

Your Voice
Got something
to say?

...Your
vote is
your voice.
Make sure
you are being
heard.

Are you being listened to?

Do you want to have your say
on the issues affecting you?

Have you got something to say on
how things could be done better?

Then use your voice...

About the Fawcett Society

The Fawcett Society campaigns for equality between women and men in the UK. We want to help create a society where women can enjoy equality with men at work, at home and in public.

We work particularly to help women in the UK to have

- a better say in politics
- equal pay and control over their money
- freedom from stereotypical roles that can stop them achieving what they want to in life
- a safe life free from violence and harm

We started our work in 1866 when a woman called Millicent Fawcett began a campaign for women in the UK to have the right to vote. Since then Fawcett has been working on important issues for women and politics.

This pack has been put together with help from the Electoral Commission, UK Parliamentary Outreach and Involve.

Fawcett
closing the inequality gap
women
since
1866

Registered Charity No. 1108769

The
Electoral
Commission

“Your vote is your public voice. You have to make sure what you’re thinking gets heard.” Nazlee, youth worker

Your vote is your voice!

Q: Did you know that politics affects almost everything that you do in your day-to-day life?

Politics is about the decisions that are taken on your behalf and how these decisions impact on you. Many of the things that matter most to you will be affected in one way or another by politics.

It is important that the people in power make decisions that are best for you. You can use your voice and decide who makes the decisions that will affect you and your family everyday.

Do you want to get your voice heard?

Do you want to know more about politics?

Then this pack is for you.

Your voice!

Voting in elections is a really important way of you having a say on who makes decisions on your behalf. At Fawcett we believe every woman who is allowed to vote in the UK should be able to do so. We think this is one big way that you can get your voice heard.

We know that ethnic minority women are less likely to vote than other people in the UK. This is a problem; it means that other people are deciding who should make decisions on your behalf. This pack tackles this problem. The aim of this pack is to help you understand politics a little better so that you can use your voice and use your vote at elections.

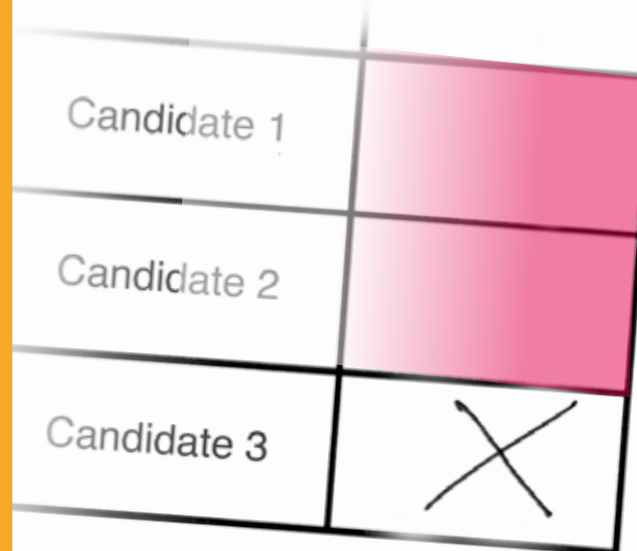
How to use this pack

This pack is about how you can use your voice and influence politics. It explains:

- x what politics and democracy are
- x what the people who represent you do
- x why, when and how you can vote
- x what different political organisations do and why they might matter to you

You can use this pack to:

- x register to vote
- x find out who you can contact on the issues that matter most to you, your family and your community
- x learn about how politics works



“Politics controls everything. The power of politics will never be in your hands if you don’t vote.” Maria-Enrica, student

Politics, democracy and you

Q: What is politics?

Politics is about the decisions that are taken on your behalf and how these decisions impact on your life. Politics is not just about men in suits! It’s about you and how the street, area, town or city that you live in is managed. It’s also about how the country is run.

Q: How does politics affect you?

Politics affects almost everything that you do in your day-to-day life. Many of the things that matter most to you will be affected in one way or another by politics, like the type of education your children receive, the quality of housing you live in, how easily your family from abroad can visit you in the UK, what support you can get for childcare and looking after elderly relatives and how much tax you pay or can receive.

Q: What is democracy?

There are different ways that politics can be organised. In the UK politics is organised by democracy. The word democracy means ‘government by the people for the people’. This means that UK citizens (and citizens of some other countries) get to choose who makes decisions on the rules and laws that everyone here has to live by. At the heart of politics is the question of who has power and what they do with it. Because we live in a democracy you get to help decide who wins power and who loses it. You do this by voting at elections.

Q: How does democracy work?

Some issues will only affect you if you live in a certain area, while other issues will affect everyone in the UK. It would not be very sensible if a decision was made in Cardiff about a new library opening in Birmingham. It would make much more sense for this decision to be made locally. Democracy happens at different levels of society so that decisions can be made at the best level.

Local democracy

There are some issues that will only affect you and the people that live in your local area, for example, how often your rubbish bins are collected.

Decisions about your rubbish collections, and other local issues like these, are better made at a local level. These decisions are taken by local councils. For more information about what your local council does, read ‘Who represents me locally?’

National democracy

There are some issues that will affect you and everyone in the UK regardless of where you live, for example how old you have to be to vote in elections.

These issues need to be dealt with on a UK wide level and decisions are taken by the UK Parliament and the UK Government. For more information about UK Parliament and Government, read ‘Who represents you at UK Government?’

The UK Parliament has handed over the power to make decisions on some issues to the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales. This is because there are some issues that will only affect you if you live in Scotland or Wales and decisions on these issues are best made at this level. This means if you live in Scotland or in Wales you can get your voice heard on Scottish and Welsh issues.

Decisions on issues that affect you where ever you live in Scotland are made by the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive. Decisions on local issues in Scotland are still made by your local council.

If you live in Wales, decisions about issues that affect you just in Wales are made by the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government. Decisions on local issues in Wales are still made by your local council.

European democracy

The UK is part of the European Union, an association that politically joins the UK together with over 25 other European countries. This means there are some issues that will affect you and the whole of Europe, e.g. whether you can travel, live and work in other European countries without immigration control.

Decisions such as where you can live and work in Europe, and other European issues, are best made at an European level. These decisions are taken by the European Parliament and the European Commission.

At each level of democracy you can have a say on who makes important decisions by voting.

“Voting gets my voice on the map!”

Neelam, mother and marketing assistant

Who represents you locally?

Q: What does your local council do?

Your local council deals with issues that directly affect you in your local area. It is also known as your local government or local authority. There are different types of local councils in the UK that are responsible for different things. Mostly they will look after things like: planning decisions like deciding whether to build a new mosque; local roads and footpaths; rubbish collection and recycling; youth and leisure facilities; libraries; social services like elderly day care centres; council housing; education services like adult learning; parks and other public places; checking up on local businesses and registering voters and running local elections.

Types of local council

It's important to know which local council covers your area and what services they provide for you. This is so that if you have any problems you know who to contact. The kind of council you have will depend on where you live:

x If you live in London or one of the larger cities of England, you will have a London Borough or Metropolitan District Council (MDC for short). MDCs cover places like Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool. These councils provide all of your local services.

x If you live in Scotland or Wales, you will have a unitary authority. There are also unitary authorities in some medium-sized towns and cities in England, like Nottingham and Reading. These councils have the same powers as a London Borough or MDC, but may cover a wider area, for example Bath and North East Somerset.

x If you live in a mostly rural part of England, your local government is split between a county council and a district council. County councils cover large areas like Lancashire. They will provide most of your services for that area. District councils like Preston in Lancashire cover smaller areas and will provide your more locally-based services.

Depending where you live, you may also have a parish, town or community council. These represent the most local level of local government and often cover small rural areas. Parish, town or community councils in England are responsible for very local things like public clocks, public halls or pathway lighting.

Local councillors

The people who represent you in your local council are called local councillors. The area covered by your local council is divided into smaller areas called wards. Each ward is represented by a local councillor. Depending on how the ward you live in is divided up, you may have up to three councillors representing your ward. If you have a parish, town or community council you will also be represented by a local parish, town or community councillor.

What does your local councillor do?

The main job of your local councillor is to provide a voice for you and the other people who live in your ward. Local councillors will also make decisions on your behalf, help develop future plans for your area called strategies, keep an eye on the council to check that it is doing what it should be and make sure that the council keeps to the law in carrying out its work. As well as representing you at your local council, your local councillors are responsible for your local services. This means he or she may also:

x be involved in deciding how much money is spent on services where you live

x help you to deal with any problems that you may have with the services provided by your local council

x campaign on local issues that you think are important in the area that you live, such as a crossing patrol on a busy road.

How to contact your local councillors

You can contact your local councillors about the services your local council provides and other local problems and issues that concern you. Things you may want to contact your local councillor about include having women only swimming sessions at your council leisure centre or improving the local bus service. There are a number of different ways that you can do this:

x Phone, email, or write – you can phone, email or write to your local councillors. Your local council's website will have a list of all of your local councillors and their contact details. Or you can visit www.councillor.gov.uk where you can find your local councillor by typing in your postcode.

x Attend a councillor's surgery – most local councillors hold a regular free surgery where you can meet and talk to them. Information on when your local councillor is holding a surgery can be found at your Town Hall. They are also sometimes advertised in your local newspaper.

“I think we all have a responsibility to do our bit towards a better society. Ethnic minority women can do that by using their vote.” Naomi, teaching assistant

Who represents you at UK government?

Q: What does the UK government do?

The UK government is in charge of the country. Its main job is to work in the interest of everyone who lives in the UK. In doing so, it has responsibility for:

- x developing and implementing policy
- x making new laws, called legislation

Each year the government informs Parliament of its plans for new legislation in the Queen’s Speech. New legislation is introduced as Bills, which must be discussed and agreed by Parliament before it can become law.

Q: What is Parliament?

The UK Parliament is an important part of UK politics. It is made up of two different institutions: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Both of these ‘Houses’ work together to:

- x keep a watch on the work of the UK government
- x make new laws
- x debate current issues

In addition, the House of Commons also have to agree to government suggestions on taxes and what it spends money on. Normally the decisions made in one House have to be agreed by the other. It means the two Houses not only keep a check on the UK government but also on each other. This way of working together is called the two-chamber system.

Members of Parliament

The only institution of the UK Parliament that is directly elected by you is the House of Commons. The person who represents you in the UK Parliament is called a Member of Parliament or MP for short.

Each MP represents an area called a constituency which has about 70,000 - 90,000 people living in it. Your MP will spend some of their time at Parliament in Westminster, London and some of their time visiting areas in your constituency.

The main job of your MP is to represent you and the other people who live in your constituency at Parliament. He or she may also help to make new laws.

Your MP is there to help you with anything that the UK Parliament or the Government is responsible for. If you raise an issue with your MP, he or she might:

- x Raise the issue with the person who is responsible for it within the Government.
- x Make your issue public by talking about it in the House of Commons. If they raise the issue in the House of Commons it may get enough attention from the public and the media for those responsible to take action
- x Support a campaign you are a part of to help make a change in the law

How to contact your MP

You can contact your MP about issues or problems affecting you that are not local or private. Local issues should be discussed with your local councillor instead. Things that you may want to contact your MP about include the closure of your child’s school, immigration concerns or benefit and pension problems.

You can find out who your MP is on the UK Parliament website www.parliament.uk. There are a number of different ways to contact him or her:

Write - The best way to contact your MP is to write to him or her. You can write to your MP at:

Name of MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Email - Most MPs can also be contacted by email. You can find your MP’s email address at the UK Parliament website.

Attend MP surgery - Your MP may also hold a surgery at different places in your constituency area. Sometimes your MP and local councillor may hold a joint surgery. Information on when your MP is holding a surgery can be found at your local library or in your local newspaper.

“I vote to stop far right racist groups getting into power.” Lauren, volunteer

Who represents you in Scotland and Wales?

Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Parliament is at Holyrood in Edinburgh. It makes laws on issues that affect people living in Scotland. These issues are called devolved matters and include:

- x health
- x education and training
- x local government
- x social work
- x housing

Q: Why does Scotland have its own Parliament?

Scotland decided to have its own parliament after a referendum was voted on in September 1979. At this referendum the majority of people voted yes to having a Scottish Parliament. The first elections to the Scottish Parliament were held in 1999.

Scottish Members of Parliament

The people who represent you at the Scottish Parliament are called Members of the Scottish Parliament or MSP for short. If you live in Scotland you will be represented by eight MSPs. Each MSP looks after particular geographic areas in Scotland called constituencies. One of your MSPs will represent the Parliamentary Constituency that you live in. Your other seven MSPs will represent the Regional Constituency that you live in.

A Regional Constituency is a much larger area than a Parliamentary Constituency. This is why you have seven MSPs representing you in the Regional Constituency that you live in.

What does your MSP do?

The main job of your MSP is to provide a voice for you at the Scottish Parliament. To do this your MSP should listen to your concerns and opinions about local problems. He or she may also help to make Scottish laws. Your MSP is also there to help you with anything that the Scottish Parliament or the government is responsible for.

How to contact your MSP

You can contact your MSP about issues or problems affecting you in Scotland that are not local or private. Things that you may want to contact your MSP about include NHS concerns. You can find out who your MSP is on the Scottish Parliament website www.scottish.parliament.uk. You can also find your MSPs' email address from this website. You can contact your MSP by writing to them at: Name of MSP, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP

National Assembly for Wales

The National Assembly for Wales is at Cardiff Bay. It deals with issues that affect people living in Wales. It cannot make laws for Wales but it can make decisions on everyday things that affect you like education and training, health services, housing and transport. It also decides how Wales should spend money from the European Union and decides what money should go to local government.

Why does Wales have a National Assembly?

Wales decided to have its own Assembly after a referendum was voted on in September 1997. At this referendum the majority of people voted yes to having a National Assembly for Wales. The first elections to the Welsh Assembly were held in 1999.

Assembly Members

The people who represent you at the National Assembly of Wales are called Assembly Members or AMs for short. If you live in Wales you will be represented by five AMs. Each AM looks after particular geographic areas in Wales called constituencies. One of your AMs will represent the Assembly Constituency that you live in. Your other four AMs will represent the Regional Constituency that you live in. A Regional Constituency is a much larger area than an Assembly Constituency. This is why you have four AMs representing you in the Regional Constituency that you live in.

What does your AM do?

The main job of your AM is to provide a voice for you at the National Assembly for Wales. Your AM is there to help you with anything that the National Assembly for Wales is responsible for. You can contact your AM about issues or problems affecting you in Wales. You can find out who your AM is on the National Assembly for Wales website www.assemblywales.org. You can also find out your AMs' email address from this website.

You contact your AM by writing to them at: Name of AM, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay Cardiff CF99 1NA.

"I vote to make sure the government makes the changes that will improve my life."

Alexandra, working mum

Who represents you in Europe?

European Parliament

The UK is a member of the European Union or EU for short. There are four different political institutions that make up the EU. All of these institutions work together to make decisions that affect countries that are members of the EU. Countries that are members of the EU are called member states.

Members of European Parliament

The only institution of the EU that is directly elected by you is the European Parliament. The people who represent you in the European Parliament are called Members of the European Parliament or MEP for short.

The UK is divided into twelve European Parliamentary regions. Each region can have up to nine MEPs representing it. The number of MEPs you have depends on the number of people that live in your region.

The table opposite shows how many MEPs represent your area.

Number of MEPs in your area

Scotland	7
Wales	4
Eastern	7
East Midlands	6
London	9
North East	3
North West	9
South East	10
South West	7
West Midlands	7
Yorkshire & the Humber	6

What does your MEP do?

The main job of your MEP is to make sure the region you live in is represented at the European Parliament. As well as representing your region, he or she will also

- × use their power to agree, change or reject new laws that affect Europe
- × keep a watch on how the European Union spends its money
- × develop plans on issues affecting Europe

How to contact your MEP

You can contact your MEP about issues or problems affecting you that have a European perspective.

You can find out who your MEPs are by visiting the UK Office of the European Parliament website www.europarl.org.uk. You can also ring the UK Office of the European Parliament on 020 72274300.

European Union includes:

The Council of Ministers that represents EU member states. It is made up of Government Ministers from all EU member states.

The European Council that is made up of the leaders of each EU member states and the President of the European Commission

The European Parliament that is made of representatives that are elected by citizens of EU member states.

The European Commission that is made up by people nominated by the different government of member states.

**POLLING
STATION**

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STATION**

"I vote because I have the right to and much was sacrificed for that right. People died so that women and Black people can have the liberty of voting. In some countries people are still fighting and dying for this right. Cynthia, mother

Elections

Q: Why have elections?

Elections are the way that you decide who you want to represent you at the different political levels. These representatives are then allowed to make decisions on your behalf. At an election you vote for a person or a political party from a list of options set out on a ballot paper. For more information on voting see 'Use Your Voice and Vote'.

How often are elections?

Where you live will determine how often you have elections in your area. In the UK there are elections for the UK, Scottish and European Parliaments, the National Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Greater London Authority and for local government. This may mean you have elections quite often.

To find out when elections are next happening in your local area visit www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

Who am I voting for in elections?

At an election you are voting for the person who you would most like to represent you. Sometimes elections to different political organisations are held on one day which may mean you have lots of things to vote for at once.

- × Local councillors are usually elected every four years at local government elections. Local government in England will be having County Council elections in May 2009.
- × If you live in Scotland, Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) are elected at Scottish Parliament elections every four years. The next Election of Parliament is due May 2011.
- × If you live in Wales your Assembly Members are elected every four years at National Assembly for Wales elections. The next Election of Assembly is due May 2011.
- × Members of the UK Parliament (MPs) are elected for a maximum of five years at UK Parliamentary elections. The Prime Minister decides when a UK Parliamentary general election will be. But this must be within five years of the last one. The last general election was in May 2005. This means the next General Election must be held before May 2010.
- × Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected every five years. The next European Parliamentary election will be 4 June 2009.

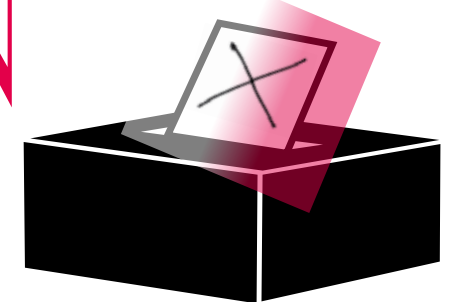
Is an election the only time I get to vote?

Most of the times that you will be able to vote will be at an election when you select a party or individual to represent you. It is important that you use your voice and vote because these representatives will then make rules and laws that affect you.

Occasionally you may be able to vote directly on a question about a particular issue rather than your representatives making a decision for you. This is called a referendum. Referendums don't occur often. But it may be on a topic that is very important for you so it is best to register to vote now so that you can have your say if one was to happen.

You have to be registered to vote well before an election or a referendum. To make sure you don't miss your opportunity to vote, it's better to register to vote now before it is too late.

I voted in the Scottish referendum in 1997. It was my chance to choose Scotland's future and help make Scottish history!
Shu-Mei, teacher



Institution	Representative elected	Type of election
Local government	Local councillors usually elected every four years	County councils District councils Unitary councils Metropolitan borough councils London borough councils Parish and town councils
National Assembly for Wales	Assembly Members elected every four years	Election of Assembly
Scottish Parliament	Members of the Scottish Parliament elected every four years	Election of Parliament
UK Parliament	Members of the UK Parliament elected for maximum of five years	UK General Election
European Parliament	Members of the European Parliament elected every five years	Election of MEPs

“I vote because I want a change.”

Yenee, care assistant

Political Parties

The UK party system

The way that democracy is run in the UK is by a party political system. It is based on different political organisations, called parties, which compete against each other to win the most votes in elections. The party that wins the most votes forms the Government. The party with the second highest number of votes becomes the Official Opposition.

It isn't just the parties that win elections that matter. For the UK party system to work there has to be a relationship between the government and the parties in opposition. The role of the opposition parties is to discuss government proposals and challenge those that they disagree with.

What is a political party?

A political party is an organised group of people who have similar ideas about how the country should be run. Each political party has its own leader. Political parties develop opinions on how different issues in the UK can be dealt with. These are called party policies.

There are many political parties including national parties in Scotland and Wales. Some political parties are small and only cover a local area whilst others may be part of a larger national political party.

The three main political parties in the UK are:

- × Labour who currently forms the UK Government
- × Conservative, who forms the Official UK Opposition
- × Liberal Democrat

I hold the power on election day! Ami, store manager

Political parties are made up of party members. These are ordinary people who join the party and help to develop the party's policy and campaign to promote the party's views. They also help choose who should stand as a candidate for the party in elections. Joining a political party is a way that you can get more involved in politics. You can find out more information about joining a political party in your local area by visiting the party's website. Political party websites can be found at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

Political parties and elections

The aim of a political party is to get their candidates elected to power so they can influence political decisions. Most candidates in elections will stand on behalf of a political party. This means as a voter you can get an idea of the views of the different candidates by listening to what political parties say about their party policies. You can then vote for the candidate and party you most agree with.

When you use your voice and vote you help to decide who gets political power. Election days are the days when you hold all the power because all the political parties want your vote.

How can I find out what a political party stands for?

Before every election political parties publish a manifesto. This outlines what the political party would do if they were to receive the most votes and get elected into power. You can find out information about what is in a political party's manifesto through the media or by visiting the party's website.

Not all candidates who stand in elections are from political parties. Those who are not are called independent candidates.

POLLING STATION

“Voting gives me a chance to choose who will be in power.” Yasmin, fitness instructor

Use your voice and vote!

Why should I vote?

Would you let a visitor to your house completely redecorate your home? Would you go shopping and let someone you didn't know pick what clothes you should buy? Would you let a stranger choose what you should eat at a restaurant? Probably not - you may end up with something you didn't like!

It's exactly the same with voting. If you don't vote you are letting other people decide who should make decisions for you and you may not like the result. Voting in an election is one of the easiest ways to take part in UK politics.

Can everyone vote?

No, not everyone can vote. To vote in UK elections you have to be:

- x aged 18 years or over
- x on the electoral register
- x a UK citizen or a citizen of a Commonwealth country or the Republic of Ireland
- x a citizen of an EU country

Your vote helps to choose the people who make the decisions that affect you.

What do I have to do to vote?

To vote in UK elections and referendums you must be on the electoral register. This is the list of everyone who is registered to vote. You are not automatically put on the register. To get onto the register you have to fill in an electoral registration form. Your registration will last for one year. After this year you have to renew your registration.

An electoral registration form is sent to your house every year for you to fill in and post back in an envelope already addressed for you. If you miss filling in your form when it is sent to your house then you can get a form throughout the year from the electoral registration office at your council, a library or a Citizen's Advice Bureau. Once you fill in the form you will need to send it to the address on the top of the form.

How do I vote?

1. If you are on the electoral register you will be sent a poll card before an election. The poll card tells you where and when to vote on election day.
2. On election day go to the polling station. The polling station, which is written on your poll card, will often be a school or a local hall near to you. Tell the staff inside the polling station your name and address. This is so they can check you are on the electoral register.
3. The staff at the polling station will give you a ballot paper. This is a list of candidates or political parties that you can vote for. If there is more than one election happening on the same day you may be given more than one ballot paper.
4. Go into a polling booth. This is a private standing area where you can vote by yourself so that no one can see who you vote for. You will be asked to put a cross (X) next to the candidate or political party that you want to vote for.
5. Fold the ballot paper in half and put it in the ballot box. This is the secure box where all the votes are collected. You do not need to let anyone see how you voted.

Who should I vote for?

In the run up to an election different political parties and candidates standing for election will try and get you to vote for them. They may give you leaflets or even visit your home to talk to you about what they will do if you vote for them and they win the election. Friends and family members may also try to encourage you to vote for a particular person or political party.

The most important thing to remember is that who you vote for is your choice. It's a personal decision. If you vote in person at a polling station then your vote is made in private and no one can find out who you voted for unless you tell them.

Postal vote

You can vote by post. To vote by post you will need to fill in a postal vote form. You can download a postal vote form at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk. You can also pick one up from some post offices.

You will receive your ballot paper in the post about a week before the election. You will need to send it back before the polls close on election day.

You do not have to take your poll card or any ID like a passport or driving licence to the polling station to be able to vote.

“I vote so I can help influence decisions and shape the future of my community.”

Lynette, librarian

Get more involved

5 easy steps to voting

Step 1: Make sure your name is on the electoral register by filling in an electoral registration form and returning it to your local electoral office.

Step 2: Your local electoral office will send you a polling card in the post near to an election time telling you where and when to go to vote.

Step 3: Choose which candidate you think best will represent you.

Step 4: On election day go to your polling centre and get your ballot paper.

Step 5: Go to your polling booth where you can vote in private for the candidate or political party of your choice.

You don't have to wait until election time to get more involved in politics. There are more ways that you can use your voice and have your say on politics. You can:

Campaign

If you feel strongly about something and want to get your voice heard on a particular issue then why not start campaigning on it? You could start a campaign about the issue or join an existing one.

Help your representative understand an important issue

Your representative is your voice. You can help them to understand an issue that is important to you so that they can represent your concerns better. Helping your representative to better understand an issue is called lobbying. You can do this to either influence a decision that is about to be made or to change a decision that has already been made that you don't agree with. For example you may want to persuade your local council not to stop funding your local domestic violence support group for women.

Fawcett has lots of information on its online library on lobbying called 'Make Some Noise'. You can find the library by looking at the resources part of the Fawcett website at www.fawcettsociety.org.uk.

Keep an eye on your representatives

You can keep an eye on what your representative in the UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales is doing at www.theyworkforyou.com. This may be useful if you want to know how your representative has voted on a particular issue that concerns you. Or you may want to know what issues he or she is interested in so that you can ask them to support a campaign you are involved with.

Give it a try

Do you think you can do a better job as a representative? We think you're probably right so why not give it a try? For information on training and support available to help you get more involved then visit the following websites:

Black Ethnic Minority Infrastructure Scotland
www.bemis.org

Centre for Women and Democracy
www.cfwd.org.uk

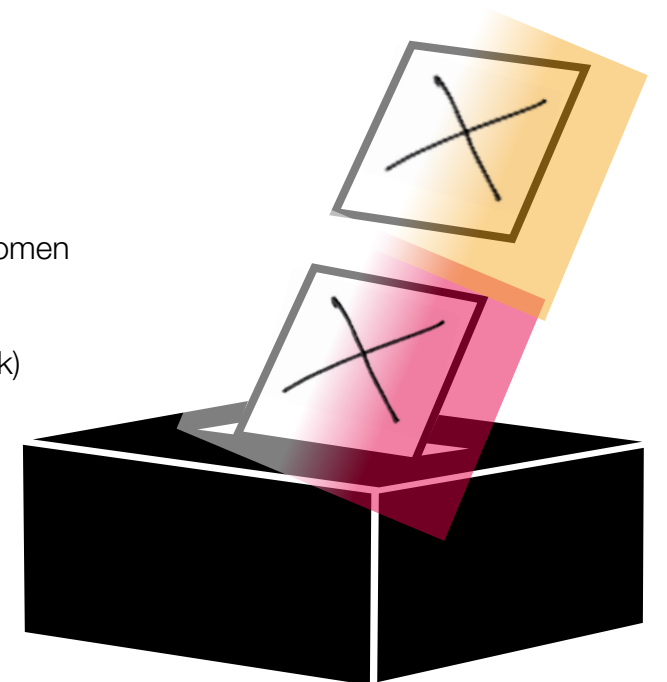
Ethnic Minority Women Councillors' Taskforce
www.livegroup.co.uk/BAME

Lancashire Wide Network for Minority Ethnic Women
www.lwnmew.org.uk

Mewn Cymru (Minority Ethnic Women's Network)
www.mewn-cymru.org.uk

Operation Black Vote
www.obv.org.uk

South Yorkshire Women's Development Trust
www.sywdt.org



“Politics affects me every day. I get involved because I want my opinions heard.”

Ellie, foster carer

There is no excuse!

Here are some typical reasons why some ethnic minority women don't vote. But voting is your right so get involved - there's no excuse!

I don't have time. I'm too busy working and I have my family to look after!

It can be very difficult to fit everything you have to do into one day. To help you, the polling station where you go to vote will be open for most of the day. For General Elections and European Elections it is open from 7am until 10pm. For Local Elections it is open from 8am until 9pm.

I can't get to the polling station.

Your local polling station is often a school or local community centre near to where you live so you will not have to travel too far to vote. It may even be your children's school!

If you or someone in your family is disabled and you need help getting to the polling station, your local electoral office should be able to help you out. You can even phone a local political party and ask them to arrange transport for you (this doesn't mean you have to vote them).

If you can't get to your polling station on election day you can also vote by post. To do this you have to fill in a postal vote form. You can get a form from www.aboutmyvote.co.uk. You will have to make sure that you send back your postal ballot paper before polls close on election day to make sure your vote is counted.

Every day people are making decisions on issues that will affect you and your family. Get involved there's no excuse!

I don't want people can find out personal information about me from the electoral register
The only information about you on the electoral register is your name and address. It will also have your date of birth if you're not 18 yet.

There are two versions of the electoral register: the full version and the edited version. The full register is used for elections and finding out about crime and stopping crime from happening. It is also used for checking applications for credit such as a mobile phone contract or getting a shop credit card. The edited version is available for sale. This means commercial companies can buy it and use it for activities such as marketing.

When you register to vote you can choose whether or not you have your details on the edited version.

I find politics too confusing.

Politics can be a little confusing. To help you understand it better we have put this pack together for you. It explains what politics is all about.

Decide who decides for you!

There may be lots of different reasons why you are not involved in politics. Whatever the reason, you can keep away from politics, but politics will not keep away from you! Every day people are making decisions on issues that will affect you and your family. This is why it is so important that you are a part of politics and have your say on who is making those decisions. If you do not help to decide who makes the decisions, then those in power may make decisions that you don't agree with or are not best for you.

So use your voice and vote!

**Use your voice and
vote!**

POLL CARD

Constituency:

Polling day: -

Word list

Some of the words used when people speak about politics and democracy can be confusing. This page gives an explanation of some of the words used most often.

Act – a law passed by the UK or Scottish Parliaments

Assembly Member (AM) – person elected by people in Wales to represent them in the National Assembly for Wales

Ballot paper – a list of all the candidates and political parties that you can vote. It is stamped with an official mark and you use it to vote

Bill – a draft Act of Parliament that is debated by both Houses of the UK Parliament and the Scottish Parliament.

Cabinet – the most senior members of a local council, the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament who make decisions

Candidate – a person who stands in an election. They are usually a member of a political party.

Constituency – an area represented by a Member of Parliament

Councillor – the person who represents you locally at local government level

Democracy – a system of organising politics in which the people vote to decide who runs the country

Electoral register – the list of everyone who is registered to vote in elections

Electoral registration form – the form that you have to fill in to get your name on the Electoral Register

Electorate – the people who are able to vote in an election

EU member state – a country that is member of the European Union

First Minister – the person who is the head of the Welsh Assembly Government

Independent candidate – a person who stands in an election who is not a member of a political party

Local authority / government – another word used to describe a local council

Lord Speaker – the chair person of the House of Lords who is in charge of discussions

Manifesto – a plan explaining what a political party or independent candidate will do if they come into power

Member of European Parliament (MEP) – a person elected by the public to represent them in the European Parliament

Member of Parliament (MP) – person elected by the public to represent them in the UK Parliament

Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP) – person elected by people in Scotland to represent them in the Scottish Parliament

Minister – a MP or Peer who is given an extra job leading or helping in a government department, such as the Foreign Office

Opposition party – all parties other than the Government are called Opposition Parties. They check the work of the Government by asking questions and suggesting alternative ways of doing things.

Peer – a member of the House of Lords

Political party – a group of people with similar opinions on how the country or an area should be run

Politician – a person who has been elected by the public as a political representative

Poll card – a card that tells you where and when to vote

Polling booth – a private voting area so that no one can see how you vote

Polling station – where you go to vote (in Scotland these are called polling places)

Presiding Officer – the chair person of the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament who is in charge of discussions

Prime Minister (PM) – the leader of the political party that wins most seats in a UK General Election.

Prime Minister's Questions – every Wednesday at 12pm the Prime Minister answers questions from Members of Parliament about the work of the Government

Referendum – a vote on a particular question or issue

Representative – a person who officially speaks on your behalf

Shadow Ministers – a person who is a member of the Opposition who has the job of checking on what one of the government departments does, and also says what the Opposition thinks should be done.

Speaker – the chairperson of the House of Commons who is in charge of discussions

Surgery – a place where you can go to discuss issues or problems with your elected representative. They have nothing to do with your doctors' surgery. They are called a surgery because you can meet your councillor and have a private one-to-one chat with him/her about any concerns that you may have

UK Government – the political party that wins the most votes at a UK General Election

Ward – an area represented by a local councillor