

What to expect when you're expecting local elections

Your guide to what's going on,
why you should pay attention
and what it means for you and
the people who use your services.

**LLOYDS BANK
FOUNDATION**
England & Wales



Why are local elections important for small and local charities?

Local representatives elected in May will be making decisions that shape the experiences of people in your community.

Different local elections take place in May each year including local council elections, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), Local and Combined Authority Mayoral elections, London Assembly elections. You can find out what's happening in your area and what these elections mean here.

As charities providing frontline support you have a valuable insight to share so local representatives understand how best to champion your interests, in local government and with key decision makers. An election is the perfect time to get them to pay attention as they need your vote.

Elections present two key duties/opportunities for charities

- 1.** In terms of supporting those facing complex social issues to have agency through voting and sharing their experiences and suggestions with decision makers.
- 2.** Developing staff and volunteers and building relationships to shape future policy and the operating environment



Are there particular issues/challenges you want your local councillor, mayor, assembly member or PCC to understand?

Is there something you want them to deliver?

Elections can be when they are most likely to say yes.

Why should you build a relationship with your local representatives?

You can engage decision makers and politicians at any time, but elections provide an opportunity to build a relationship and make sure you are represented.

There are several things a good councillor or other representative can do for you, and knowing those in your area is always useful. Below are some ways in which local representatives can work to support you:

- **Champion your charity's issues** – for example in local government, asking questions and raising concerns but also sitting on committees, scrutinizing decision making and generally making sure your points are heard
- **Getting a response to issues** – if you're struggling with a local issue, you can raise it with your local representatives, such as a councillor, who will be able to advocate to get it resolved
- **Broker relationships** – your local representatives will be well connected with other decision makers, organisations and businesses
- **Help with building your profile and securing press attention** – a councillor, mayor or other representative who comes to events can provide quotes and help secure news coverage of your everyday activities
- **Do casework** – providing support and advocacy for individuals affected by local decisions
- **Potential funding opportunities** – Police and Crime Commissioners often distribute funding, for example, to support survivors of domestic and sexual abuse. If your charity is delivering relevant services, it's useful to ensure the PCC knows about the support you provide in the local community
- **Regional influence** – if your area has a combined authority or metro mayor, they may have powers over issues such as housing, transport and skills. If your charity wants to influence policy at this level, you can use the election to hold them to account on what they promise to deliver

Getting the most from your potential representatives



Voting is really important, but it's also just the beginning of what it looks like to meaningfully participate in democracy.

Before engaging with candidates in the run up to a local election, think about why you want to act.

Councillors, mayors, assembly members or PCCs can be helpful in a range of ways. It's good to work out what kind of relationship you want or need and what you want it to deliver, considering what falls within their remit – and how to involve your team, supporters and clients from the beginning.

Useful questions to help think this through are:

- What is your aim?
- Are trends in your work impacted by decisions at a local level?
- Would your clients benefit from casework?
- Is there anything else you they might be able to help with?
- Who are you wanting to develop that might benefit from meeting with a councillor or other representative and sharing their story?
- Is your mayor likely to change and do they understand the issues you are working on?

It might be that you do want to engage with your representatives in an election but not with every candidate – that's ok! You can simply be in touch with the candidates most likely to win. However it is important that you remain impartial and can't be seen to be endorsing any candidate or party by preferring them without an 'impartial reason'. This doesn't stop you engaging privately with any candidates.

Making initial contact with your potential candidates:

When inviting candidates it's important to credential yourself so they know why to meet you. They'll be making decisions about what to do at relatively short notice in an election campaign. To give yourself the best chance of getting them it can be helpful to:

- **Stress your links with the ward or borough they represent** – is this where you are based? Do you run activities there? Is this where people who use your services are from?
- **Talk numbers** – it might sound crass but candidates are competing for votes. How many staff, volunteers, service users do you have? How many people have your registered to vote? This can be especially useful if it's a marginal seat.
- **Give other pertinent information** – will you be inviting press? Are you going to be inviting the public or key community leaders? Are you meeting with other candidates? Who else will be at the event? Are you supporting people to vote who might not otherwise? Is this an issue that you know they care about?

All of these things will help and are also useful to remind candidates of when you meet them. If you don't hear back then simply give them a call.

If you don't think you'll be able to arrange the meeting or event during the election, you can attend hustings to find out where candidates sit on issues or ask them to meet with you once elected.

Designing your action with potential representatives:

To get the most out of your action the following information should help you to think through the most effective way of achieving your aims and getting your desired outcome.



Questions to work through when designing an action:

How can you get a reaction from candidates?

Actions should be designed to get a reaction; be that a next meeting, a change in behaviour or a commitment to relationship. What do you want to happen?

Who is your specific target? Understand who your candidates are, what they want and why they should listen to you. Are you focusing on one or two candidates or do you want to engage everybody?

What is your clearly defined ask? It might be as simple as agreeing to attend your AGM or to meet with you every 6 months, to raise a challenge within local government or to help broker a useful relationship. Be prepared that if the action goes well they might want to do more – it's helpful to have a very best and worst case scenario worked out beforehand.

Will the activity show you at your best? The best actions are ones where people putting them on are comfortable and able to be themselves (and where the target is taken a little outside their every day). Just because a politician is coming doesn't mean you have to have a formal meeting if that's not what you do. Depending on social distancing restrictions, if it is safe to do so, you might want to think about inviting candidates to a drop-in or to visit your outreach services. Think about what's best for the people you work with.

How can your activity be meaningful or fun? Good actions aren't boring! It might be harder to think of different ways to engage candidates online, but you could still do something different rather than a standard meeting. Think outside the box. What will make you stick out and ensure that they want to follow up with you if elected?

How can you develop leaders? Actions can be great development opportunities. Think about your people and who might benefit from the experience of getting traditional power (in the form of the potential mayors, assembly members, councillors or PCCs) to listen to them and respond to their issues and requests as well as who might benefit from helping with the logistics.

What are the next steps? Any action you choose to take is just one in a (hopefully) longer relationship. Think about how this fits into the wider strategy and what you both might need to do as next steps to follow up.



After the election

It's important to follow up with the winner to say congratulations and to remind them of what they have committed to do – or to re-engage them if they didn't agree to what you asked initially.

If you want to be more inventive than a letter think about fun ways to congratulate them and get their attention e.g. sending a card made by service users with a photo of their visit or thinking of a useful “welcome to your new job” action using the planning questions. As part of your follow up, update them on what you have done since your meeting and suggest the next way for them to engage with you going forwards.



Actions can be great development opportunities. Think about the people you work with and who might benefit from the experience of getting traditional power to listen to them and respond to their issues.

How can you support the people who use your services to vote?



Helping your service users to vote is a chance to make sure their voices are heard.

You must be registered in order to vote and for some elections, you'll need a valid form of Voter ID. You can check the deadline for registering to vote in particular local Electoral Registration Office [here](#).

Eligibility

Anyone can vote in local elections in England who has registered and is over 18, a British, Irish or EU or 'qualifying commonwealth citizen' not legally excluded from voting, or a citizen of another country living in Scotland or Wales who has permission to enter or stay in the UK, or who does not need permission. Bear in mind that the rules differ for local and general elections – you can check which elections you're eligible to vote in [here](#).

How do you register to vote, and how can you make sure your clients are registered?

If you have a permanent address and know your national insurance number then registering to vote is very simple and takes no more than 5 minutes online.

You can support clients to do this quickly online by following the instructions [here](#).

Or you can download the paper forms to register and post in applications [here](#).

Anonymity on the electoral register

Anyone can ask for their details to be hidden on the electoral register but you can also support people to register anonymously if concerned about their safety, they will need proof of this and you may be able to help them get a written attestation from any registered medical practitioner (a doctor, nurse or midwife) or the manager of a refuge.

Voter ID



From May 2023, the UK Government has introduced a **requirement** for voters to show photo ID when voting at a polling station, including local elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England, and UK General Elections. It won't apply at Scottish Parliament or Welsh Senedd elections, or council elections taking place in Scotland or Wales.

Types of ID

Accepted forms of photo ID include a passport, driving licence or Blue Badge – **a full list can be found on the Electoral Commission website**. If you don't currently have a valid form of ID, you can also apply for a **Voter Authority Certificate**.

Don't let people miss out

We know that some groups are less likely to have a valid form of photo ID already, so are more likely to experience barriers. Charities can play an important role in helping people to access ID so that they can still get their voice heard. The Electoral Commission has **useful resources** in different languages, British Sign Language and Easy Read.

There are also **resources** specifically supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities, older people, people experiencing homelessness, people registered to vote anonymously (such as survivors of domestic abuse), trans and non-binary people, Blind and partially-sighted people and D/deaf people.

Check the deadlines

Be sure to **check the deadlines** for registering to vote or applying for a Voter Authority Certificate ahead of an election.

There are lots of [resources](#) for supporting disabled people to vote, as well as an easy read guide to registering to vote [here](#).

The Mental Capacity Act, which provides a framework for decision-making on behalf of people who are considered to lack capacity to make decisions, does not apply to voting. This means that, for example, someone who is detained under the Mental Health Act or on a Community Treatment Order, or an individual with dementia, has just as much right to vote as anyone else. They still need to register, of course, and might need additional support to vote too (for example, accessing a polling station).

If you or your clients do NOT have a permanent address there are a number of ways to register to vote. This is particularly important for charities and services to be aware of as they can act as an address for clients to register at through completing a “Declaration of Local Connection Form”. This also means that you CAN be eligible to vote if you are homeless, currently in residential mental health treatment, part of the gypsy or traveler community and if you are remanded in custody (but not convicted). The Electoral Commission has more information [here](#).

How can you support clients to vote?

You can help clients to attend their polling station in person or if this is not possible to vote by post or to have a proxy vote.

You may want clients to register for a postal vote if you are not going to see them on polling day and know that they are unlikely to remember to vote.

If they are unable to vote due to medical issues or disability, employment, or because they are away polling day, they may want to apply for a proxy vote, where a nominated person votes on their behalf. Usually, they’ll need to apply at least 6 days before an election, and the nominated person will need to take their own photo ID with them to vote in some elections.

More details on voting by post and by proxy can be found [here](#).





Supporting service users to vote, key questions for charities to think through in advance of an election:

- Why is it important that your clients are able to vote?
- Are there people you work with who might not vote without your help? What do you need to think through to support voter registration?
- Do your clients have a valid form of Voter ID? If not, can you support them to access this?
- Will your clients prefer to vote in person (if possible), by post or by proxy? What is your role in this as a service?
- Are there ways you can embed registering to vote and voting into your everyday activities? For example, registering people to vote and access Voter ID alongside support you're already providing? Could you do a session on voting and the election as part of your regular activities?
- What extra time or support might you need to be able to do this?



If you or your clients do not have a permanent address, there are a number of ways to register to vote.

Understanding what your charity can / can't do during elections



The Lobbying Act 2014 and the Elections Act 2022 brought in rules about who can and can't campaign in an election without registering as a political organisation. If you're spending less than £10,000 on campaigning in the 365-day period running up to a general election (including polling day) you shouldn't need to register – so that's unlikely to affect many small charities. If your charity is spending more than £10,000 on campaigning in this period ahead of a general election, you should check the [Electoral Commission's guidance and code of conduct](#) to see if you need to notify the Electoral Commission or register as a non-party campaigner.

It's also really clear that **charities can campaign** for a change in the law, policy or decisions where such change would support the charity's purposes. Charities can also campaign to ensure that existing laws are observed. This should cover all of the activity set out in this leaflet and should not stop you from deciding to build a relationship with your potential candidates.

There are however still rules that apply. The broad rules are that as an organisation in the period running up to an election:

- You need to remain impartial and can't endorse candidates
- You can't promote the policies of particular candidates.
- You can't tell clients who to vote for
- You can't be seen to be doing any of the above (e.g. inviting only one candidate to address a public event might be seen as endorsing them by default even if you don't say 'vote for XX')

Staff or other representatives should not share their own political views while representing the charity – particularly on social media – and don't share anything which could be seen as endorsing a candidate or party on any channel where you also list your job or employer (to be on the safe side). It's good practice to have a well-defined social media policy that addresses this. Check the [Electoral Commission](#) and the [Charity Commission](#) for more information.

Small charities have valuable insight – use yours to make a difference.



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Through unrestricted funding, support to develop, and influencing policy and practice we help small and local charities thrive, communities grow stronger, and people overcome complex issues and barriers so they can transform their lives.



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