

Parish council elections in England

Guidance for candidates

Part 2a of 6 – Standing as an independent candidate

January 2020

This document applies to parish elections in England.

It does not apply to district, borough, county, county borough and unitary council elections, mayoral elections or elections to the Greater London Authority. Our guidance and resources for other elections in the UK can be accessed from our website at: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/candidate-or-agent>

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Essential information

This section of the document contains our guidance on standing as an independent candidate at a parish council election in England.

Supplementary information, which may only be relevant to some candidates, is provided at the back of this document. You can also view this supplementary guidance by clicking on the links within this document or by clicking on the chapter heading on the contents page.

In this document, we use 'you' to refer to the candidate. We use 'must' when we refer to a specific requirement. We use 'should' for items we consider to minimum good practice, but which are not legal or regulatory requirements.

Deadlines mentioned in this document are generic. We have published a [generic election timetable on our website](#). For any by-elections, you will be able to obtain a copy of the specific timetable for that election from the Returning Officer.

For scheduled elections, we will publish an election timetable, which you can download from our [website](#).

We are here to help, so please contact us if you have any questions. See our [Overview document](#) for contact details.

Data protection legislation applies to the processing of all personal data.

Please contact the [Information Commissioner's Office](#) for further information about how the current data protection legislation affects you.

This document does not cover community council elections in Wales.

You can access guidance for those elections through our website.

Completing your nomination papers

1.1 Legislation removing the requirement for candidates to have their home address published on the ballot paper, statement of persons nominated and notice of poll at parish elections has now been made and will apply for all parish elections held in England.

1.2 To become nominated as a candidate at a parish election in England, you need to submit a completed set of nomination papers to the place fixed by the Returning Officer by 4pm on the 19th working day before the poll. This deadline is set out in law and cannot be changed for any reason. The start date from which you will be able to submit nomination papers, as well as the times and place for delivery, will be set out in the notice of election published by the local Returning Officer.

1.3 There are three nomination papers that you must submit for your nomination to be valid:

- the nomination form
- a home address form
- your consent to nomination

1.4 You can obtain nomination papers from the local elections office. Contact details can be obtained from our website <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter> alternatively, the Commission has produced a set of [nomination papers](#) that you could use.

1.5 If you or someone you trust are unable to complete the nomination form, the Returning Officer can help by preparing the form for your signature.

1.6 The Returning Officer may also be able to offer informal checks of your completed nomination papers before you submit them. You should find out from the Returning Officer whether they plan to offer informal checks.

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1.7 Note that any information you provide on your nomination papers must be true to the best of your knowledge. It is an offence to provide a false statement on your nomination papers. Providing a false statement could invalidate your election, and is also punishable by an unlimited fine and/or imprisonment.

The nomination form

1.8 The [nomination form](#) must be completed in English. The form must contain:

- **Your full name.** This means your surname and other names in full. Using initials only could lead to your nomination paper being rejected. Also, do not use prefixes such as Mr, Mrs, Dr or Cllr as part of your name. The same applies to suffixes. However, if you have a title, you can use this as your full name. For example, if your actual name is Joseph Smith but your hereditary title is Joseph Avon, you can use the name Joseph Avon as your full name.
- **Signatures of 2 registered electors** (known as a proposer and seconder) from the parish area, or from the parish ward if the parish is warded. Your proposer and seconder must be on the local government electoral register that is in force on the 25th working day before the poll. For more information on proposers and seconds, see paragraph **1.56**.

1.9 The following is optional:

- **A commonly used name** – if you commonly use a name that is different from any forename or surname that you have and you wish this to appear on the ballot paper, you need to state this on the nomination form. More details are provided in paragraph **1.48**.
- **A description** – if you want the word ‘Independent’ to appear on the ballot paper underneath your name, you need to state this on the nomination form.

The RO can hold your nomination paper invalid if the particulars of your nomination are not as required by law.

The RO can also reject your nomination if they conclude that it is clearly a sham, for example, if an obviously fictitious name is provided.

Data protection legislation applies to the processing of all personal data.

Please contact the [Information Commissioner's Office](#) for further information about how the current data protection legislation affects you.

Your name and description (if you choose to use one) should be written on the nomination form **before** you ask the proposer and seconder to sign the form.

Alternatively, you may give a description of no more than six words in English to appear on the ballot paper. It can be any description providing it is sufficient to identify you and is unlikely to associate you with a political party registered with the Electoral Commission. Examples include 'farmer', 'Baker in the High Street', 'member of village action team', etc. Note that the six-word limit is set out in law and the Returning Officer will have to reject your nomination if you exceed it. If you are in any doubt about whether your description exceeds six words, you should contact the Returning Officer for advice.

Remember that the description is optional and you may choose not to have a description at all by leaving this part of the form blank.

For details on descriptions that candidates standing on behalf of registered political parties can use, see our document [Part 2b: Standing as a party candidate](#).

For information on how to register a political party, see our website at <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/party-or-campaigner/political-parties/registering-and-maintaining-a-party>

Home address form

1.10 The home address form must state:

- your full name (see paragraph 1.8)
- your home address in full
- your qualifying address, or, where you have declared on your consent to nomination that you meet more than one qualification, your qualifying addresses
- which of the qualifications your qualifying address or addresses relate to
- the full name and the home address in full of the person attesting the form.
- There are no restrictions on who can act as an attester on the home address form. (this must be the same person who signs your consent to nomination)

1.11 Your home address:

- must be completed in full
- must not contain abbreviations
- must be your current home address
- must not be a business address (unless you run a business from your home)

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1.12 You may choose for your home address not to be published on the statement of persons nominated or the ballot paper.

1.13 In this case the home address form must contain, as well as your full name and home address:

- a statement, signed by you, which states that you require your home address not to be made public
- the name of the relevant area in which your home address is situated (if your home address is in the UK)
- if you live outside the UK, the name of the country in which your home address is situated

Meaning of qualifying address and relevant area

1.14 Qualifying address means:

- where you have selected option (a) on the consent to nomination form, the address in full where you are registered as a local government elector
- where you have selected option (b) on the consent to nomination, a description and the address of that land or premises which you have occupied as owner or tenant
- where you have selected option (c) on the consent to nomination the address of your place of work
- where you have selected option (d) on the consent to nomination, the address or addresses in full of where you have resided

1.15 Relevant area means:

- **For home addresses in England:**
 - if the address is within a district for which there is a district council, that district;
 - if the address is within a county in which there are no districts with councils, that county;
 - if the address is within a London borough, that London borough;

- if the address is within the City of London (including the Inner and Middle Temples, the City of London; and
 - if the address is within the Isles of Scilly, the Isles of Scilly
- **For home addresses in Wales:**
 - if the address is within a county, that county;
 - if the address is within a county borough, that county borough
- **For home addresses in Scotland:**
 - the local government area in which the address is situated
- **For home addresses in Northern Ireland:**
 - the local government district in which the address is situated

Consent to nomination

1.16 You must also formally consent to your nomination in writing. The content of the [consent to nomination form](#) is fixed by law and the entire form must be returned in order for your nomination to be valid. On the form you will be asked to state that you are qualified and not disqualified from standing. You must also state your date of birth.

1.17 You must meet at least one of the qualifications to stand for election, as explained in [Part 1: Can you stand for election?](#) On the consent to nomination form you should state as many of the qualifications as apply.

1.18 You are not allowed to sign the consent form earlier than one calendar month before the deadline for submitting your nomination papers. Your signature must be witnessed, and the witness must sign the form, give their full name and be the same person who acts as attester on your home address form. There are no restrictions on who can be a witness to the consent to nomination.

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Submitting your nomination papers

1.19 All nomination papers, including the home address form and consent to nomination, must be delivered to the place specified on the notice of election by 4pm on the 19th working day before the poll. It is your responsibility to ensure that your nomination papers are delivered in the correct manner and by the required deadlines. We recommend that you or someone you trust delivers them, so you can be sure they are delivered to the Returning Officer in time.

How must nomination papers be submitted?

1.20 The nomination form, the home address form and consent to nomination must be delivered by hand and cannot be submitted by post, fax, e-mail or other electronic means.

1.21 The **original version** of each completed paper must be submitted. A [consent to nomination](#) form which has been sent as an attachment to an email to be printed out, for example, would make it a 'copy document' and not the original document.

When must nomination papers be submitted?

1.22 You should submit your nomination papers as early as possible to give the Returning Officer an opportunity to conduct an informal check and to give you sufficient time to submit new nomination papers should your first set contain any errors.

1.23 The notice of election will be published no later than 25 working days before the poll and will state the earliest date on which you can submit nomination papers. In most cases, the notice of election will be published on the website of the local authority in which the parish is situated.

1.24 Usually, nomination papers can only be delivered during normal office hours. The Returning Officer will confirm the exact details of when and where they can be delivered on the notice of election.

1.25 You should contact the Returning Officer as soon as possible to find out what arrangements are in place for submitting nomination papers. You will be able to contact the Returning Officer via your local authority elections office. Contact details can be obtained from our website

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

1.26 After you have submitted your nomination papers you will be sent a notice by the Returning Officer to let you know whether or not your nomination is valid.

1.27 If, after you have submitted your nomination papers you change your mind and no longer want to stand for election, you can withdraw, provided you do so by 4pm on the 19th working day before the poll. For more details on withdrawing, see below.

Withdrawing

1.28 You may withdraw as a candidate by signing and submitting a withdrawal notice, which must be witnessed by one other person. There are no restrictions on who may submit the notice, but it must be delivered by hand. Your witness must also sign the notice. A [notice of withdrawal](#) can be obtained from the local Returning Officer or downloaded from our website.

1.29 If you are outside the UK and want to withdraw, your proposer can sign the withdrawal notice on your behalf and the withdrawal must be accompanied by a written declaration signed by your proposer confirming your absence. If you are outside the UK and stand nominated by more than one nomination form, you should speak to the Returning Officer if you wish to withdraw as special rules apply in this instance.

1.30 The withdrawal notice must be submitted by the deadline for withdrawals (i.e. by 4pm on the 19th working day before the poll). After the withdrawal deadline it is not possible to withdraw from the election, and your name will appear on the ballot paper. If the election is uncontested, you will be declared elected.

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What happens after the close of nominations?

1.31 The Returning Officer will publish a statement of persons nominated for each parish, or for each parish ward if the parish is warded, by 4pm on the 18th working day before the poll. The statement will include:

- the full or commonly used names, as the case may be, of all candidates validly nominated
- the names of candidates who no longer stand nominated, if any (i.e. invalid and withdrawn candidates), with the reason why they are no longer standing
- the address of each candidate, or if they have requested not to make their home address public, the name of the relevant area in which their home address is situated (or the country if their home address is situated outside the UK)
- each candidate's description (if any)

Being validly nominated in more than one ward

1.32 If the parish is warded and you are validly nominated in more than one ward in that parish you must withdraw from all wards but one before the deadline for withdrawals (i.e. by 4pm on the 19th working day before the poll). If you do not withdraw from all but one ward, you will be deemed to have withdrawn from all of the wards.

Inspecting candidates' nomination forms and consent to nomination forms

1.33 From the close of nominations until the day before the poll, nomination forms and consent to nomination forms that have been delivered are open to inspection by anyone during normal office hours, and anyone can take a copy of them.

Inspecting the home address form

1.34 During normal office hours from the close of nominations until the day before the poll, only certain people are entitled to inspect home address forms. These people are:

- any (other) person standing nominated as a candidate in the same electoral area as you
- the proposer or seconder of any other person standing nominated as a candidate in the same electoral area as you

1.35 No person is permitted to take an extract from them or make a copy of them.

Will the election be contested or uncontested?

1.36 After the close of nominations, the Returning Officer will establish whether or not there is a need to hold a poll in the electoral area. If the parish is not warded, the electoral area will be the whole of the parish. If the parish is warded, the electoral area will be the parish ward. If there are more candidates than seats after the deadline for withdrawals, there will be a poll.

1.37 If, however, after the deadline for withdrawals the number of validly nominated candidates is less than or equal to the number of seats to be filled in the electoral area, those candidates are declared to be elected.

1.38 In this case, the Returning Officer will declare those candidates to be elected to the parish council as soon as possible and will give public notice of the names of those declared elected.

If elected at an uncontested election, candidates must still make a declaration as to their election spending.

See [Part 3: Spending and donations](#) for further details.

Further information on taking up office is included in [Part 6: After the declaration of result](#).

Appointing your postal voting, polling and counting agents

1.39 You can appoint agents to observe the following electoral processes, which you are also entitled to observe:

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- the opening of postal votes
- the poll
- the count

1.40 Anyone, except for the following, can be appointed as a postal vote, polling or counting agent:

- the Returning Officer or a member of their staff
- a partner or clerk of the Returning Officer or a member of their staff
- anyone not entitled to vote at the election as a result of the report of an election court or a conviction for a corrupt or illegal practice under the Representation of the People Act 1983

1.41 The number of agents who may be appointed to any particular polling station is limited to four, or such greater number as the Returning Officer decides to allow. If more than that number are appointed, the Returning Officer will draw lots to determine those people who may attend. Only one polling agent for each candidate can be present in a polling station at any time, but a polling agent can be appointed to attend multiple polling stations. Your right to attend will remain unaffected by this.

1.42 The Returning Officer will tell you the maximum number of postal voting and counting agents you can appoint. All candidates will be allowed to appoint exactly the same number. At the count, unless there are special circumstances, the number of counting agents allowed for each candidate will not be less than the number obtained by dividing the number of counting assistants (i.e. those staff employed on the counting) by the number of candidates.

1.43 The request to appoint these agents must be made in writing to the Returning Officer. It must contain the names and addresses of the people being appointed. The Returning Officer will provide forms you can use for this, or you can find [postal voting](#), [polling](#) and [counting](#) agent appointment forms on the Commission's website.

1.44 The deadline for appointing these agents will depend on the process they are to attend. Polling and counting agents must be appointed by not later than the fifth working day before the poll. However, appointment forms for postal voting agents only need to be submitted to the Returning Officer by the time fixed for the opening of postal votes they want to attend. The Returning Officer will give you at least 48 hours' notice before the scheduled start of each postal vote opening session.

1.45 If an agent dies or becomes incapable of acting, you may appoint another agent in their place by submitting the relevant appointment form to the Returning Officer. Any new appointment in these circumstances must be made without delay.

1.46 More information on what agents can and cannot do and what they can expect to see at postal vote opening sessions, polling stations and the count, can be found in [Part 5: Your right to attend key electoral events](#).

Death of a candidate

1.47 If a candidate dies during the election period, see paragraph **1.65** for further information on how this will affect the election.

Supplementary information

Commonly used name(s)

1.48 If you commonly use a different name from your actual name, you can ask for your commonly used name(s) to be used instead of your actual name. For example, you may be known by your abbreviated name 'Andy', rather than your full first name 'Andrew'. In that case, you can write 'Andy' into the commonly used forename box on the nomination paper if you would rather that name appear on the ballot paper.

1.49 However, you cannot use your first name as a commonly used name so that only your first name and surname appear on a ballot paper, thus excluding your middle name. The legislation makes it clear that a commonly used name is one which is different from any other forename or surname. This means that a forename in its original format cannot be used as a commonly used name. If you wish to use a commonly used forename and/or surname then these must be different from your full name as it appears on the nomination form. For example, in the case of Andrew John Smith, he could not use Andrew Smith as his commonly used name, although he would be able to use Andy Smith (if Andy was the name by which he is commonly known).

1.50 You can request to use a commonly used forename, surname or both.

1.51 You may also use initials as part of your commonly used name if you are commonly known by them.

1.52 Any commonly used name(s) would then appear on:

- the statement of persons nominated and the notice of poll, and

- the ballot papers

1.53 The Returning Officer will disallow commonly used names that are likely to mislead or confuse electors, or are obscene or offensive. If the name(s) are not permissible, the Returning Officer will write to you stating the reason for rejection. In those cases, your actual name will be used instead.

1.54 If either the commonly used forename or surname box on the nomination paper is left blank, then your actual forename or surname, depending on which commonly used name box has been left blank, will be used.

1.55 It is an offence to give a false statement on your nomination form. Therefore if you choose to provide a commonly used name you must ensure that it is a forename or surname which you commonly use.

Signatures of proposer and seconder

1.56 Each nomination form needs to be signed (subscribed) by 2 electors on the local government electoral register in the parish or, if the parish is warded, in the parish ward.

1.57 The electors must be of voting age and be on the register that is in force on the last day for publication of notice of election.

1.58 The two electors will sign and print their names as proposer and seconder.

1.59 The elector numbers of the proposer and seconder as they appear on the electoral register, including the distinctive numbers or letters of the polling district, must be entered on the nomination form. The distinctive numbers/letters of the polling district can usually be found at the front of the register. Both the Returning Officer and the Electoral Registration Officer will be able to advise you how the register is laid out.

1.60 You will be entitled to a free copy of the electoral register for the parish area or parish ward you are contesting, as appropriate. You should use it to ensure that your nomination

To find out how to obtain the electoral register, see:

[Part 4: The Campaign](#)

There may be some electors on the register who have registered anonymously because of risks to their safety.

Anonymous registered electors may not subscribe nomination forms.

Anonymous electors are shown on the register with just their poll number and the letter 'N' (rather than with their name and address).

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form is properly subscribed. You must ensure that you keep the electoral register secure and, once you have finished with it, ensure that it is securely destroyed.

1.61 Each elector may not subscribe more nomination forms than there are vacancies. For example, if there are two vacancies in a parish ward, an elector may subscribe up to two candidates' nomination forms in that ward; if three candidates submit nomination forms subscribed by the same person, the two that were submitted first will be accepted, but the third will be invalid. You should therefore always enquire, before asking a subscriber to sign your form, if they have already signed someone else's.

1.62 If a nomination form contains more than two subscribers' signatures, only the first two will be accepted. If either of the subscribers is invalid, the Returning Officer must hold the nomination form invalid, regardless of whether the form contains more than two.

1.63 Nomination forms should not be altered once they are subscribed. All of your details should be completed before you invite anyone to subscribe your nomination. Once the Returning Officer has formally accepted a nomination form, signatures cannot be withdrawn.

1.64 When collecting subscriber information, you should point out what the information will be used for, how personal data will be processed and kept secure. The lawful basis to collect the information in this form is that it is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest and exercise of official authority as set out in Representation of the People Act 1983 and associated regulations. You should also explain that the information will be shared with the Returning Officer. For further information on data protection and processing you should refer to the Returning Officer's privacy notice on their website.

Data protection legislation applies to the processing of all personal data.

Please contact the [Information Commissioner's Office](#) for further information about how the current data protection legislation affects you.

Death of a candidate

1.65 If the Returning Officer is notified of a candidate's death during the election campaign or even on polling day itself (but before the declaration of the result), the poll will be cancelled.

1.66 The Returning Officer will in that case order a new election to fill the vacancy. The new polling day will be within 35 working days of the day fixed for the first election. Candidates already validly nominated do not have to be nominated a second time.

1.67 Should a fellow candidate die during the campaign, the Returning Officer will provide you with further guidance.

1.68 If an already elected candidate dies after the declaration of the result, a by-election would be needed to fill the vacancy.