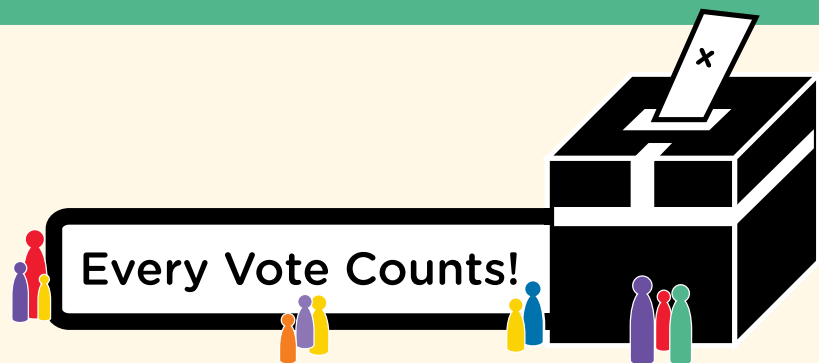




How to get involved in politics



How to get involved



There are a **lot of things** you can do to take part in **politics**.



You can vote in an election.

When **you vote** you are saying who you want to become a politician.



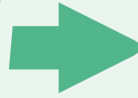
You can also **contact a politician** and tell them what is **important to you**.

This could be a local councillor, your MP or your MEP.



You could also **join** or support a political party.

Or you could set up your own.



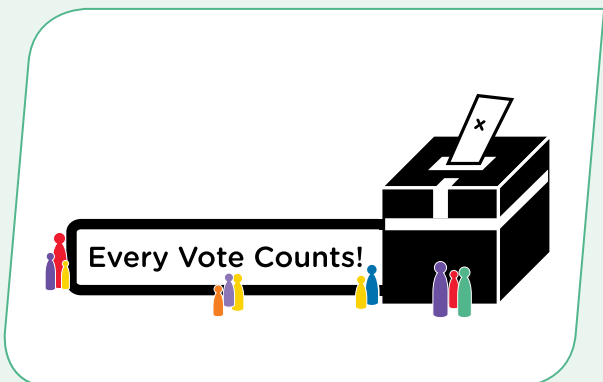
You can also **take part** by supporting a **campaign** or setting up your own.



This booklet **tells you** more about how you can **get involved** in politics.



It is one of three '**Every Vote Counts**' booklets.



Every Vote Counts is a campaign to make politics **easier to understand** for everyone.

Voting



Voting is how **you choose** the people who represent us. Their job is to **represent** us when **decisions** are made about the **local community**, the country and Europe.



To be able to vote, you have to be **over 18** and on the **electoral register**. The electoral register is a list of the names and addresses of everyone who can vote. You can **only vote** if your name is **on the register**.



In 2014, the Government **made changes** to the way that people register to vote. You should **get a letter** to tell you about the changes.



You should contact your council if you **do not** get a letter or if **you are unsure** if you are on the register. You can **phone** them, **email** them, or write to them. You can also find out more about the changes and register at **www.aboutmyvote.co.uk**.

Elections



Once you are **registered** you can vote in General Elections. **General Elections** are where you vote for people **you want** to become Members of Parliament (MPs). MPs make decisions that affect the whole country.



You can also vote in **local elections**. At local elections you choose who you want to represent you in your **local area**. They are called councillors. **Councillors** make decisions about your local area and local services.

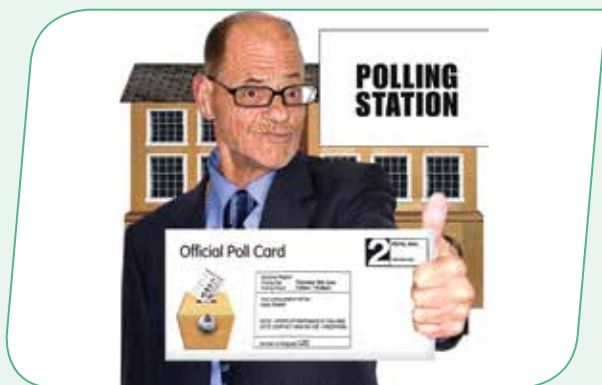


In **European Elections** we vote for people to become Members of European Parliament (MEPs) and to represent our views in Europe.

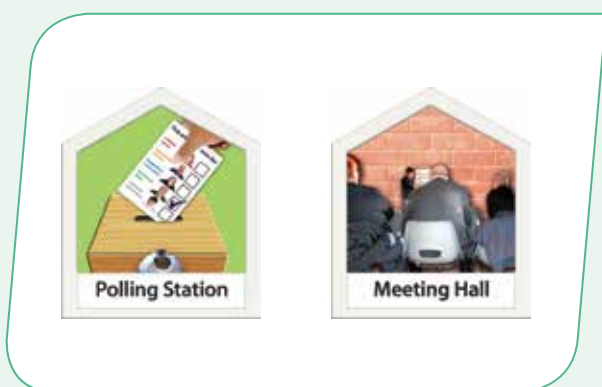


People who live in **Scotland**, **Wales** and **Northern Ireland** can also vote at elections to decide who becomes a politician in their Parliament or Assembly.

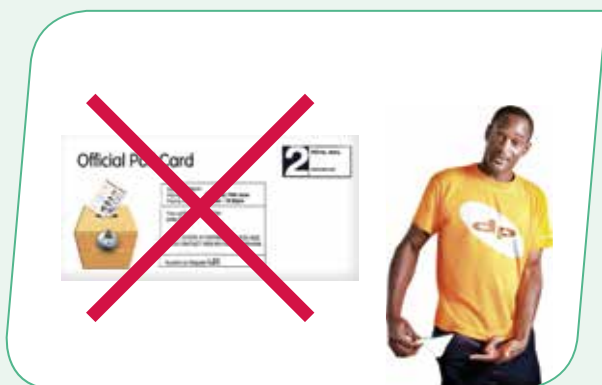
Voting in person



Before an election, the council will **send you a card** called a Poll Card or a Polling Card. **Polling** is another name for voting. This card will tell you **when** the election is and **where** to go to vote.



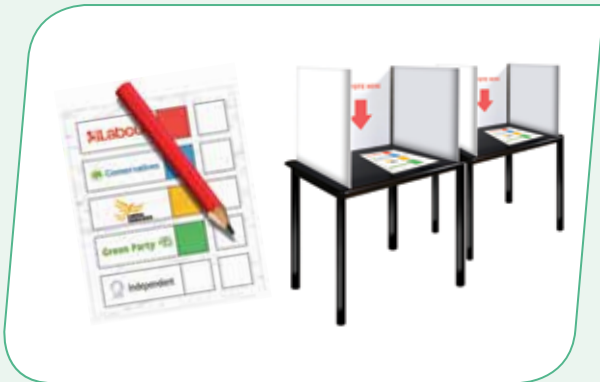
On the day of the election, you can go to your "polling station" to vote. The **polling station** is the name for the place **where you vote**. The polling station is usually in a school or local hall. It will be **near where you live**.



You **do not need** your polling card to vote, but you may find it **helpful** to take it with you.



At the polling station you will be given a **ballot paper**. A ballot paper is a **list of names** of people you can vote for.



Once you have your ballot paper, you can go to **a booth**. A booth is an area where you can vote **in private**.



To vote, put a **cross in the box** on the ballot paper next to the name of the person **you want** to vote for. Then fold up the paper so **no-one can see** where you put your cross. You then take the paper to the **"ballot box"** and post it in. The ballot box is a locked box where all the votes are **kept safely**.



When the voting is **finished** the ballot boxes are taken away and the votes are **counted**.



The person with the **most votes** wins. That person is your representative even if **you didn't vote** for them.

Other ways to vote



You **do not** have to go to a polling station to vote. Instead you can choose to make **a postal vote**.



You have **to ask** your council for a postal vote. They will **send you** a ballot paper to fill in at home.



You **put a cross** next to the name of the person that **you want** to vote for and **post** the ballot paper back to the council.



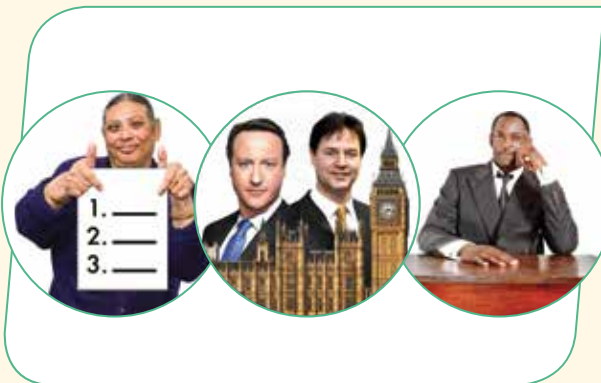
Another way to vote is by proxy. This means that you can tell someone else how you want to vote and ask them to vote for you.



You can **register** for a proxy vote if you **cannot** get to the polling station. This might be because you are **unwell** or on **holiday**. You can register for a proxy vote and find out more at **www.aboutmyvote.co.uk**



The person **you choose** to vote for you will be given a proxy voting card. You have to **trust** the person to vote for who **you choose**.



A **referendum** is also a vote. The government holds a referendum to **help them** make a very **important** decision.



At a referendum you have to vote **yes or no** to a question. You put a cross against the answer **you agree with** on the ballot paper.

Politicians and Political Parties



Another way to **take part** in politics is to contact the politicians that **represent you** and tell them about the things that are **important** to you.



MPs are responsible for things that affect the **whole country**. The things that you might want to **contact them** about include health, benefits, education, employment and wars.



You can **ask for a meeting** with your MP to tell them about the issues that **affect you** by writing to them, emailing them and phoning them. You can find out who your MP is by going to **www.theyworkforyou.com**



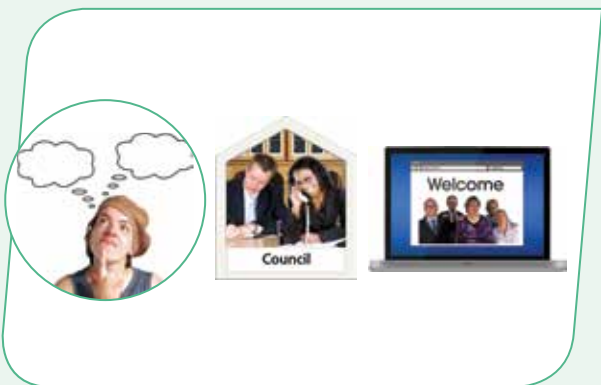
You can **find out** about the decisions your MP is making on issues **important to you** by looking on their website, following them on **Facebook** or **Twitter**, or looking on **www.theyworkforyou.com**



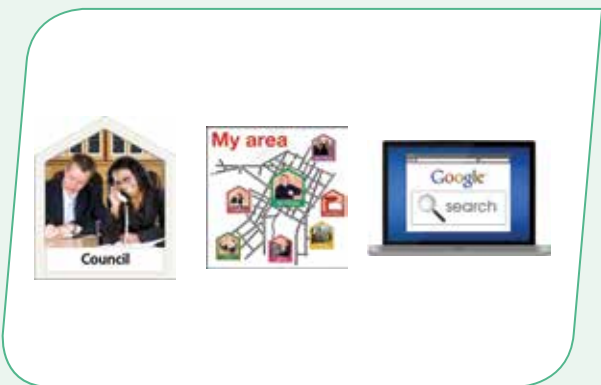
Councillors are responsible for **local services**. The things you may want to **contact them about** include social services, housing, rubbish collection, local police and fire services, libraries, leisure centres, and local transport.



You have the right to go to some **council meetings** to see how decisions are made and to **ask questions**.



You can **find out** about the decisions that your local council have made and about your councillors by **looking at** the council's website or by **phoning** them.



You can **contact** your local councillors to tell them what **you think** about local services. You can find out who they are and write to them directly at **www.writetothem.com**

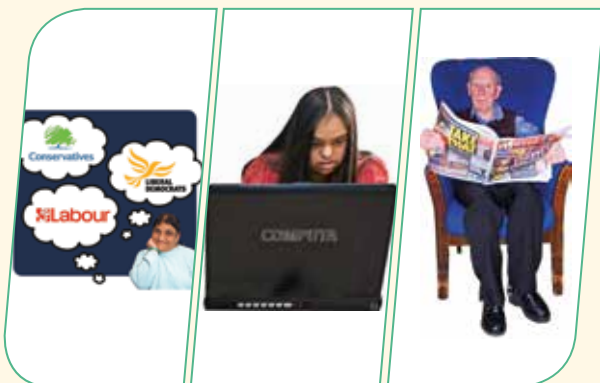
Political parties



Political parties are **groups** of people who join together because they have **similar ideas** about things like running the country. Most **MPs** and **councillors** belong to a political party.



Knowing what a political party thinks can **help you** decide if you want to **join** them, **support** them or vote for them at an election.

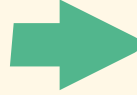


You can **find out** about what a political party thinks by going to their **website** or reading about them in the news. You can find out about accessible news at www.unitedresponse.org.uk/easy-news



Before an election, most political parties will write a **manifesto**. A manifesto tells people what the political parties' **main ideas** are. You can ask for **a copy** of a manifesto.

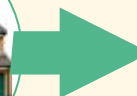
Campaigning



Another way to **take part** in politics is to join a **campaign** or **set up** your own.



A campaign is when a **group** of people work together to try and bring about **change** on an issue that is **important** to them.



A campaign may be about an issue that affects people across **the world**, people in **one country** or people in a **local area**.



If an issue is **important** to you, then it is probably important to a lot of **other people** too.



Looking on the **internet** is a good way to find out which groups and organisations are campaigning on issues **important** to you.



There may be a **local group** that you could go along to. Or you might be able **to join** a Facebook group or an online forum where you can **meet** other people and **share** ideas.



If you **cannot find** a group that is campaigning on an issue, then you could **set up your own** campaign group.



You could **tell people** about your campaign by setting up a **webpage** or a **Facebook group**.



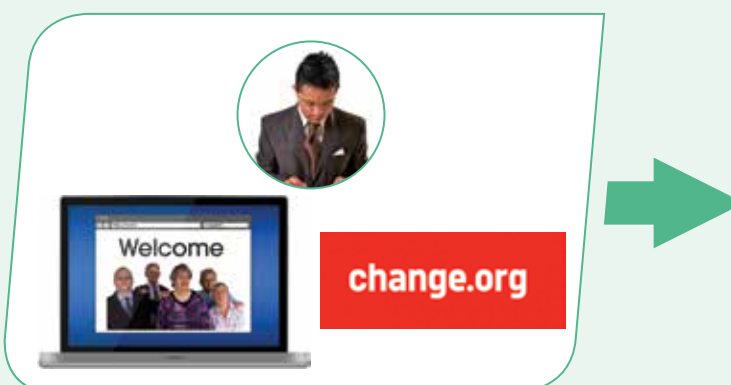
You could ask your MP to support **your campaign**. If it is a local issue then you could write to local newspapers and businesses to tell them about your concerns. You could also organise a meeting to talk about the issue.



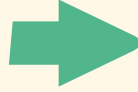
You could also create a **petition**. A petition is about a lot of people **asking** people in charge to do something. For example, it could be a petition asking the Prime Minister to **change the law**.



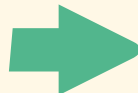
The person who makes the petition then tries to get other people **to sign it** if they agree. If enough people sign it then **this can make** people in charge listen.



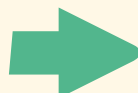
There are websites that you can use **to help you** create your petition and to **tell people** about it. Find out more at **www.change.org**.



If you would like to find out more about how politics affects your life, go to www.everyvotecounts.org.uk



There are three booklets in the **Every Vote Counts** series.



If you would like to read the **other booklets**, you can send an email to everyvotecounts@unitedresponse.org.uk

