

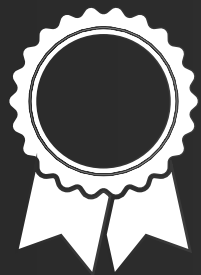


YOUR GUIDE TO LOCAL ELECTIONS

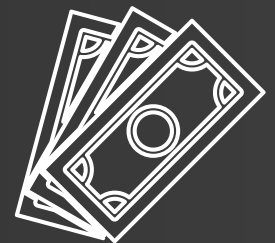
Resident responsibilities

One of the main roles of councillors is to represent and engage with their residents.

- The most common form of this involves helping residents with their issues with the council, which might be raised by email or by phone, whether it's something personal or a broader concern, e.g. a new development.
- Some councillors hold surgeries where people can attend to raise concerns and discuss issues.
- Councillors also try to keep residents regularly updated and consulted on activities, which may be via leaflets and surveys, emails, or canvassing.
- Councillors also generally engage with local organisations, from parish councils and residents' associations, to local charities and campaign groups.



COUNCILLORS



Political concerns

Most councillors are elected as a candidate for a political party, which carries with it its own set of expectations.

- They will be expected to toe the party line, voting in the way the party expects, even if they personally disagree with it. Councillors who rebel against the party are liable to be deselected by the membership.
- Some councillors may be hoping to win personal promotion, e.g. becoming a council cabinet member or using their role as a councillor as a springboard to become an MP.
- Councillors might also participate in other parts of their party's structure, serving on committees and other bodies at a local, regional or national level.
- Councillors will also have an eye on being re-elected, as council terms only last four years.

Authority responsibilities

Another important part of the role of being a councillor is to participate in the governance of the local area.

- If a councillor is part of the governing party, they may be allocated a portfolio of council services to oversee. If they are council leader, they will have overall charge of the whole authority.
- If a councillor doesn't hold one of these roles, they will still be able to influence and scrutinise policy, by service, on a committee. The precise set-up varies from council to council, but committees may cover particular topics or hold more general scrutiny roles.
- In addition, there are some duties which are not party political, such as planning and licensing, which are decided by committees of councillors and are not subject to the party whip.

Other factors

- Many councillors will have a job and career, as well as personal commitments to balance with their role.
- Councillors do get paid an allowance to support them in their work; those with additional responsibilities (e.g. cabinet members) receive higher allowances. Councillors may be able to claim back some other expenses (e.g. travel). Precise rules and entitlements vary from authority to authority. Some political parties will require councillors to pay them a proportion of their allowance to help support them.

Where are elections being held?

Council elections

Elections are being held in many different councils across England. In some councils, 'whole council' elections are held every four years, while in others, elections are held 'by thirds' (which is where a third of the seats are elected each year for three years, then the fourth year has no elections before the cycle starts again).

This year's elections in England are split as follows:

- 33 metropolitan district councils electing by thirds
- 116 district councils holding whole council elections
- 53 district councils electing by thirds
- 30 unitary authorities holding whole council elections
- 17 unitary authorities electing by thirds
- Elections are also being held in many areas for parish, town, community, neighbourhood and village councils

In addition, local elections are being held for all 11 local authorities in Northern Ireland.

There are also a number of changes being introduced at these elections:

- Elections at councils in Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire have been cancelled pending local government reorganisation
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole councils are merging to form a unitary authority (to be known as Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole). East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland are merging to form a unitary authority (to be known as Dorset). As a result, the existing Dorset County Council will cease to exist
- Suffolk Coastal and Waveney councils are merging to form East Suffolk
- Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils are merging to form West Suffolk
- Taunton Deane and West Somerset councils are merging to form Somerset West & Taunton
- An additional 50 councils have changed their boundaries since the last election

Some parts of the country will not have local elections. Elections are not being held for London boroughs, county councils, or other local authorities that elect their councillors on a whole council basis on a different four-year cycle.

Mayoral elections

Elections are also being held for a number of mayoral posts:

- Five directly-elected mayors
- A new regional mayor for the North of Tyne Combined Authority

Directly-elected mayors exercise the powers of a council's leader and cabinet. Regional mayors oversee combined authorities, which cover several council areas and exercise some functions jointly.

European Elections

Should the UK be granted an extension to the Article 50 period, it is likely that it will still be a member of the EU on 23 May. In this event it will have to hold European elections, and preparations to do so are being made. This will not affect the timetable for the local elections.

What do different councils do?

All councils

- Almost all councillors represent an area known as a ward (NB some parish/town/community councils are not divided into wards because of the small areas they often cover). The number of councillors representing each ward will depend on its size; the aim of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England is to ensure that wards are of equivalent size so that different parts of a council's area are represented equally. Ward boundaries are periodically redrawn to ensure that this continues to be the case.
- Councillors have a dual role – on the one hand they represent the opinions of their electorate to the council, on the other, they will have some responsibility in terms of decision-making. Councils are, like the Government, generally run by the political party with a majority of councillors, or by a coalition of parties that can command a majority.
- There are different models of council governance, but under the most common 'Cabinet' model, a council will be structured like the Government, with a council leader occupying the prime ministerial position and a number of cabinet members or portfolio holders drawn from the councillors in the governing group taking the role of ministers.
- Opposition councillors still play a part, sitting on council committees that scrutinise the council and on other committees as appropriate (e.g. planning and licensing committees). Some councils use the 'committee system', under which there is still a council leader but the rest of the council's powers are exercised by committees in proportion to the council's political make-up. Each committee represents a different function of the council.

District councils (including borough and some city councils)

- District councils are responsible for services including council housing, council tax, electoral administration, environmental health, leisure and recreation, local planning, and rubbish and recycling collection.

County councils

- County councils are responsible for services including education, fire, libraries, social services, highways and transportation, trading standards and waste management.

Unitary authorities

- Unitary authorities combine the functions of district and county councils, as listed above. The way they describe themselves can vary, depending on the area they cover. For example, Nottingham City Council, Bedford Borough Council and Durham County Council are all unitary authorities.

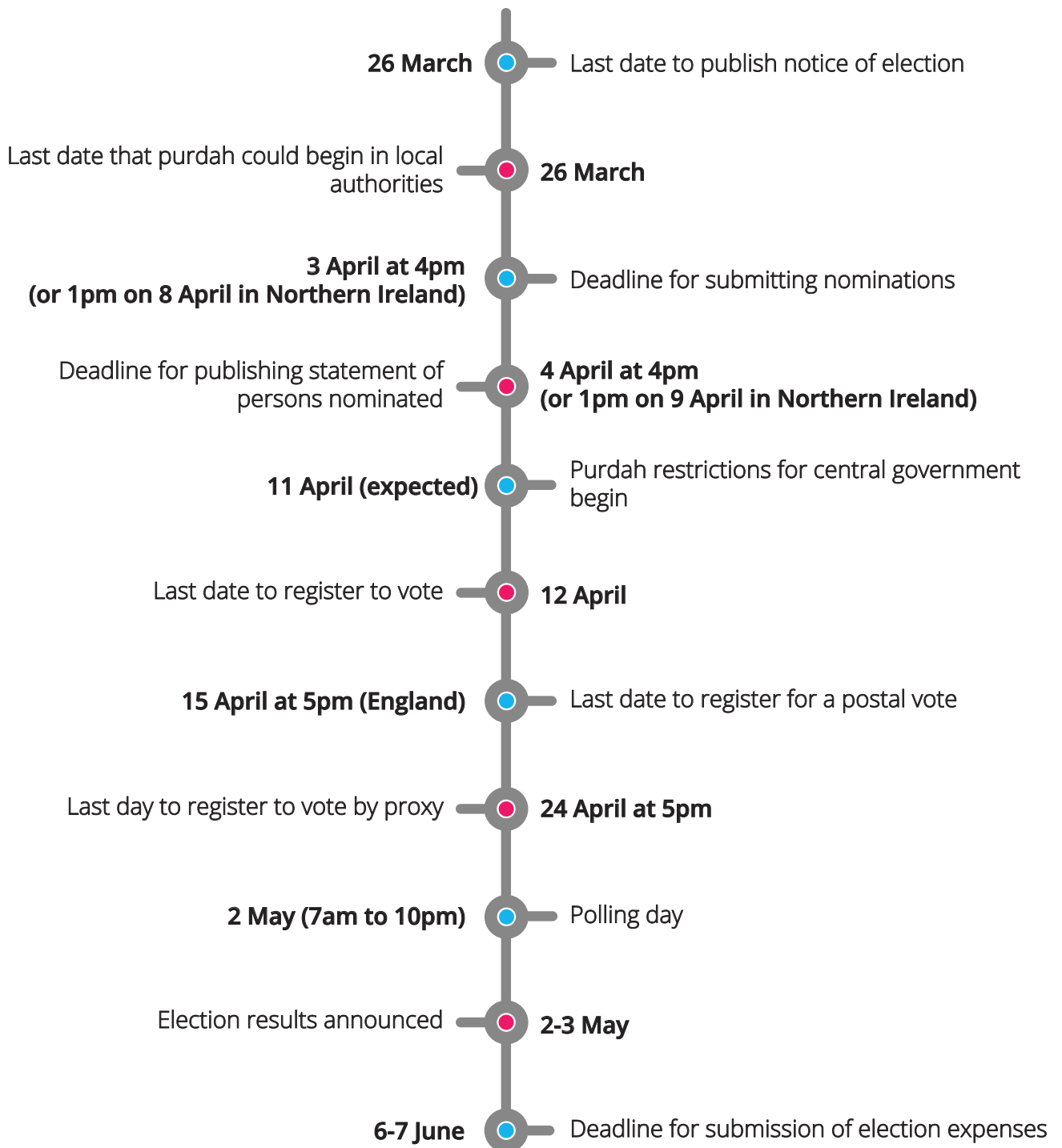
Metropolitan district councils (including some city councils)

- Like unitary authorities, metropolitan district councils are responsible for all the functions of district and county councils. However, some services are provided jointly with neighbouring authorities (e.g. fire, waste, public transport).

Parish, town, community, neighbourhood and village councils

- These are the lowest tier of council and they are often not contested on a party-political basis, with candidates instead standing as independents. Not all parts of the country have them – they are more common in rural areas.
- The services they provide vary from council to council, but might include allotments, community centres and playgrounds.

Local elections timeline



Result declaration times

Every year, the Press Association compiles a list of estimated declaration times, based on information supplied by local authorities and actual declaration times of past elections. This year's list will be published [here](#). Councils will start to count their results after polls close at 10pm on 2 May, although some may not start doing so until the following morning. All results should be declared by the end of 3 May.

Purdah

'Purdah' refers to the period of time in the run-up to an election in which announcements by the Government or local authorities are restricted. This helps to prevent the incumbents from gaining an unfair advantage over their opposition, e.g. by announcing the roll-out of a popular new policy, or benefiting from the increased media coverage afforded to an official announcement.

Local authorities

The latest date that purdah could start for local authorities before this year's local elections was 27 March, so all local authorities holding elections in May are now within this pre-election period.

While local authorities do not have to stop all publicity during this period, they must have 'heightened sensitivity' about what they issue. In particular, they should ensure that any material they publish or events they organise do not appear to be designed to affect public support for any political party, e.g. by making an announcement on a controversial issue, involving a candidate at the election, or helping with national political visits. Similarly, council resources should not be provided to councillors if they wish to use them for political purposes (e.g. writing to a local newspaper).

The Local Government Association also advises councils to 'think carefully' before they continue to run existing campaigns – these can continue where they are not controversial (e.g. foster care) but should not use councillors (council officers could be used in their place) – or launch new consultations, unless legally required to do so. However, other normal business, such as deciding on planning applications or responding factually to media stories, is allowed.

For more details, the Local Government Association publishes a [guide](#) to restrictions during purdah.

Government

Each year, the Cabinet Office publishes guidance to civil servants in central government and on arms-length bodies about their conduct ahead of local elections. For them, restrictions come into place three weeks prior to the elections (i.e. 11 April).

They are advised to take care to make sure that public resources aren't used for party political purposes and not to do anything to call their impartiality into question. Particular areas they should be careful about are Government announcements, visits and campaigns that could affect the elections, as well as treating information requests from different candidates equally. They should also ensure that Government property is not used for election purposes.

For more details, the guidance issued to civil servants published by the Cabinet Office is available [here](#).

What's next?

Fair Funding Review & Business Rates Retention

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is currently conducting the Fair Funding Review which will redesign the formula that allocates funding to local authorities based on their relative need for services (this has not been updated since 2013-14, based on a methodology that has existed for over a decade). The new formula will first be used as part of the 2020-21 local government finance settlement and the Government aims to consult on indicative allocations before then. In 2020, the Government also intends that local authorities will be able to retain 75% of the business rates they collect, with a further consultation on this proposal to follow later this year.

Spending Review

In March's Spring Statement, Chancellor Philip Hammond confirmed that a three-year Spending Review would be launched before the summer recess and would conclude alongside the Autumn Budget. This process will set departmental budgets and thus determine the amount of money available for local authorities. He promised that if the UK left the EU with a deal, there would be a 'Deal Dividend', which could be spent on public services, capital investment and low taxes.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

When the UK leaves the European Union it will lose access to EU structural funding (worth around €2.4bn a year), which supports local economic development. The Government has guaranteed that this funding will continue in the short-term (even in the event of a no-deal Brexit) and has announced that in the long-term it will be replaced by a UK Shared Prosperity Fund. A consultation on the fund's design had been promised for 2018; this has not appeared but continues to be promised 'shortly', with a final decision to be made alongside the Spending Review.

Social Care Green Paper

Proposals for the funding of social care are set to be outlined in the Social Care Green Paper, which will address long term sustainability and the integration of services, as well as issues such as workforce and technology. The publication of the Green Paper was first scheduled for the summer of 2017, though it has been continually delayed and will now be published at some point in 2019. When finally published, the Green Paper will be the starting point for social care policy development and will fill in the gaps in the NHS Long Term Plan and provide a clearer view of the Government's priorities in the sector.

Local Industrial Strategies

As part of the Government's overall industrial strategy, announced in January 2017, it has committed to working with all parts of England to develop Local Industrial Strategies (working with Mayoral Combined Authorities, or with Local Enterprise Partnerships where those don't exist). These are aimed at increasing productivity by developing local strengths. The first were due to be agreed by March 2019, with the remainder to follow by early 2020.

English Devolution Framework

The Government has promised to publish a devolution framework for England, providing clarity over what has become a complicated system of different types of local authorities with different powers in different areas. This had been promised by December 2018, but Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary James Brokenshire recently said that 'there is a need to land Brexit first so we can all look at this properly and sensibly' although he did not want to push it into 'the long grass'.

Does your comms plan include local councils?

The fully integrated Vuelio platform allows you to identify, understand and engage all your media and political stakeholders – including local councillors, who will be updated after the elections.

[Find out more](#)

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