

How Scottish Churches can prepare for the UK General Election

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There will be a General Election on the **4 July 2024** and people will need support with the practicalities of voting for two main reasons:

- **The General Election falls in the school holidays for many people across Scotland.** It is likely many people will have plans to be away from home on 4 July and will need to apply either for a postal vote or for a proxy vote, (where a trusted person casts your vote for you.)
- **New legislation** means everyone must present photo ID at the polling station for a General Election. More details and examples of valid types of ID are below.

This document aims to provide individuals and congregations with all the information needed to

- Check that they are eligible and registered to vote in a UK General Election
- Register for a postal vote or a proxy vote if they're not going to be at home on 4 July
- Research the candidates standing in their area
- Cast their vote on the day
- Help vulnerable people in their communities check if they are able to vote

Can I vote?

The rules for a UK General Election are different to those for many of the elections we can participate in in Scotland.

To vote in the upcoming general election you must be

- Registered to vote (there is information about how to do this below)
- 18 years of age on the day of the election
- be a British, Irish or qualifying Commonwealth citizen
- be resident in the UK or living abroad and registered as an overseas voter
- not be legally excluded from voting

You will also need to show a valid form of photo identification at the polling station before you can cast your vote – we'll explain more about this later too!

YOU MUST BE REGISTERED TO VOTE BY 11.59PM ON TUESDAY 18 JUNE TO VOTE IN THE UPCOMING GENERAL ELECTION

Voting Age and Registration Age

- You can register to vote if you live in Scotland and are aged 14 years and over, but you will only be able to vote in an election once you have turned 16, or 18, depending on the rules for the election.
- **The minimum voting age for a UK Parliament Election is 18 years.** This is higher than the voting age for Scottish Parliament and Scottish Local Elections, which is 16 years

STOP! Are you registered to vote?

Around 8 million eligible people risk losing out on their right vote because they are not registered to vote. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to check if you are registered to vote.

Citizens UK recommend **if you're not sure, then register to vote!**

It doesn't matter if you re-register, you will still only be able to vote once! If you have moved house recently you will need to re-register at your new address.

Registering to vote is quick and easy. The fastest way to do this is to register on the [UK Government's website](#)

If you want to register by post, you can contact your local Electoral Registration Office and ask them to post a form to you. You'll then need to return the completed form to your local Electoral Registration Office.

It is also possible to register to vote anonymously, more information about this can be found on the Government's website

Voter ID

It is now **compulsory for voters in Scotland to show photo ID to vote in UK parliamentary elections**, including general elections. Valid types of photo ID include;

- Passport
- Driving license
- Blue badge
- Identity card bearing the Proof of Age Standards Scheme hologram (a PASS card)
- Scottish National Entitlement Card issued for the purpose of concessionary travel (including a 60+, disabled or under 22s bus pass)
- Ministry of Defence Form 90 (Defence Identity Card)

A full list of valid photo IDs can be found at

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/voter-id/accepted-forms-photo-id>

You can use an out of date ID as long as you still look like your photo and your name is the same.

If you do not have any form of valid ID, or are worried about using an existing form of ID for any reason (for example, you don't think you are recognisable in your photo, or because of a gender marker) you can apply for a free voter ID document, known as a Voter Authority Certificate.

You can apply [online](#), or by post from your local Electoral Registration Office.

You must apply by 5pm on Wednesday 26 June.

Who can I vote for?

You can find up-to-date information about the candidates in your area by visiting

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information>

This will tell you who is standing in your area, what party they represent, and what your UK parliamentary constituency is. You can also view the details of your local electoral registration team.

Many constituency boundaries have changed recently, and your constituency may have changed since the last time you voted.

I won't be at home on election day, can I still vote?

Yes, you can! But there are a few extra steps you need to take before election day to be able to cast your vote.

Firstly, make sure you are already registered to vote. You can only vote by post or by proxy if you are registered to vote.

Register for a postal vote

You can apply online or by post for a postal vote.

To apply online, or to download a postal vote application go to

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote>

You must do this by 5pm, on Wednesday 19 June

You will receive a voter pack in the post approximately 2-3 weeks before election day. Your voter pack will include instructions on how to vote by post. More information is available on the [Electoral Commission website](#)

If you will be away from mid June, you may miss your postal vote voter pack, so register for a proxy.

Register for a proxy vote

A proxy vote is where you nominate a trusted person to vote for you on your behalf. A proxy vote can be done in person or by post.

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-proxy-vote>

You must do this by 5pm on Wednesday 26 June

Due to recent changes, proxy votes applied for from before 31 October 2023 expired on 31 January 2024. If you applied before 31 October 2023 you will need to apply again for a new one.

What happens on election day?

Polling places are open between 7am and 10pm. If you're registered to vote and you are voting in person, you'll receive a poll card in the post in the weeks before the election takes place. This will tell you where you need to go to vote. **You can only vote in the place that is stated on your poll card.** You do not need to take the poll card with you when you go to vote. When you arrive at the location stated on your poll card you will be greeted by a poll clerk who will check your details and give you instructions to follow to vote.

If you haven't received your polling card in the days leading up to the election, contact your local council.

Remember! The new regulations mean that everyone must show a valid form of photo identification with them to be able to vote

Help for citizens of other countries, refugees and asylum seekers, homeless people, and other special circumstances

Citizens of other Countries

Some individuals from a set list of Commonwealth countries with leave to remain, or who do not require leave to remain, can vote in a UK General Election. The easiest way to check if this applies to you, or someone who you know, is to visit www.canivote.org.uk

This is a joint initiative run by Citizens UK, Migrant Democracy Project and Just Register and is a free and easy to use service to check voter eligibility.

Refugees

The rules around voting and refugee status differ from Scottish elections.

People with refugee status or indefinite leave to remain **can only vote in a General Election if they are a citizen of a certain number of Commonwealth countries** (use the www.canivote.org.uk tool to check)

All other refugees are only eligible to vote once they have British citizenship.

[The Scottish Refugee Council](#) can help anyone who is a refugee, or anyone supporting them, to understand more about their eligibility to vote.

Asylum Seekers

People seeking Asylum, from any country, cannot vote in a General Election. This is because they are not considered to have leave to remain in the UK

Homeless people or people with No Fixed Address

People who are homeless or have no fixed address can still register to vote via a 'Declaration of local connection'. This form can be downloaded from the [UK Government's website](#) or picked up from your local electoral registration office.

Visit [Crisis' website](#) for more information.

Illegal Occupancy

Illegally occupying a property or grounds **does not** disqualify an individual from registering to vote using that address if it is determined to be their permanent residence.

Other Special Circumstances

Care Homes

The [Electoral Commission provides guidance](#) for assisting people in care homes resident in Scotland to vote, as well as information around power of attorney, postal and proxy voting.

Mental Health Inpatients

Inpatient mental health patients, including those detained under the Mental Health Act, have the same right to vote as the general population. However, they remain one of the most disenfranchised groups.

Patients who have spent enough time in a mental health hospital setting to be considered a resident can register at their hospital address. This does not apply to people detained in a Mental Health Hospital in relation to a criminal conviction (see below).

Visit the [Electoral Commission website](#) for more information.

Prisoners

Most prisoners in the UK cannot legally register to vote in UK elections, including General Elections. This applies whether someone is in prison, convicted and detained in a mental health hospital, or is unlawfully at large.

There are some exceptions for people detained due to contempt of court, and for non-payment of fines or debts, as well as for prisoners on remand and convicted prisoners released on temporary license. The Electoral Commission can offer [further guidance](#) on this.

This is different to the law for Scottish Elections. Since 2020, Scottish prisoners who are ordinarily resident in Scotland and serving a sentence less than 12-months are eligible to vote in Scottish Parliament, local and national park elections.

Election Ready Sunday Resources

Help your congregation to get ready for the General Election by holding an ‘Election Ready Sunday’ before the voter registration deadline of 18 June.

‘Election Ready Sunday’ is a simple activity to do in the next few weeks in June. It could make a big difference to members of your congregation by ensuring they are registered and have the right ID to vote, now that photo ID is compulsory in a General Election. Through Election Ready Sunday we aim to reach some of the 300,000 people who have the right to vote but are not yet registered – some of these people will be in our congregations.

This is an initiative from Citizens UK and supported by a number of Churches across the UK, including The Church of Scotland, The Methodist Church, The United Reformed Church and the Church of England. Congregations can register as Voter Registration Champions and encourage all eligible members of their congregation to register to vote in the weeks preceding the General Election.

More information and resources can be found on the [Church of Scotland website](#)

Additional Resources on Key Issues at Stake in the Election

Hustings Resources

UK Church partners, including the Church of Scotland, have come together to produce [hustings guidance](#) for congregations in relation to the upcoming UK Parliament election.

General Resources

The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) have produced several useful documents including;

[Love Pray Vote](#) – An Election Issues Briefing on JPIT’s [six core issues](#)

More guidance can be found on the [JPIT General Elections resource page](#)

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CBTI) have launched their [General Election website](#) which collates resources and news from a number of churches and para-church organisation. From the end of May, you can also search for and register local hustings and events on the website.

The Evangelical Alliance have published a pre-General Election report [Thinking Faithfully about Politics](#). The report offers a snapshot into the attitudes and priorities of evangelical voters across Britain.

Quakers in Britain have produced [a range of guides and templates](#) for speaking to people, including local candidates, about key issues in the run up to the General Election

[Act on Poverty](#) is a six-week course developed by **Christian Aid** and UK partners to help Christians gain a deeper understanding of poverty and get equipped to talk to political representatives about it. Each session contains bible studies, small group resources and practical actions.

[Black Church Political Mobilisation: A Manifesto for Action](#) Second Edition, from the **National Church Leaders’ Forum**. This manifesto is intended to diversify political opinions, formulate public policy development and to encourage the participation of members of the Black Christian community.

Links and Information

The information in this document had been drawn from a range of sources and web pages.

Key links and information can be found on

UK Parliament Website

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/timetable-for-the-2024-general-election/>

UK Government Website

<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote>

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-proxy-vote>

The Electoral Commission

General Information

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/running-electoral-registration-england/eligibility-register-vote/how-does-legal-incapacity-affect-right-register-vote>

Prisons

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/running-electoral-registration-england/special-category-electors/prisoners-and-detained-mental-health-patients>

Candidate and Constituency Information

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information>

Voter ID Requirements

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/voter-id/accepted-forms-photo-id>

Non-UK Citizen Voters

Can I Vote

www.canivote.org.uk

Homeless Voters

Crisis

<https://www.crisis.org.uk/get-help/information-for-crisis-members/member-news/how-to-register-to-vote-if-you-re-homeless/>