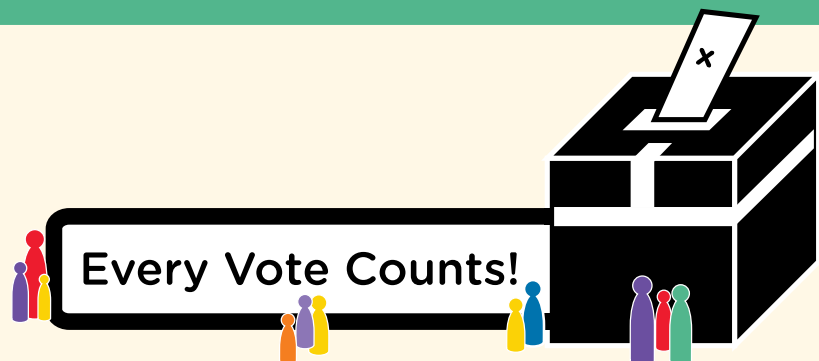




# How to get involved in politics



# 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.



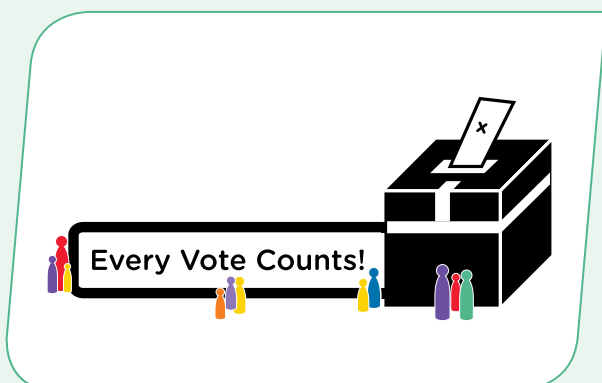
You can also take part by supporting a campaign or setting up your own.



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.**



You should contact your local electoral registration office to find out if you are on the register. You can do this by contacting your council or by going to **[www.yourvotematters.co.uk](http://www.yourvotematters.co.uk)**



To register to vote, visit **[www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)**

# Elections



Once you are registered you can vote in a **General Election**. This is 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.



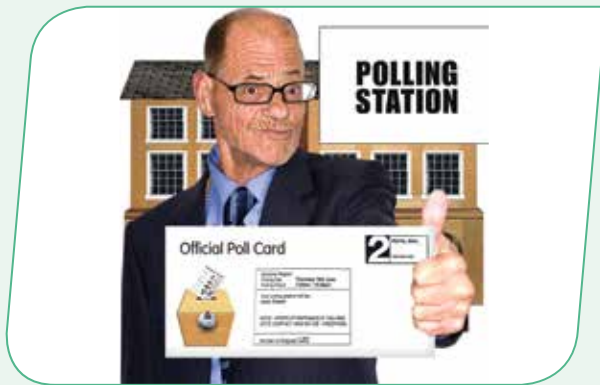
Some councils have elected **Mayors**. They are responsible for the day-to-day running of local services. You can vote for these mayors in a **mayoral election**.



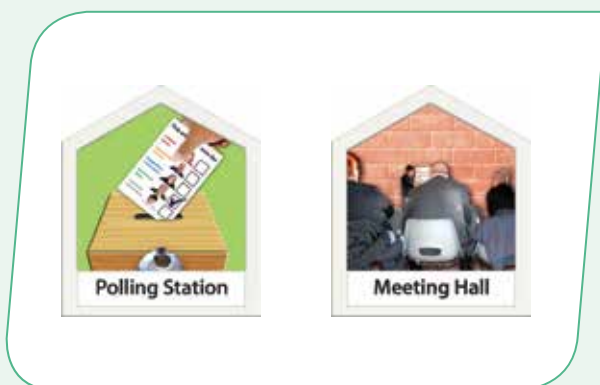
People who live in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also vote at elections to decide who becomes a politician in their Parliament or Assembly.



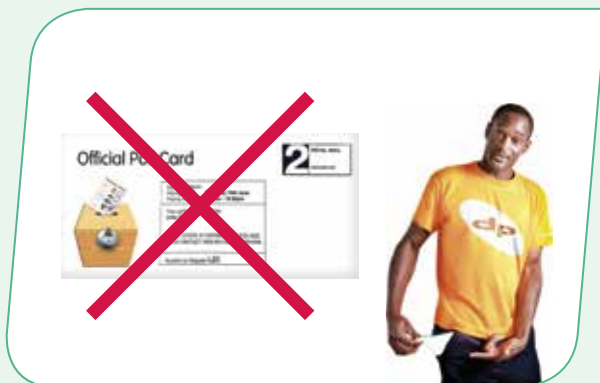
# Voting in person



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.



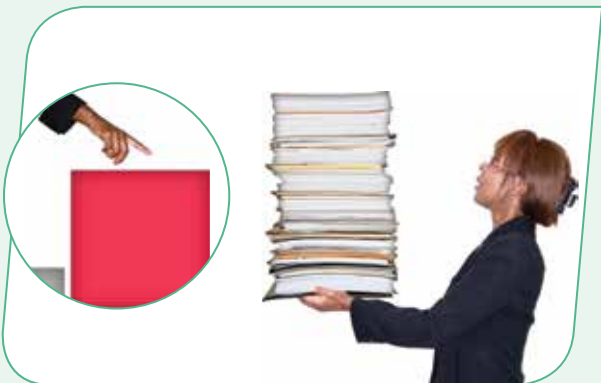
At the polling station you will be given a **ballot paper**. A ballot paper is a list of names of people you can vote for.



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 politician 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.

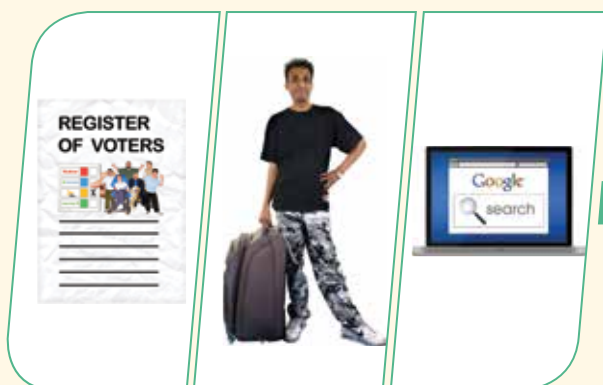


You put a cross next to the name of the person that you want to vote for and post the ballot paper back to the council.



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.

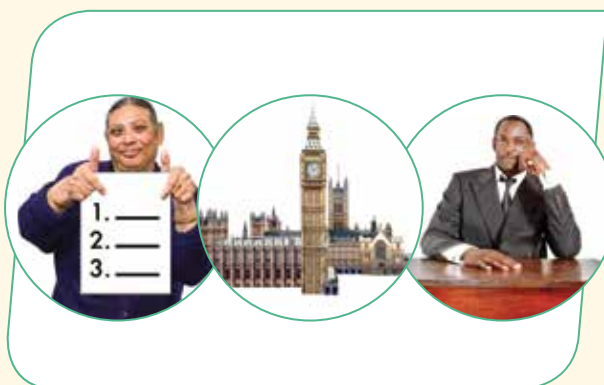




You can register for a proxy vote if you cannot get to the polling station. This might be because you are unwell or on holiday. You can register for a proxy vote and find out more at [www.yourvotematters.co.uk](http://www.yourvotematters.co.uk)



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



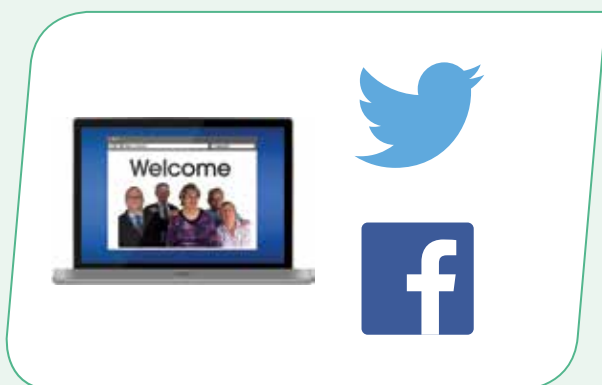
Another way to take part in politics is to contact the politicians that represent you and tell them about the things that are important to you.



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](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)



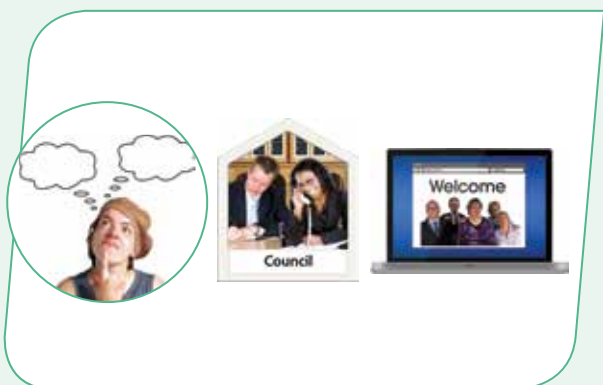
You can find out about the decisions your MP is making on issues important to you by looking on their website, following them on Facebook or Twitter, or looking on [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)



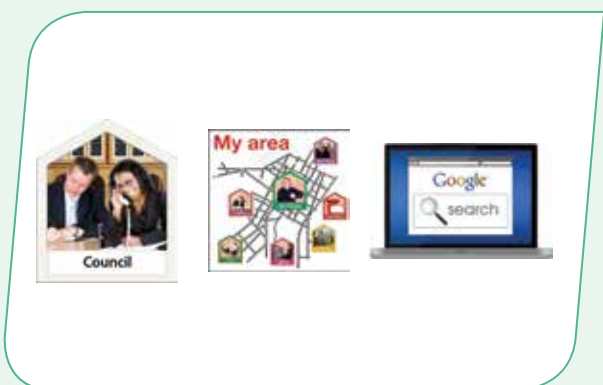
Councillors are responsible for local services. The things you may want to contact them about include social services, housing, rubbish collection, local police and fire services, libraries, leisure centres, and local transport.



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](http://www.writetothem.com)

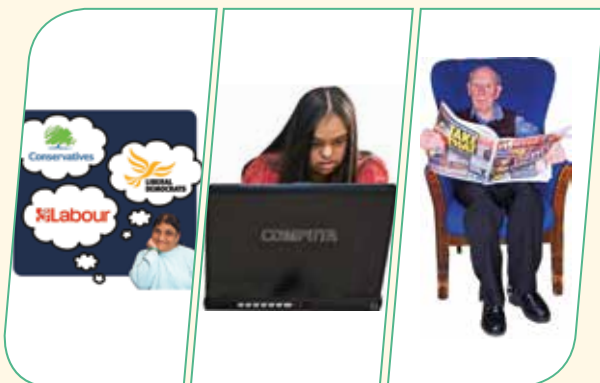
# Political parties



**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](http://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 each party for a copy of their 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.





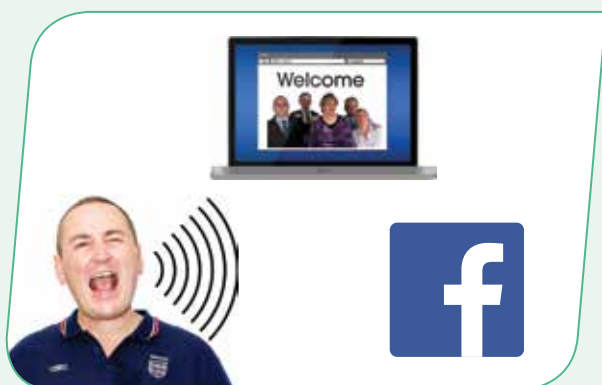
Looking on the internet is a good way to find out which groups and organisations are campaigning on issues important to you.



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.



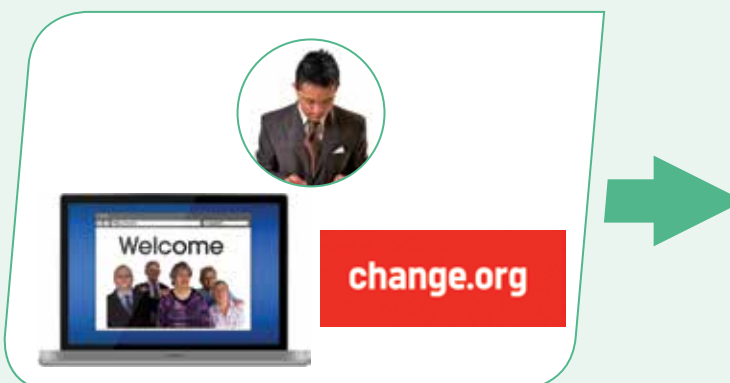
You could ask your MP to support your campaign. If it is a local issue then you could write to local newspapers and businesses to tell them about your concerns. You could also organise a meeting to talk about the issue.



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.



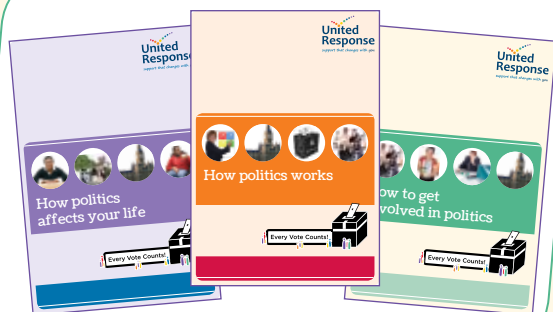
The person who makes the petition then tries to get other people to sign it if they agree. If enough people sign it then this can make people in charge listen.



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](http://www.change.org).



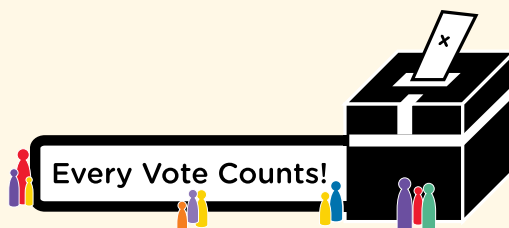
If you would like to find out more about how politics affects your life, go to **[www.everyvotecounts.org.uk](http://www.everyvotecounts.org.uk)**



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



If you would like to read the other booklets, you can download them at **[www.unitedresponse.org.uk/every-vote-counts-resources](http://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/every-vote-counts-resources)**



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