

# Dorset Council Parliamentary Election 4 July 2024

Guidance for  
candidates  
and agents



# Dorset Council

## Candidates and Agents Election briefing guide for elections on 4 July 2024

### Who's who

- The **Acting Returning Officer** is the person responsible for running elections. The Returning Officer for Christchurch (Part), Mid Dorset and North Poole, North Dorset, South Dorset and West Dorset Parliamentary Constituencies is Matt Prosser.
- The **Electoral Registration Officer** is responsible for maintaining the register of electors and absent voters' lists. The Electoral Registration Officer for the Parliamentary Constituencies administered by Dorset Council is also Matt Prosser.
- The Acting Returning Officer is supported by a number of **Deputy Acting Returning Officers** – the Deputy Acting Returning Officers for the Parliamentary Constituencies administered by 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](mailto: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 has been removed, and the registration period for these voters has 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**

The Electoral Commission have published [Guidance for candidates and agents at UK Parliamentary Elections](#). The guidance is very comprehensive, and you are advised to refer to this.

## **Election timetable**

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

## 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 citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland, or an eligible Commonwealth citizen

An eligible Commonwealth citizen is a Commonwealth citizen who either:

- Does not need leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom, or
- Has indefinite leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom

Citizens of other countries are not eligible to become Members of the UK Parliament.

There is no requirement in law for you to be a registered elector in the UK.

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 Elections Team will not challenge when processing the nomination paper. We cannot give any individual advice on whether prospective candidates qualify to stand.

## Disqualifications

Apart from meeting the qualifications for standing for election, you must also not be disqualified.

The full range of disqualifications is complex and if you are in any doubt about whether you are disqualified, you must do everything you can to check that you are not disqualified before submitting your nomination papers.

The Elections Act 2022 introduced a disqualification conviction of an intimidatory criminal offence motivated by hostility towards a candidate, future candidate or campaigner or holder of a relevant elective office.

You must be sure that you are not disqualified as you will be asked to sign one of the required nomination papers to confirm that you are not disqualified.

It is a criminal offence to make a false statement on your nomination papers as to your qualification for being elected, so if you are in any doubt you should contact your employer, consult the legislation or, if necessary, take your own independent legal advice.

The (Acting) Returning Officer will not be able to confirm whether or not you are disqualified.

There are certain people who are disqualified from becoming a Member of Parliament in Great Britain. You cannot be a candidate if at the time of your nomination and on polling day:

- You hold a post that is disqualified from becoming a Member of Parliament. More information is set out in the Electoral Commission guidance.
- You are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions. Again, more information is set out in the Electoral Commission guidance on bankruptcy.

- You have been sentenced to a term of imprisonment or detained for a year or more and are detained anywhere in the UK, the Republic of Ireland, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, or are unlawfully at large. The nomination of a person disqualified on this basis is void, and the (Acting) Returning Officer is entitled to reject their nomination paper.
- You have been disqualified under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (which covers corrupt or illegal electoral practices and offences relating to donations). The disqualification for an illegal practice begins from the date a person has been reported guilty by an election court or convicted and lasts for three years. The disqualification for a corrupt practice begins from the date a person has been reported guilty by an election court or convicted and lasts for five years.
- You have been convicted of an intimidatory criminal offence motivated by hostility towards a candidate, future candidate or campaigner or holder of a relevant elective office. The effect of a disqualification order is that the person will be disqualified from standing for, being elected to, and holding any relevant elective office for five years.

## Submitting nomination papers

Nomination papers must be submitted **by hand** by either the candidate, election agent (if one has been appointed within the due time), proposer or seconder to the Acting Returning Officer or one of his Deputies on **any working day after publication of the Notice of Election but no later than 4pm on Friday 7 June** are:

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

An appointment must be made for the submission of nomination papers. Appointments can be made by emailing [elections@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:elections@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) or calling 01305 838299.

All appointments will be at the offices of Dorset Council at County Hall, Colliton Park, Dorchester DT1 1XJ.

During the appointment any 'minor' corrections can be made, however if there are mistakes or missing information that cannot be rectified by law and a new form needs to be completed, another appointment will need to be made to re-submit papers at a later date/time.

There should be no alterations on the nomination paper and **NEVER** any correction fluid. The Acting Returning Officer has no power to reject a paper which otherwise contains the particulars required by law, but it is in the candidate's own interest to submit a paper which is not open to legal challenge.

All electors subscribing the nomination paper must enter their **normal signature** in the appropriate column. It is also helpful if the names are printed in the relevant column and the respective polling district and electoral numbers are also present. These can be obtained from a copy of the electoral register.

A deposit of £500 is payable with each nomination paper submitted and this is returnable if the candidate polls more than 5% of the total valid votes cast in the Constituency. Deposits may be paid by cash, by debit card or by BACS payment to DC Income Account, Sort Code 60-07-01, Account Number 59190019.

## 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](mailto: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 18 June.
- 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](mailto: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 for postal votes is 5pm Wednesday 19 June and for proxy votes is 5pm on Wednesday 26 June.
- 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.

## 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 Acting Returning Officer.

## **Polling Day – 4 July 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.

### **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 and count will commence as soon as the first boxes arrive at the count venues after 10.00pm on Thursday 4 July 2024.

The count for the South Dorset and West Dorset Parliamentary Constituencies will take place at Redlands Leisure and Community Park, Dorchester Road, Weymouth DT3 5AW.

The count for the North Dorset and Mid Dorset and North Poole Parliamentary Constituencies will take place at Blandford Leisure Centre, Milldown Road, Blandford Forum DT11 7DB.

We will provide further information on this in a future update.

## Candidate spending and spending returns

The spending limit is based on a fixed amount of £11,390 plus 12 pence per elector for a each County Constituency. The final electorate figures will be circulated with the spending return forms by email once the deadline for applications to register has passed. The below figures are a guideline to assist you as of the 22 May

The figures below are as a guide to assist you as at 27 May 2024:

Parliamentary Constituency	Properties	Electors
<b>Christchurch</b> Dorset Council element	18,242	30,699
<b>Mid Dorset and North Poole</b> (Dorset Council element – Dorset Council is lead for this constituency)	26,522	44,156
<b>North Dorset</b>	43,929	71,062
<b>South Dorset</b>	50,921	74,268
<b>West Dorset</b>	49,564	74,240

If you have any queries with your spending return, please look through the [Guidance for candidates and agents at UK Parliamentary Elections](#). If this doesn't answer your queries



please contact the Electoral Commission directly as we are not able to give advice on this matter. Email [pef@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:pef@electoralcommission.org.uk) or call them on 0333 103 1928.

## Appendix A

### Parliamentary Election Timetable of Proceedings for

Thursday 4 July 2024

Proclamation of Summoning new Parliament	Thursday 30 May 2024
Dissolution of Parliament	Thursday 30 May 2024
Issue of Writ	Thursday 30 May 2024
Receipt of Writ	Friday 31 May 2024
Publication of Notice of Election	4:00 pm Tuesday 4 June 2024
Publication of Notice of Poll	Friday 7 June 2024
Receipt of Nominations	4:00 pm Friday 7 June 2024
Withdrawal of Candidate	4:00 pm Friday 7 June 2024
Appointment of Election Agents	4:00 pm Friday 7 June 2024
Publication of Statements of Persons Nominated	5:00 pm Friday 7 June 2024
Publication of Notice of Election Agents	4:00 pm Friday 7 June 2024
Last Date for Registration	Tuesday 18 June 2024
Receipt of Postal Vote Applications	5:00 pm Wednesday 19 June 2024
Last day for Voter Authority Certificates	5:00 pm Wednesday 26 June 2024
Receipt of Proxy Vote Applications	5:00 pm Wednesday 26 June 2024
Appointment of Poll and Count Agents	Thursday 27 June 2024
First Day to Issue Replacement Lost Postal Ballot Papers	Friday 28 June 2024
Last Day to Issue Replacement Spoilt or Lost Postal Ballot Papers	5:00 pm Thursday 4 July 2024
Receipt of Emergency Proxy Vote Applications	5:00 pm Thursday 4 July 2024
Day of Poll	7:00 am to 10:00 pm Thursday 4 July 2024
Return of Election Expenses	Thursday 8 August 2024
Inspection of Expenses	Sunday 18 August 2024