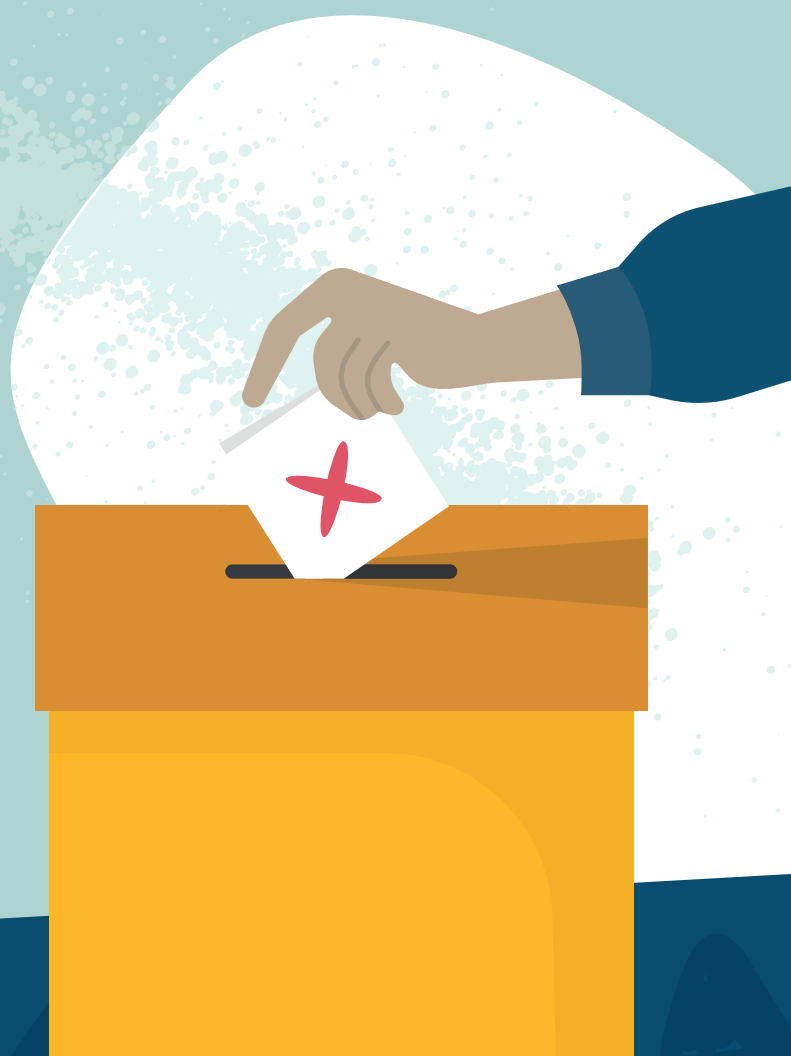


Dorset Council elections 2 May 2024

Guidance for
candidates
and agents



Dorset Council

Candidates and Agents Election briefing guide for elections on 2 May 2024

Who's who

- The **Returning Officer** is the person responsible for running elections. The Returning Officer for Dorset Council is Matt Prosser.
- The **Electoral Registration Officer** is responsible for maintaining the register of electors and absent voters' lists. The Electoral Registration Officer for Dorset Council is also Matt Prosser.
- The Returning Officer is supported by a number of **Deputy Returning Officers** – the Deputy Returning Officers for Dorset Council are Jonathan Mair (Director for Legal and Democratic Services), Jacqui Andrews (Service Manager, Democratic and Electoral Services) and Julia Duncan (Electoral Services Team Leader).
- All enquiries should be directed to email: elections@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk or Tel: 01305 838299.

Election Act 2022 – Key Changes

Accessibility

The provisions in the Elections Act improved the support in polling stations to enable or to make it easier for electors with a wider range of disabilities to vote. These measures came into force on 4 May 2023.

Returning Officers are now required to consider Electoral Commission guidance on supporting people with disabilities to vote, and to provide each polling station with equipment as is reasonable to support disabled people to vote. The Electoral Commission developed their guidance in conjunction with organisations who represent disabled voters, and it recommends a range of support that can be made available. This gives the RO flexibility to best tailor support provided in polling stations to the local communities and needs. The legislation removed the requirement to provide a Tactile Voting Device, replacing it with this general responsibility.

The accessibility measures mean that anyone who is over the age of 18 can now act as a companion to assist a disabled person in a polling station thereby widening that particular type of assistance. You can read more about accessibility on the Electoral Commission website [here](#).

Voter ID

This has been a requirement for all elections since 5 October 2023. There is a long list of acceptable photo ID the most common probably being passports and photo driving licences. ID can have expired provided the photograph remains a good likeness of the voter. Polling Station staff do not have discretion to accept ID not on the approved list. Anyone who doesn't have photographic ID can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate

through the Government Portal – there is a paper application process and people will need to contact the Elections Team if they are not able to use the online portal. Please encourage people to do this early and not leave until the deadline which is 5pm, six working days before the poll. You can read more about Voter ID on the Electoral Commission website [here](#).

Digital Imprints

From November 2023, imprints are required on digital political campaign material as well as on printed material. This includes social media posts, website material, adverts in online newspapers and on audio material such as adverts in podcasts or streams. This rule applies all year round, not just in the lead-up to an election. This is an area where we often receive complaints so please ensure that you carefully read and apply the imprint rules. You can read more about digital imprints on the Electoral Commission website [here](#).

15-year limit on voting rights for British Citizens

The 15-year limit on voting rights for British citizens living overseas will be removed, and the registration period for these voters will be extended from one year to three years. This means that overseas voters will only need to register to vote every three years.

Any British citizen living abroad who has previously lived in, or been registered to vote in the UK, will have the right to vote at UK Parliamentary elections. These voters will be registered at the constituency where they were last registered to vote, or where they lived if they were not registered to vote before. You can read more about overseas electors on the Electoral Commission website [here](#).

Online postal vote applications

From 31 October 2023, changes have been made to the postal vote application process including a requirement to prove identity as part of the application process. Registered electors can now apply for a postal vote online, and all postal votes will be for a maximum period of 3 years when an elector will need to reapply. The Electoral Registration Officer will write to electors reminding them to reapply if they wish to continue to vote by post ahead of their postal vote being removed. You can read more about postal voting on the Electoral Commission website [here](#).

Handling of postal votes

From 1 December 2023, there is a ban and new criminal offence in place to stop parties and campaigners handling completed postal votes and postal vote envelopes. Only voters, a family member or a designated carer will be able to hand in a postal vote.

Electoral Commission Guide

A useful guide for Candidates and Agents for Local Government Elections can be found on their website [here](#).

Election timetable

A copy of the election timetable is attached at Appendix A.

The latest date on which we could publish the Notice of Election is 26 March 2024.

We have taken a local decision to publish the Notice of Election on **Monday 11 March 2024** which means nomination papers can be delivered from **Tuesday 12 March 2024** (see below for times, dates and locations where nomination papers can be delivered).

Qualifications

- Candidates must satisfy criteria on the day they are nominated and on polling day:
 - be at least 18 years of age
 - be a British, qualifying Commonwealth citizen, or national of an EU member state.
- Also at least one of the following:
 - Registered local government elector for local authority area
 - Occupied as owner or tenant any land or premises in the local authority area during the whole 12 months preceding nomination
 - Principal or only place of work (including unpaid) during last 12 months in the local authority area
 - Lived in the local authority area during the last 12 months.

We recommend people tick as many of the 4 criteria that apply to them as possible. The only qualification that must be met during the whole term of office is being a registered local government elector so if they move just outside of the area and have ticked one of the other 3 qualifications then they can remain as a councillor.

The Elections Team take nomination forms at **face value** and don't challenge what a candidate claims. If anyone wishes to challenge this there is a process that they must follow but the Election Team will not challenge when processing the nomination paper. We cannot give any individual advice on whether prospective candidates qualify to stand.

Disqualifications

- A person cannot be a candidate if they:
 - are employed by the local authority or hold a paid office under the authority (including joint boards or committees). Candidates may be 'employed by the local authority' if they work at certain schools, fire services, police, or health services
 - are subject of a Bankruptcy Restrictions Order (or interim restrictions order)
 - have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of three months or more (inc. suspended sentence) without option of a fine, during the 5 years before polling day
 - are serving a disqualification due to being found guilty of a corrupt or illegal practice by an election court
 - hold a politically restricted post at another local authority
 - are subject to the notification requirement of or under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 or a relevant order under any legislation set out in s.81(A)(3) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Dorset Council will ask all its elected members to have an enhanced DBS check in line with the advice given by Simon Bailey CBE, QPM in his report commissioned by the Home

Office seeking an independent review of the disclosure and Barring Regime, published on 18 April 2023. It should be noted that any spent convictions and in particular spent convictions that are sexual in nature will appear on an enhanced DBS check and your candidates should be advised accordingly.

Submitting nomination papers

- The documents that must be submitted by all candidates by 4pm Friday 5 April are:
 - the nomination form
 - their home address form
 - the consent to nomination.
- Party candidates will also need to submit, by 4pm Friday 5 April:
 - a certificate authorising the use of a party name/ registered description on the ballot paper
 - a written request to use one of the party's emblems on the ballot paper (optional).

We have no discretion on the **4pm deadline** so please don't ask for an extension as we would have to say "No".

- Take care when completing your nomination papers as mistakes may invalidate your nomination.
- Deliver nomination papers early so that you can take them away if there are errors that need correcting.
- The nomination form, home address form and consent to nomination **must be delivered by hand** and cannot be submitted by post, fax, email, or other electronic means.
- We will have appointments available at a number of locations across the Dorset Council area as set out below:

County Hall, Dorchester

Tuesday 12 March to Thursday 4 April 9am to 4.30pm (7pm on 14 and 25 March)
Friday 5 April – 9am to 4pm

Westport House, Wareham

Monday 18 March	9am to 4.30pm
Wednesday 20 March	9am to 7pm
Tuesday 26 March	9am to 4.30pm
Wednesday 27 March	9am to 4.30pm

Allendale House, Wimborne

Tuesday 19 March	9am to 4.30pm
Thursday 21 March	9am to 4.30pm
Tuesday 26 March	9am to 7pm
Wednesday 27 March	9am to 4.30pm

Nordon, Blandford Forum

Tuesday 19 March
Thursday 21 March
Monday 25 March
Thursday 28 March

9am to 4.30pm
9am to 4.30pm
9am to 4.30pm
9am to 7pm

We will be operating a strict appointment only basis for accepting nominations – we're expecting more than 2000 nominations for Dorset Council seats and 160+ parish council seats and need to manage this effectively.

Completing a nomination paper

An instructional video on how to complete a Dorset Council nomination form can be found using this link: <https://youtu.be/H4apk9LCxuc>

- Include your full name.
- Optional: use commonly used name box(es) if commonly known by a name other than actual name and wish to use it instead.
- Description field – 3 options:
 - leave blank
 - Independent
 - party candidates can use party name or description authorised by a certificate issued by or on behalf of the Nominating Officer.

Subscribers: 2 subscribers are required and they:

- Must sign and print their names. Check details of subscribers against the electoral register. They must reside in the ward for which the candidate is standing.
- Only ask subscribers to sign after the candidate has completed the name, address, and description fields on the form.

Please ask subscribers to write their name clearly as the Election Team will need to be able to read this to undertake the required checks.

Home address form

- Part 1 of the home address form must state:
 - your full name and 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 (a, b, c and/or d)
 - the full name and the home address in full of the witness to your consent to nomination.
- Part 2 of the home address form must be completed if you **do not** want your address 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.

Part 2 of this form **must be signed**, or the home address will be included in the statutory notices and on the ballot paper.

Consent to Nomination

- Must include:
 - name
 - which area the candidate is standing in
 - confirmation of the qualification(s) that apply (at least 1, but select all that apply)
 - date of birth and signature
 - date of consent
 - witnesses name and signature.

Certificate of Authorisation and Emblem Request form

- Party candidates must have written permission to use the party name/description from the Nominating Officer (or a person authorised to act on their behalf).
- The certificate may:
 - allow the use of the party name or a particular description
 - allow candidate to choose whether to use the party name or any of the descriptions registered with the Electoral Commission.
- Must be submitted by 4pm Friday 5 April.
- may be delivered by hand or by post, **but cannot be delivered by email or other electronic means.**
- Party candidates can ask for an emblem to be printed on the ballot paper.
- Emblem request form must be submitted by 4pm Friday 5 April.
- Party candidates should supply an electronic version of the emblem to the Returning Officer if required.

Election Agents and other Agents

- Election Agents are responsible for the proper management of your election campaign, particularly its financial management.
- Notification of appointment must reach the Returning Officer by 4pm on Friday 5 April. The form is included in the nomination pack.
- You will become your own agent by default if no Agent is appointed.
- Other agents can be appointed to attend postal vote openings, polling stations and the count on your behalf:

- You must give notice in writing of any people appointed as polling and counting agents by 4pm Thursday 25 April.
- The appointment of postal voting agents attending a particular opening session must be made before the start of the session. We will give 48 hours' notice of opening sessions.

Access to and use of the electoral register and absent vote lists

- Electoral registers can be supplied to candidates once they officially declare themselves a candidate.
- Request for copies of the registers/lists must be made in writing to the Electoral Registration Officer using the request form and submitted via elections@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk or by writing to Electoral Services, County Hall, Dorchester DT1 1XJ – forms are available from the office and can be emailed to you on request.
- **Only use the register for permitted purposes**
 - to complete the nomination form
 - to help you campaign
 - to check that donations/loans are permissible.

Registration of Electors and Absent Voting

- As a candidate you are uniquely placed to encourage people to register to vote.
- You should encourage people to register as soon as possible.
- The deadline for applying for the election is Tuesday 16 April.
- Individuals can apply to register online at <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote> . It only takes a few minutes, or paper application forms can be obtained from the Elections Office at elections@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk or Tel: 01305 838299.
- When talking to electors about voting by post or proxy, you should make them aware of the relevant deadlines and advise them to apply early. Deadline for new applications is 5pm Wednesday 17 April.
- If you are encouraging people who don't have a postal (or proxy) vote to apply for one, make sure you explain that they will only qualify for one in time for the elections if they are (or will be) registered in time to vote at the elections.

Please read the Code of Conduct for Campaigners that offers advice on assisting electors.

Campaign dos and don'ts

- Do use imprints on all your campaign material, including websites and any digital material.
- Do comply with planning rules relating to advertising hoardings and large banners.
- Do make sure outdoor posters are removed 2 weeks after the election.

- Do not produce material that looks like a poll card.
- Do not pay people to display your adverts (unless they display adverts as part of their normal business).

Summary of key points in the Code of Conduct for campaigners

- Campaigners are an essential element of a healthy democracy, but their activities should not bring into question the integrity of the electoral process.
- Electoral registration and absent vote applications:
 - Ensure forms fully conform to the requirements of electoral law.
 - Include the Electoral Registration Officer's address for the return of forms.
 - Ensure unaltered applications are sent to the Electoral Registration Officer within two working days.
 - Make sure electors understand implications of applying for an absent vote.
 - Do not encourage postal ballot pack redirection.
 - Do not encourage electors to appoint a campaigner as proxy.
- Voter Authority Certificate Applications:
 - You should not handle paper-based Voter Authority Certificate applications and you should encourage electors to send them directly to the Electoral Registration Officer.
- **Postal ballot packs:**
 - Never touch a postal ballot paper.
 - Never observe electors completing their postal vote.
 - Never handle or take any completed ballot paper or postal ballot pack from voters.
- **Campaigning outside polling stations:**
 - You are allowed to put your messages to voters on polling day, including public spaces outside polling places.
 - Keep access to polling places and the pavements around polling places clear to allow voters to enter.

Tellers

Detailed information in respect of the activities and conduct of tellers is available on the Electoral Commission website [here](#). Please ensure that everyone appointed as a Teller reads this guidance carefully.

There should be no more than one teller at a polling station at any time for each candidate. Where a polling place contains more than one polling station with separate entrances, it may be appropriate for there to be tellers at each entrance, but no more than one per candidate.

Tellers must:

- always remain outside the polling station
- only enter the polling station to cast their own vote, to vote as a proxy or to accompany a disabled voter
- always comply with the instructions of the Returning Officer and Presiding Officer.

Tellers must not:

- be able to see or hear what is happening inside the polling station
- impede, obstruct or intimidate voters on their way in or out of the polling station
- demand any information relating to a voter's elector number, name or address
- ask to see or check a voter's photographic ID
- ask voters to re-enter the polling station to ascertain their elector number
- have discussions with voters that may give rise to allegations of undue influence (e.g. voting intentions, party affiliations or party campaigns)
- display any campaign material in support of or against any particular political party or candidate other than a rosette or badge.

Tellers may:

- approach voters for information as they enter or leave the polling station
- display a coloured rosette or badge displaying the name of the candidate or party and/or emblem or description; the rosette/badge should not bear a slogan and must not be oversized
- remind electors as they approach the polling station that they need to provide photographic ID.

It is important to note that Tellers have no legal status and voters have the right to refuse to give them information. They should not give the impression that any information provided will be used for official purposes or that they are employed by the Returning Officer.

Polling Day – 2 May 2024

- Polling stations open from 7am to 10pm.
- The office is open 7am to 10pm for queries or problems relating to the administration of the election.
- All candidates contesting the elections and election agents have the right to enter and to remain in a polling station, but they must not disrupt voting or attempt to canvass voters.
- Voters in this election will need to present photographic ID in the polling station.
- Voters in the polling station or in a queue outside the polling station at 10 pm can apply for a ballot paper.
- Postal votes can be handed into stations within the ward until 10pm.

- A person in a queue at a polling station at 10pm waiting to hand in a postal vote can do so after 10pm.

Polling Agents

- Polling agents have the right to enter and to remain in the polling station and to observe voting. The main purpose is to detect personation – there is no right to view a voter's ID.
- Not more than one polling agent may be admitted at the same time to a polling station on behalf of the same candidate.
- They must not campaign or canvass voters in the polling station. If they do wear a rosette or badge, it should be plain but may display the name of a candidate, party and/or emblem.
- They have the right to observe the preparation and opening of the polling station and its closure and may add their seal to the ballot box at the close of poll (though not at poll opening).
- During polling hours, polling agents in attendance should be placed at a separate table that is close enough to observe and hear the proceedings, but not in a position that would compromise the secrecy of the ballot.

Counting of votes

- The verification of all ballot papers and the count of votes for Dorset Council seats will be held at Redlands Leisure and Community Park, Weymouth on Friday 3 May commencing at 9.30am.
- Town and Parishes – the count of votes for town and parish elections will be held at Redlands Leisure and Community Park, Weymouth on Saturday 4 May commencing at 9.30am.
- Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) – the count of votes for the PCC will be undertaken by the Returning Officer for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council and will be held at Bournemouth International on Saturday 4 May.

This may be subject to change if a Parliamentary Election is called for 2 May 2024.

- The Count centre will be open to candidates/agents from 9.15am.
- Candidates may appoint 2 counting agents to attend the count. You must provide details to the Returning Officer prior to the deadline – Thursday 25 April.

Candidate spending and spending returns

- Defined as certain expenses 'used for the purposes of the candidate's election' during the regulated period.
- This is the responsibility of **election agent**. The Elections Team cannot offer any advice on spending and completion of spending returns.
- Limit on expenses:

£806 + 7 pence per elector in ward/division on register in force on date of the publication of the notice of election (correct as at November 2023 – check rates on the Electoral Commission website at the time of election).

- Must get and keep receipts (over £20).
- Returns are due 35 calendar days after result of election.
- Returns are made public by Returning Officer.
- Sample of returns may be reviewed by the Electoral Commission.
- Failure to submit a spending return is a criminal offence enforceable by police.
- No spending will be reimbursed.

Appendix A

Local Government Election Timetable Calculator

Timetable of Proceedings for

Thursday 2 May 2024

Publication of Notice of Election	Monday 11 March 2024
Receipt of Nominations	4:00 pm Friday 5 April 2024
Withdrawal of Candidate	4:00 pm Friday 5 April 2024
Appointment of Election Agents	4:00 pm Friday 5 April 2024
Publication of Notice of Election Agents	4:00 pm Friday 5 April 2024
Publication of Statements of Persons Nominated	4:00 pm Monday 8 April 2024
Last Date for Registration	Tuesday 16 April 2024
Receipt of Postal Vote Applications	5:00 pm Wednesday 17 April 2024
Last day for Voter Authority Certificates	5:00 pm Wednesday 24 April 2024
Publication of Notice of Poll	Wednesday 24 April 2024
Receipt of Proxy Vote Applications	5:00 pm Wednesday 24 April 2024
Appointment of Poll and Count Agents	Thursday 25 April 2024
First Day to Issue Replacement Lost Postal Ballot Papers	Friday 26 April 2024
Last Day to Issue Replacement Spoilt or Lost Postal Ballot Papers	5:00 pm Thursday 2 May 2024
Receipt of Emergency Proxy Vote Applications	5:00 pm Thursday 2 May 2024
Day of Poll	7:00 am to 10:00 pm Thursday 2 May 2024
Return of Election Expenses	Thursday 6 June 2024