

## A guide to polling day

### Everything you need to know about voting in person

The May elections are just around the corner; here is a useful guide to what you can expect if you're voting in person on Thursday 6 May.

#### **Where is my polling station?**

If you have registered to vote, you will receive a poll card through the post from Hartlepool Borough Council. It will tell you where your polling station is. Make sure you check your poll card before heading out to vote, in case your polling station has changed since you last voted. You can also find out where your polling station is on [the Electoral Commission website](#), by entering your postcode.

Polling stations are open from 7am until 10pm. You can vote at any time within this window. And don't forget, you need to go to your designated polling station; you can't go to a different one, for example, near where you work.

#### **Will there be safety measures in place at the polling station?**

Yes, polling stations will be safe places to vote. You can expect many of the measures you've become used to in shops or other indoor spaces, such as social distancing and hand sanitiser.

#### **Do I need to take anything with me?**

You can help keep yourself and others safe by:

- wearing a face covering
- bringing your own pen or pencil
- cleaning your hands when entering and leaving the polling station
- keeping a safe distance

#### **Can I still vote if I develop Covid symptoms?**

If you become unwell or are self-isolating as a result of Covid-19 shortly before polling day, or on the day itself, you don't need to miss out on your vote.

You will be able to apply for an emergency proxy up until 5pm on polling day, so someone you can trust can vote on your behalf. You can arrange it by speaking to Elections Team on 01429 523017.

### **What if I forget my face covering, or to bring a pen or pencil?**

You should bring your own pen or pencil, in order to minimise contact. You should also wear a face covering so that you can keep yourself, and others, safe on polling day.

If you forget to bring these with you, polling station staff will have spare face coverings and clean pencils available for you. You will not be prevented from entering the polling station if you forget these things.

### **How long will it take?**

It should only take a few minutes to vote. We have put arrangements in place to help maintain social distancing within the polling station. This means you may have to queue to enter. If you are asked to queue, please be patient and we will work to enable you to vote as quickly as possible.

If you are still in a queue waiting to vote at 10pm, you will be able to vote before the polls close.

### **What happens when I get there?**

Polling station staff will be on hand to greet you and invite you in as soon as polls open at 7am. There will be markers on the floor that will show you which way to go and help you maintain social distancing. Staff will also point out the public health measures that you should follow whilst you're in the polling station.

The staff will give you a ballot paper listing who you can vote for. Depending on the elections taking place in your area, you may have more than one ballot paper to complete.

Take your ballot paper into a polling booth. There will be a shelf for you to lean and write on. Use your own pen or pencil, or if you forgot to bring one, ask the poll clerks for a clean one.

### **How do I complete the ballot paper?**

Take your time: read the ballot paper carefully and complete it in line with the instructions.

Don't write anything else on the paper, or your vote may not be counted.

If you make a mistake, don't worry – as long as you haven't already put it in the ballot box, just let the polling station staff know and they can give you a replacement ballot paper.

### **What do I do with the ballot paper then?**

Once you're done, fold your completed ballot paper in half and put it in the ballot box. This will be on the desk beside the poll clerks.

If you're voting in the London Mayoral and London Assembly elections, you shouldn't fold the completed ballot paper before putting it in the ballot box. This is because the process of counting the votes for those elections is done via electronic counting.

### **What if I need help?**

If you're not sure what to do, or need any help, just ask the staff at the polling station – they will be happy to assist you.

### **What if I have access issues?**

If you have a disability which means you can't fill in the ballot paper yourself, you can ask the presiding officer – the person in charge of the polling station - to mark the ballot paper for you, or you can take someone along with you to help you.

If you have a visual impairment, you can ask for a large print ballot paper to refer to when you cast your vote, or a special tactile voting device that is designed so you can mark your ballot paper on your own.

### **Should I tell anyone who I voted for?**

Your vote is yours and yours alone: you do not need to tell anyone how you voted.

Exit polls are sometimes conducted, where people – usually private companies working for newspapers or broadcasters – ask voters leaving the polling station who they voted for to help them predict what the outcome might be. You do not need to respond to their questions if you don't want to.

Political discussion is not allowed inside and immediately around the polling station and staff will ask you to stop so that there's no risk of influencing other voters. If you want to debate your vote with friends or family, do it away from the polling station.

### **What are 'tellers'? Why are they asking for the number on my poll card?**

You might see people outside the polling station who ask you for the number on your poll card. These people are called 'tellers', and are volunteering on behalf of candidates or parties. They will use the information you give them to check who has voted, and to remind people who haven't yet voted, to do so.

They are allowed to be there and to ask for the information, but you don't have to give them any information if you don't want to. If you are concerned about the conduct of a teller, speak to a member of staff at the polling station.

### **Can I take selfies or other photos while I'm voting?**

You shouldn't take photos inside the polling station as it might put the secrecy of the ballot at risk.

You are more than welcome to take photos outside the polling station and share them on social media to encourage your friends and family to vote.

### **Can I take my friend / partner / children / parents / dog?**

You can go along to the polling station with whomever you like, but only those registered to vote at that station will be able to go inside. You must not be accompanied into the

polling booth by another adult, unless you have a disability, in which case you can take someone in to help you, or you can ask one of the polling station staff for their help.

Children are welcome at polling stations. While your child must not mark the ballot paper for you, you will be allowed to take them into the polling booth with you.

Animals, apart from assistance dogs, are not usually allowed inside polling stations, so will need to be secured outside if you do decide to take them with you.