

Code of conduct for campaigners: electoral registration, postal voting, proxy voting and polling stations

Campaigners are an essential element of a healthy democracy, and their right to put their arguments to voters should be supported and protected. It is equally important, however, to ensure that the activities of campaigners do not bring into question the integrity of the electoral process.

This Code provides a guide for campaigners, electoral administrators and police forces to what is, and is not, considered acceptable behaviour at polling stations and in the community during the lead-up to polling day.

As a guiding principle, if there is any doubt about a particular activity, campaigners should ask themselves “What would a reasonable observer think?”

More detailed guidance about electoral offences can be found in the guidance for candidates and agents, which is available at: electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent

The Code has been sent to all registered political parties in Great Britain, and Returning Officers will draw it to the attention of all candidates and parties contesting elections.

Some Returning Officers may identify the need to develop and seek agreement to specific local provisions which supplement the terms of this Code, in order to address identified local risks. Returning Officers must consult with local campaigners and the relevant national Nominating Officers as well as police forces to secure appropriate local agreement to such provisions, and should ensure that they are communicated and well-understood by campaigners locally.

Scope of this code

This code covers all those actively involved in campaigning in elections or referendums in Great Britain. All references to campaigners in this code include:

- Candidates standing at an election, their agents and their staff and supporters
- Political party officers, members and supporters campaigning at an election
- Other people and organisations campaigning for or against a candidate, a group of candidates or a party at an election
- People and organisations campaigning for or against a particular outcome at a referendum

Compliance with this code

Any concerns that this code has been breached should be raised first with the candidate, political party or campaigner in question.

Any further concerns should be drawn to the attention of the Electoral Commission. The Commission will raise them with the relevant party or campaigner if appropriate, and will agree appropriate actions to remedy or prevent a reoccurrence of any breach.

1 Electoral registration and absent vote applications

1.1 Campaigners should be free to encourage voters to register to vote and apply to vote by post or appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf, if that is the most convenient way for them to vote.

Campaigners can help to inform voters about how to participate in elections, and Electoral Registration Officers should support you by providing you with a reasonable number of registration and absent vote application forms on request. Voters can also register online at: www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

1.2 Campaigners should ensure that any electoral registration forms and postal or proxy voting application forms conform fully to the requirements of electoral law, including all the necessary questions and the options open to electors.

You can download electoral registration forms from gov.uk/register-to-vote and absent vote application forms from electoralcommission.org.uk/voter

1.3 Campaigners should ensure that the local Electoral Registration Officer's address is clearly provided as the preferred address for the return of registration and absent vote application forms.

To ensure voters can make their own choice about how to return registration or absent vote application forms, you should always clearly provide the relevant Electoral Registration Officer's address as the preferred return address, even if an alternative address is also given. This will also minimise the risk of suspicion that completed applications could be altered or inadvertently lost or destroyed.

1.4 Campaigners should send on unaltered any completed registration or absent vote application forms given to them to the relevant Electoral Registration Officer's address within two working days of receipt.

To minimise the risk of absent vote applications being refused because completed forms arrive with the Electoral Registration Officer after the statutory deadline before a poll, you must ensure that there is no unnecessary delay in forwarding on application forms which you receive directly.

1.5 Campaigners should always explain to electors the implications of applying to vote by post or appointing a proxy.

It is important that electors understand that they will not be able to vote in person on polling day if they or their proxy apply for and are granted a postal vote, and will not be able to vote in person if their appointed proxy has already voted on their behalf. To avoid duplication and unnecessary administrative pressures for Electoral Registration Officers, campaigners should try to ensure that electors who are included in current postal or proxy voter lists, or have already applied for a postal or proxy vote for a particular poll, do not submit an additional application.

Postal vote applications

1.6 Campaigners should never encourage electors to have their postal ballot pack redirected to anywhere other than the address where they are registered to vote.

Electors should take care to protect their ballot paper and postal ballot pack, and they will be best able to do so at their home address unless there are compelling reasons why receiving the postal ballot pack at the address where they are registered to vote would be impractical. Electors must state on the application form the reason why they need their postal ballot pack sent to another address.

Proxy vote applications

1.7 Electors should be encouraged to explore other options for people to act as a proxy – including relatives or neighbours, for example – before a campaigner agrees to be appointed as a proxy.

To minimise the risk of suspicions that campaigners may be seeking to place undue pressure on electors, electors should not be encouraged to appoint a campaigner as their proxy.

2 Postal voting ballot papers

2.1 Campaigners should never touch or handle anyone else's ballot paper.

If you are asked for assistance in completing a ballot paper, you should always refer the voter to the Returning Officer's staff at the elections office who may be able to arrange a home visit if necessary. Assistance will also be available for electors at polling stations.

2.2 Campaigners should never observe voters completing their ballot paper. If you are with a voter when they complete their ballot paper, remember they should always complete it in secret.

You should ensure that the voter seals both envelopes personally and immediately after completing their ballot paper and postal voting statement. If you are asked to give advice, it is acceptable and often helpful to explain the voting process, but do not offer to help anyone to complete their ballot paper.

2.3 Campaigners should never handle or take any completed ballot paper or postal ballot packs from voters.

Wherever practical, you should encourage voters to post or deliver the completed postal ballot pack themselves. If you are approached or asked for help by a voter who is unable to post their completed postal ballot pack or make any other arrangements for it to be returned in time, you should contact the Returning Officer to ask them to arrange for it to be collected. The Returning Officer may agree that it would be in the voter's best interest for you to deliver the completed postal ballot pack to the relevant office or polling station, if there are no feasible alternative options.

3 Campaigning outside polling places

3.1 Campaigners should be allowed to put their messages to voters on polling day, including in public spaces outside polling places.

Polling station staff and police officers should not seek to discourage or remove campaigners who are otherwise peacefully communicating with voters, as long as they are not within or impeding access to the grounds of the polling place. You should be careful, however, to ensure that your approach is proportionate and should recognise that groups of supporters may be perceived as intimidating by voters. 3.2 Campaigners should keep access to polling places and the pavements around polling places clear to allow voters to enter.

The Presiding Officer is responsible for maintaining order in the polling place, and you may be asked to move by polling station staff or police officers if you are impeding access by voters to a polling place.

4 Complaints and allegations about electoral fraud

4.1 Campaigners should be prepared to give the police a statement and substantiate any allegations of electoral fraud they make.

The police will investigate allegations where someone is prepared to provide evidence or a statement in support of the complaint, but unsubstantiated claims about electoral fraud have the potential to damage confidence in the integrity of the electoral process. You should ensure you are confident that evidence can be provided to the police before considering whether it is appropriate to publicise any specific allegation.

4.2 Campaigners who are concerned or think that electoral fraud may have taken place should raise the matter with their election agent or local party, or with the relevant Electoral Registration Officer or Returning Officer for the area.

They may be able to explain whether or not an election-related crime has been committed, and refer it to the police if appropriate or provide details of the police contact for the relevant area so that campaigners can report their allegation. Concerns about breaches of the political finance rules should be raised directly with the Electoral Commission.

4.3 Any campaigner who has actual evidence that an electoral offence has been committed should report it directly and without delay to the police.

If appropriate, the police will investigate the matter. Every police force has designated a Single Point of Contact (known as a SPOC) to lead on election matters and who will deal directly with the matter or give advice to local police officers. The Electoral Commission can help provide contact details for local police force SPOCs.

Candidate imprints – England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Under the Representation of the People Act 1983 and associated legislation, there are rules about putting imprints on election material.

Candidate election material is any material that can be reasonably regarded as intended to promote or procure the election of a candidate at an election.

Whenever printed election material is produced, it must contain certain details (which we refer to as an 'imprint') to show who is responsible for the material. This helps to ensure there is transparency about who is campaigning.

We provide advice and guidance on these rules but we do **not** enforce them. Decisions on the investigation and

prosecution of imprint offences are a matter for the police and the prosecution services, and any allegations of non-compliance should be made to the police.

The rules on imprints apply to all candidates. Different imprint rules apply for candidates in Scottish Parliamentary elections and council elections in Scotland. Please see [Candidate imprints – Scottish Parliamentary elections and council elections in Scotland](#) for more details.

This factsheet explains the rules you must follow if you are a candidate in any other election.

What is candidate election material?

Election material is published, material such as leaflets and adverts that can be reasonably regarded as intended to promote or procure the election of a candidate at an election.

Election material also includes material that criticises other candidates.

What must you include?

On printed election material such as leaflets and posters, you must include the name and address of:

- the printer,
- the promoter, and
- any person on behalf of whom the material is being published (and who is not the promoter)

The promoter is whoever who has caused the material to be published.

You must use an address where you can be contacted. It can be a home address or an office or business address. You can also use a PO Box address or other mailbox service.

If you are putting an advert in a print newspaper, your advert does not need to include the printer's name and address, but the name and address of the printer of the newspaper must appear on the first or last page of the newspaper. The advert must include the other details as usual.

If you are being paid to publish election material, the material must include an imprint which includes the

details of whoever is paying you. This is because either they are the promoter, or you are publishing the material on their behalf.

In all cases, you must make sure that the imprint lists all the organisations involved in publishing and promoting the material.

It is an offence for a printer or promoter to publish printed election material without an imprint.

Examples of an imprint

For the candidate's own material, the promoter will usually be the agent. The person on whose behalf the material is being published will usually be the candidate.

An imprint on candidate campaign material should look like this:

- Printed by [printer's name and address].
- Promoted by [agent's name and address], on behalf of [candidate's name and address].

For example:

Printed by Armadillo Printing Ltd, 22 Thornfields Avenue, Glasgow.

Promoted by John Smith, 110 High Street, Airdrie on behalf of Jane Smith of 112 High Street Airdrie.

or where you are using an office address:

Printed by Armadillo Printing Ltd, 22 Thornfields Avenue, Glasgow.

Promoted by John Smith, on behalf of Jane Smith of 112 High Street Airdrie.

If the material is digital there is no printer, so a digital imprint on candidate campaign material should look like this:

Promoted by John Smith, on behalf of Jane Smith, both of 112 High Street Airdrie.

Where the candidate is also the promoter of the material, the 'on behalf of' part of the imprint is not required. This may happen when a candidate is their own agent.

For example:

Printed by Armadillo Printing Ltd, 22 Thornfields Avenue, Glasgow.

Promoted by Jane Smith of 112 High Street Airdrie.

If the candidate also prints leaflets using their own printer, the imprint should look like this:

Printed and promoted by Jane Smith of 112 High Street Airdrie.

Where do you put the imprint?

If your material is a single-sided printed document – such as a window poster – or where most of the information is on one side, you must put the imprint on that side of the document.

If it is a multi-sided printed document, you must put it on the first or last page.

Websites and other electronic material

As good practice, we recommend that you should put an imprint on electronic material, such as websites and social media posts. The imprint should include the name and address of the promoter and any organisation on whose behalf it has been published.

Where it is impractical to place the full imprint on the election material you should consider how to provide some other means for the material to be associated with you.

Social media

We recommend that you include the imprint in the post itself. You can also include it somewhere closely and clearly linked.

For example, on Twitter your imprint can be included prominently on your profile. For paid adverts on Facebook, you can include the imprint in the disclaimer text which accompanies the advert.

Crowdfunding

If your crowdfunding page contains election material as well as asking for donations, it must contain an imprint. Whether or not this is the case, you should ensure that it is clear on the page who the money is being donated to.

You can find out more information in our [crowdfunding factsheet](#).

Images and cartoons

We recommend that you include the imprint in the image itself.

If it is posted on social media, you can include the imprint in the same way as you would for any social media post.

If it is impractical to place a full imprint on to an image, you should include the text of a link, or a hyperlinked logo or emblem that leads to your full imprint.

Videos

We recommend that you include the imprint in the video itself. The imprint should be legible and appear for long enough for voters to read it.

If the video is posted on social media, you can include the imprint in the same way as you would for any social media post.

Posters for downloading

Any posters that are available for download from a website should carry the full imprint. If the posters are printed out and displayed as printed material, they must carry a full imprint including the printer's details. If you intend people to do this, you should leave a space for them to include their details as the printer.

Online discussion forums

As good practice, we suggest that if you use these forums you make your identity as a candidate clear where possible.

Where you can find more information

In addition to the rules about imprints, there are also rules on fundraising and spending that candidates must follow in the run-up to elections. We publish a suite of guidance for candidates that explains these rules, which you can find [here](#).

We also offer an advice service and you can contact us on one of the phone numbers or email addresses below.

- England:
pef@electoralcommission.org.uk
0333 103 1928
- Wales:
infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk
0333 103 1929
- Northern Ireland:
infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk
0333 103 1928

Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Electoral Commission:

- publications@electoralcommission.org.uk
020 7271 0500

Tellers do's and don'ts

Tellers are usually volunteers for candidates. They stand outside polling stations or polling places and record the electoral number of electors who have voted. By identifying electors who have not voted and relaying this information to the candidate or their supporters, tellers play an important role in elections and referendums. The candidate or their supporters may then contact the voters who have not yet been to vote during polling day and encourage them to vote.

There should be no more than one teller at a polling station for each candidate at any time. Where a polling place contains more than one polling station with separate entrances, it may be appropriate for there to be tellers at each entrance, but no more than one per candidate.

Tellers have no legal status and voters have the right to refuse to give them any information. The Returning Officer or their staff may provide further guidance on the activities of tellers.

Tellers must

- always remain outside the polling station
- only enter the polling station to cast their own vote, to vote as a proxy or to assist a disabled voter
- always comply with the instructions of the Returning Officer and Presiding Officer

Tellers must not

- be able to see or hear what is happening inside the polling station
- impede, obstruct or intimidate voters on their way in or out of the polling station
- demand any information relating to a voter's elector number, name or address
- ask voters to re-enter the polling station to ascertain their elector number
- have discussions with voters that may give rise to allegations of undue influence (e.g. voting intentions or party affiliations)
- display any campaign material in support of or against any particular political party or candidate other than a rosette or badge

Tellers may

- approach voters for information as they enter or leave the polling station
- display a coloured rosette or badge displaying the name of the candidate, party and/or emblem or description; the rosette/badge should not bear a slogan and must not be oversized

Guidance on the conduct of tellers in and around polling places

Introduction

1.1 This guidance provides advice for those involved in administering and campaigning in elections and referendums, and aims to ensure that tellers, agents, candidates and polling station staff know precisely what is and is not accepted when campaigning in and around polling places. These guidelines intend to promote appropriate standards of conduct to be maintained throughout the UK. Agents who also act as tellers are also subject to the provisions in this guidance.

1.2 This guidance should be read alongside any guidance issued by the Returning Officer; as they are ultimately responsible for the conduct of elections their decision is final.

1.3 For the purposes of this guidance:

- 'Polling place' means the building in which polling stations are located.
- 'Polling station' is defined as the room or area within a polling place where electors cast their votes, which contains the polling booths, ballot box and Presiding Officer's table. The polling station is a self-contained area which only those allowed by law may enter. More than one polling station may be located within a polling place.

Tellers

1.4 Tellers are usually volunteers for candidates. They stand outside polling stations or polling places and record the electoral number of electors who have voted. By identifying electors who have not voted and relaying this information to the candidate or their supporters, tellers play an important role in elections and referendums. The candidate or their supporters may then contact the voters who have not yet been to vote during polling day and encourage them to vote.

1.5 Tellers must not impede or interfere with the efficient and secure administration of the election and must comply with any instructions issued by the Returning Officer or Presiding Officer.

1.6 **Tellers have no legal status and voters have the right to refuse to give them any information.** They should not be confused with polling agents, whose appointment and rights are described in legislation. Tellers, unlike polling agents,

may not be admitted to the polling station in their capacity as tellers (see '[Location](#)' below).

Tellers' activities

1.7 Tellers should concern themselves only with checking who is about to vote or has voted. This will involve politely asking voters for their poll card, elector number or name and address. Returning Officers may advise tellers that they may approach voters for information as they either enter or leave the polling station.

1.8 If asked, tellers should explain that they are activists seeking to determine who has actually voted. No impression should be given that any information provided will be used for official purposes or that they are employed by the Returning Officer.

1.9 Tellers should not display or distribute election material (e.g. billboards, posters, placards or pamphlets) on walls or around the polling place. Any display of such material should be brought to the attention of the Presiding Officer immediately.

1.10 Presiding Officers have responsibility for ensuring that electors are given an opportunity to cast their vote in a free and fair manner. Any decision regarding the location or behaviour of tellers is a matter for the Presiding Officer and Returning Officer; tellers must comply with their instructions.

1.11 Tellers must not attempt to induce, influence or persuade an elector how or whether to vote. Tellers cannot promote particular candidates or political parties. Their conduct must not give rise to allegations of undue influence, e.g. discussing voting intentions, party affiliations, a candidate's history, election campaigns, or undertaking any other activity particularly associated with one particular party or candidate. Any queries that relate to the electoral process must be directed to the Presiding Officer.

1.12 Voters must never be asked to re-enter the polling station to ascertain their elector number or retrieve a poll card. Voters are not obliged to comply with any request for information. Tellers must not press voters if their initial request for information is declined.

Numbers of tellers

1.13 There should be no more than one teller at a polling station for each candidate at any time. Where a polling place contains more than one polling station with separate entrances, it may be appropriate for there to be tellers at each entrance, but no more than one per candidate. Their behaviour and numbers should never be capable of being seen as intimidating in any way.

Location

1.14 Tellers must remain outside the polling station itself; they may only enter polling stations for the lawful purpose of casting their own vote, voting as a proxy, assisting a voter with disabilities, or fulfilling duties of their appointment as a polling agent, election agent, or candidate.

1.15 The Presiding Officer may allow tellers to enter the polling place (e.g. stand under porticos and entrances) provided that they are outside the polling station and do not impede or obstruct the access of voters. Tellers must not be able to see or hear what is going on inside the polling station. Where a polling place consists of one room only, tellers must not under any circumstances seek or be allowed to enter that room. Tellers cannot enter the polling station under any circumstances in their capacity as tellers.

Poll cards

1.16 The activities of tellers are limited to the collection of elector numbers or poll cards. Poll cards left with tellers should be given to the Presiding Officer or Poll Clerk by the close of poll. Tellers must not ask polling staff to hand over poll cards that may have been left with them or in bins.

1.17 Tellers may use a receptacle for voters to discard their poll cards, to help them establish who has voted during their absence. Such receptacles must not obstruct voters who are entering or leaving the polling station. The contents must be returned to polling station staff after the close of poll.

Appearance

1.18 Tellers may wear coloured rosettes or a badge of a reasonable size, as this assists electors by making it clear that they are activists and not electoral officials. The rosette/badge may display the name of a candidate and/or an emblem or description; the rosette/badge should not bear a slogan and must not be oversized.

1.19 Tellers must not wear, carry or display any headwear, footwear or other apparel that carries any writing, picture or sign relating to any candidate or party apart from a rosette.

Application of this guidance

1.20 With regard to the collection of elector numbers from voters on the way in or out of the polling station, this guidance is intended to be amended to coincide with any guidelines or instructions provided by the Returning Officer. The Returning Officer is ultimately responsible for the conduct of an election; as such, their decision is final. Each individual Returning Officer is independent of the local authority when they are conducting the election, and everything is done under their personal responsibility.

1.21 The value of local agreements cannot be over-emphasised. It is recommended that the Returning Officer arranges a briefing with all agents and tellers at the earliest opportunity following the close of nominations to communicate the same message to all concerned. This will ensure that everyone is aware of the local circumstances and conducts their campaign within the same guidelines. It may pre-empt problems by discussing campaigning in and around polling places and the conduct of tellers, and reaching consensus amongst those present as to what is acceptable, especially with regard to whether to gather elector numbers as voters either enter or leave the polling station. Guidance should be distributed with nomination packs or at pre-election briefings.

1.22 On polling day, Returning Officers may find it helpful to provide Presiding Officers with posters to display that outline the main responsibilities of tellers. The poster could be displayed outside the polling station close to where tellers stand, serving both to self-regulate the activity of tellers and to alert voters that tellers are not official polling station staff. It could also be handed to any tellers prior to polling day to advise them of what they can and cannot do. The poster is intended to be used by the Returning Officer in conjunction with agreed local arrangements on the collection of elector numbers.

1.23 If in doubt about the actions of a teller, the Presiding Officer or Returning Officer should consider: 'What would a reasonable observer think?' in line with the advice of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.¹

Complaints

1.24 If a complaint is received about the conduct of tellers, the electoral administrator should contact the relevant Presiding Officer and request that the matter be dealt with and monitored by the polling station staff there. Presiding Officers have the power to keep order in the station and may require any teller who refuses to carry out their instructions to be removed.

1.25 If it is not possible to contact the Presiding Officer, or there are continuing difficulties with the activities of tellers or campaigners, a member of the Returning Officer's staff should visit the polling place. The member of staff should speak to the Presiding Officer before approaching the campaigners or tellers. Tellers may be reminded of this guidance, provided with a copy if necessary, and advised that it is an offence under electoral law for anyone to impede or interfere with any electors prior to their voting.

1.26 Tellers should be advised that if the interference persists the police will be called. The Presiding Officer should be advised of the action taken and asked to monitor the situation and report any further problems to the elections office. The agent of the party or candidate they are representing should also be informed.

1.27 This enables the party or candidate concerned to take action against such tellers and ensure that they are properly briefed before being allowed to act as tellers in future elections and referendums.

¹ Committee on Standards in Public Life, Standards in Public Life: Standards of Conduct in Local Government in England, Scotland and Wales, Third Report. Chairman Lord Nolan (The Stationery Office: London, 1997).