

Supporting people without a settled address to vote in the Scottish council elections

Scottish council elections are taking place on Thursday 5 May 2022. This guide explains how you can support people who are experiencing homelessness or don't have a settled address to register to vote and participate in the elections.

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Council elections

What do councils do?

Councils (sometimes called 'local government' or 'local authorities') make decisions about local issues that affect our everyday lives. Councils are responsible for local services including:

- education services
- youth and leisure facilities
- social housing
- managing parks and other public places
- social services, such as care for disabled people and the elderly
- local roads and footpaths
- rubbish and recycling
- libraries.

Who represents you in your council?

The people elected to represent you in your council are called councillors. The geographic area covered by your council is divided into smaller areas called wards. Your ward could be represented by up to five councillors.

Who can vote in the election?

You can vote in this election if you are registered to vote in Scotland and will be 16 or over on Thursday 5 May and are:

- a British or Irish citizen, or
- a Commonwealth or European Union citizen, or any other foreign national who has permission to enter or stay in the UK, or who does not need such permission.

Registering to vote

The deadline to apply to register to vote in the election is midnight on Monday 18 April 2022.

If someone has a settled address they can register online at [gov.uk/register-to-vote](https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote) – it only takes five minutes.

When registering to vote a person must provide their National Insurance number. If a person doesn't have a National Insurance number, they need to state this in their registration application then continue to submit it. Their local Electoral Registration Officer will then contact them to ask them to provide documentary evidence to prove their identity, such as a council tax record or a form of identification.

Where a person cannot prove their identity by providing documentary evidence to the type and quantity required by the exceptions process, the local Electoral Registration Officer will contact them to let them know and will ask them to provide an attestation in support of their application.

Electoral Registration Officers are appointed by councils and are responsible for registering voters. They can provide assistance with registration queries and you can find details for the person's local Electoral Registration Officer by entering their postcode at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information.

How does someone who doesn't have a settled address register to vote?

Registering in temporary accommodation

People living in temporary accommodation may be able to register at that address, provided they don't have a permanent address elsewhere. If they are unsure if this is the case they should contact their local Electoral Registration Officer.

Registering with no settled address

People who don't have a settled address or are experiencing homelessness can still register to vote. To register, they need to fill in a form called a 'declaration of local connection' which is available to download here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-to-vote-if-you-havent-got-a-fixed-or-permanent-address.

A paper copy can also be requested from the local Electoral Registration Officer.

The form asks for the address where the person would like to be registered. This can be anywhere in the local authority area where they spend a substantial part of their time, for example a drop in shelter, shop or a park bench.

The form also asks for an address where correspondence, including the poll card, can be sent. Alternatively, the person can opt to pick this up from their local authority, although they do not need their poll card to vote.

Anonymous registration

In some circumstances it is possible to register anonymously. Instead of the person's name and address appearing on the electoral register, a code will be added to the register.

A person can request to register anonymously if their safety (or the safety of someone in their household) would be at risk if their name and address appeared on the electoral register. For example, if they are escaping domestic abuse.

To register to vote anonymously the person must supply documentary evidence of a court order or an attestation from an authorised person to support their application.

You can find out more about applying to register to vote anonymously and download an application form here: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/register-vote/register-vote-anonymously.

What is the electoral register?

Registration officers keep two registers – the electoral register and the open register (also known as the edited register).

The Electoral Register

The electoral register lists the names and addresses of everyone who is registered to vote in public elections. The register is used for electoral purposes, such as making sure only eligible people can vote. It is also used for other limited purposes specified in law, such as: detecting crime (e.g. fraud), calling people for jury service and checking credit applications.

The Open Register

The open register is an extract of the electoral register, but is not used for elections. It can be bought by any person, company or organisation. For example, it is used by businesses and charities to confirm name and address details.

The voter's name and address will be included in the open register unless they ask for them to be removed. Removing your details from the open register does not affect your right to vote.

How to vote

There are three ways to vote:

1. In person at a polling place on Thursday 5 May 2022

Voters will be sent a poll card telling them where their polling place is. They don't need their poll card to vote, unless they have registered anonymously, and if they lose it, or don't receive it, they can contact their council to find out where their polling place is. Polling places are open from 7am to 10pm.

It will be safe to vote in person at a polling place, and a range of physical distancing and hygiene measures may be in place.

2. By post

To apply to vote by post, the person needs to complete a postal vote application form and send it to their local Electoral Registration Office to arrive by 5pm on Tuesday 19 April 2022.

The person will receive their ballot paper by post. The council can send the ballot paper to the address that was used to register or any other address. The person must give a reason if they want their ballot paper sent to a different address.

The person should complete and return their ballot paper, ensuring they leave enough time for them to arrive by 10pm on Thursday 5 May 2022. They can also hand it in at a polling place up to 10pm on polling day.

3. By proxy (allowing somebody you trust to vote on your behalf)

To apply to vote by proxy, the person must complete an application form and send it to their local Electoral Registration Office to arrive by 5pm on Tuesday 26 April 2022.

In an emergency, where the voter cannot go to the polling place in person, they can apply for an emergency proxy up to 5pm on Thursday 5 May 2022.

For more information or to get to a postal or proxy application form go to www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voter.

Completing the ballot paper

For this election you vote using numbers. Your ballot paper will list all the candidates standing to be councillors in your ward. You will be asked to number the candidates in order of your choice using 1, 2, 3 and so on. You don't have to number every candidate, and if you make a mistake on your ballot paper, you can ask for a new one.