

Easy Read Guide to voting in Northern Ireland local council elections

Contents

What is voting?	1
This section explains what voting is, why it is important and who can vote.	
Registering to vote	2
This section explains how you can register to vote.	
Voting by post	3
This section explains how you can apply for a postal vote.	
Voting by proxy	4
This section explains how you can apply to vote by proxy (this means someone votes on behalf of someone else).	
Voting at a polling station	5
This section explains how you vote at a polling station.	
Important dates	6
This section tells you the important dates you need to remember for the Northern Ireland local council elections.	
Terms we use in this guide	7
This section explains some useful words, like councillor, ballot box, polling station etc. which you will come across in this guide.	

1

What is voting?

This section explains what voting is and how it works.

This section will explain what **voting** is and why it is **important**.



People with a learning disability have as much right to vote as anyone else. Do not let anyone else tell you different.

It is important to remember that you must register so that you can vote.



People who are on your local council are called councillors.

There are 462 councillors across 11 local councils in Northern Ireland.

Councils are made up of smaller District Electoral Areas.

Different councils have different numbers of councillors and District Electoral Areas.



Different parties and councillors have different ideas about the best way to run your area.

Councillors are elected. This means people get to decide which politicians are chosen to represent their area.



Voting is one of the best ways for people to have their voice heard by people in power.

Councillors are usually part of a political party. There are lots of political parties.

Some councillors are not part of a political party. They are called independent councillors.



In elections people with a learning disability have the same rights to vote as everybody else.



People with a learning disability should vote so they have a say about things that affect their lives.



There will be council elections in Northern Ireland on Thursday 18 May 2023.



People will vote to choose who they would like to be their local councillors.

Councillors make important decisions that affect the local community.



If you need more information you can use these websites:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk

www.eoni.org.uk

www.nidirect.gov.uk

Who can vote in council elections?

To vote in the local council elections you must be:

- Registered to vote
- Live in Northern Ireland
- 18 years old or older
- A British, Irish, or qualifying Commonwealth or EU citizen

If you need more information on which countries are part of the Commonwealth you can visit the Electoral Commission's website:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/register-vote-and-update-your-details>

2

Registering to vote

This section explains how you can register to vote.



This section explains how to **register to vote**.

It is important that you register to vote. If you are not registered to vote you will not be able to vote in an election.

You can find out more about voting on the Mencap website:

<https://northernireland.mencap.org.uk/support-us/policy-and-research-northern-ireland/support-vote>



People living in Northern Ireland can register to vote online at **www.gov.uk/register-to-vote**

For the **council elections** you need to register to vote by **Friday 28 April 2023**.

You need to register to vote every time you move home.



There are three ways you can vote and you should pick the one that works best for you.

At a polling station - before an election you will be posted a poll card. Your poll card will tell you where your nearest polling station is.

Your local polling station is where you can vote in person. Polling stations are often at churches, community centres and schools. However they can be in all sorts of places.



By post - if you want to vote by post you will need to fill in a postal vote application form and send it back to the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland. Before elections, you will receive a ballot paper in the post.



By proxy - voting by proxy means choosing someone else to vote for you. You need to fill in a proxy vote application form and send it back to the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland. This person can visit a polling station or apply for a postal vote in order to vote on your behalf.

Need help?

To access the form you need to visit this website:

www.eoni.org.uk/Vote/Voting-by-post-or-proxy

3

Voting by post

This section explains how you can apply for a postal vote.



Voting by post

This section explains **how to apply to vote by post**.

If you are unable to make it to the polling station in person on election day you can apply to vote by post.

You will need to get in touch with the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

To access the form you need to visit this website:

www.eoni.org.uk/vote/voting-by-post-or-proxy

For more information or help you can contact the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

Tel: 028 9044 6680

Email: info@eoni.org.uk

Once you have completed the form please send it in the post to
Absent Voting Unit
Electoral Office for NI
15 Church Street
Belfast
BT1 1ER



The deadline for postal vote applications is 5pm on Wednesday 26 April 2023.



What happens next

Before the election, you will receive a postal ballot pack and a ballot paper that shows you who you can vote for.



The postal ballot pack will tell you where you should post the paper.



Need help?

You can find out more about voting by post on the Mencap website:

<https://northernireland.mencap.org.uk/support-us/policy-and-research-northern-ireland/support-vote>

Or

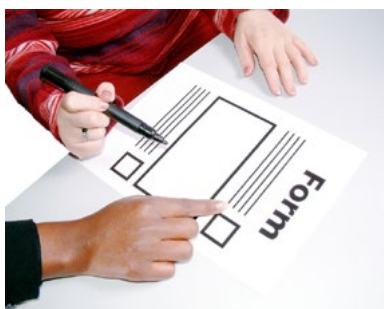


You can call the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland on 028 9044 6680.

4

Voting by proxy

This section explains how you can apply to vote by proxy (this means someone votes on behalf of someone else).



This guide explains **how to apply to vote by proxy**.

Voting by proxy means that you choose someone to vote for you.



If you are unable to make it to the polling station in person on election day you can apply to vote by proxy.

To access the form you need to vote by proxy visit this website:

www.eoni.org.uk/vote/voting-by-post-or-proxy

For more information or help you can contact the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.



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Once you have completed the form please send to:

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15 Church Street
Belfast
BT1 1ER



The deadline for proxy vote applications is 5pm on Wednesday 26 April 2023.



Need help?

You can find out more about voting by proxy on the Mencap website:

**[www.northernireland.mencap.org.uk/
support-us/policy-and-research-northern-
ireland/support-vote](http://www.northernireland.mencap.org.uk/support-us/policy-and-research-northern-ireland/support-vote)**

Or

You can call the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland on 028 9044 6680.

5

Voting at a polling station

This section explains how you vote at a polling station.



This section explains **how to vote at a polling station**.

You can find out more about voting on the Mencap website:

<https://northernireland.mencap.org.uk/support-us/policy-and-research-northern-ireland/support-vote>

When you have registered to vote, you can vote in person at a polling station.

Before an election, you will be sent a poll card.

This card will tell you which polling station you should use to cast your vote.

Polling stations are often in churches, community centres and schools. However they can be in all sorts of places.



Polling stations are open from **7am to 10pm**.

It can be useful to take your poll card with you when you go to vote.



When you arrive at a polling station, you will be asked to give your name and address.



When you vote at a polling station you will be required to produce one of the following documents to confirm your identity:

- a UK, Irish or EU passport
- a UK, Irish or EEA driving licence
- a Translink 60+ SmartPass
- a Translink Senior SmartPass
- a Translink Blind Person's SmartPass
- a Translink War Disabled SmartPass
- an Electoral Identity Card
- a Translink Half Fare SmartPass
- a biometric immigration document

Remember your passport and other forms of identity can be out of date. For more information contact the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

Tel: 028 9044 6680



If you are unsure what to do when you get to the polling station, ask the staff at the polling station – they are there to help you.

You can ask **anyone over 18** to come along to the polling station with you to help you. For example, a family member who is over 18 or a support worker. **They can also help you fill in your ballot paper.**

If you do not have anyone with you and you need help filling in your ballot paper the Presiding Officer can help you. The Presiding Officer is the person in charge at the polling station.





At the polling station you will be given one **ballot paper**. This is a piece of paper with all the names of the candidates on it.

On the ballot paper, mark a '1' against your first preferred candidate, a '2' against your second preferred candidate and so on, for as many candidates as you wish.

You can find out more about voting at the polling station on the Mencap website:

www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaigning/guides-voting

If you get stuck registering to vote or need help understanding voting, you can call the Mencap team on **0207 696 6009**.

6

Important dates

This section tells you the important dates you need to remember for the Northern Ireland local council elections.

Important dates for the local elections.

You might want to put some of these important dates in your diary or calendar.



Election Day

Election day for the **local council elections** is **Thursday 18 May 2023**. You can vote in your polling station between 7am and 10pm.



Register to Vote Deadline

If you want to vote in the local election the deadline for registering to vote is **midnight on Friday 28 April 2023**.



Postal or Proxy Vote Application Deadline The deadline for postal or proxy vote applications is **5pm on Wednesday 26 April 2023**.

7

Terms we use in this guide

This section explains specific useful words, like councillor, ballot box, polling station etc. which you will come across in this guide.

Councillors are politicians who are elected to represent your area on your local council.



Political Parties

A **political party** is a group of people who think the country should be run in a certain way.

Politicians are usually in political parties. There are also candidates that are independent from political parties.



Electoral Register

The electoral register is the list of everyone that is allowed to **vote** in **elections**. You need to be on the electoral register to be able to vote.

Voting

Voting means that you and other people choose who represents you on a **council** or in **parliament or assembly**.

In politics, voting happens during an **election**. Voting is very important. It is one of the best ways to get your voice heard by some of the most important people in the country.

Polling station

A **polling station** is a place where you go to **vote**. Polling stations are often at churches, community centres and schools however they can be in all sorts of places. You will be told where your polling station is on your poll card.



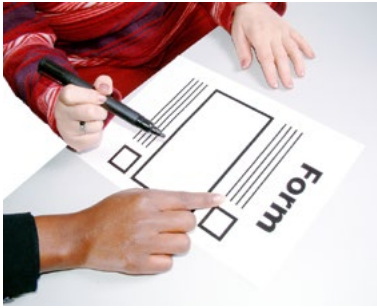
Presiding Officer

The Presiding Officer is the person in charge of a polling station on election day. They are there to make sure the election goes smoothly and they are also there to help if you have a question or would like someone to support you when you vote.



Ballot Box

The **ballot box** is where you put your ballot paper when you vote at a polling station. It is a big black box used to keep all the votes safe until they are ready to be counted.



Ballot Paper

Everyone who votes is given one **ballot paper**. This is a piece of paper with all the names of the candidates on it. If you are voting in a polling station, you then put your ballot paper into the ballot box.

After voting has closed all the ballot papers are counted and the winners are declared.



Postal Vote

A postal vote is when someone is sent their ballot paper in the post and they fill it in and post it back. This means they do not vote at the polling station on polling day.



Proxy Vote

Voting by proxy means choosing someone else to vote for you. You need to fill in a form to choose who will vote for you. This person can visit a polling station or apply for a postal vote in order to vote on your behalf.

Notes



The
Electoral
Commission