

# 'X Marks the Spot'

A Guide to Voting for Disabled People

vote2003

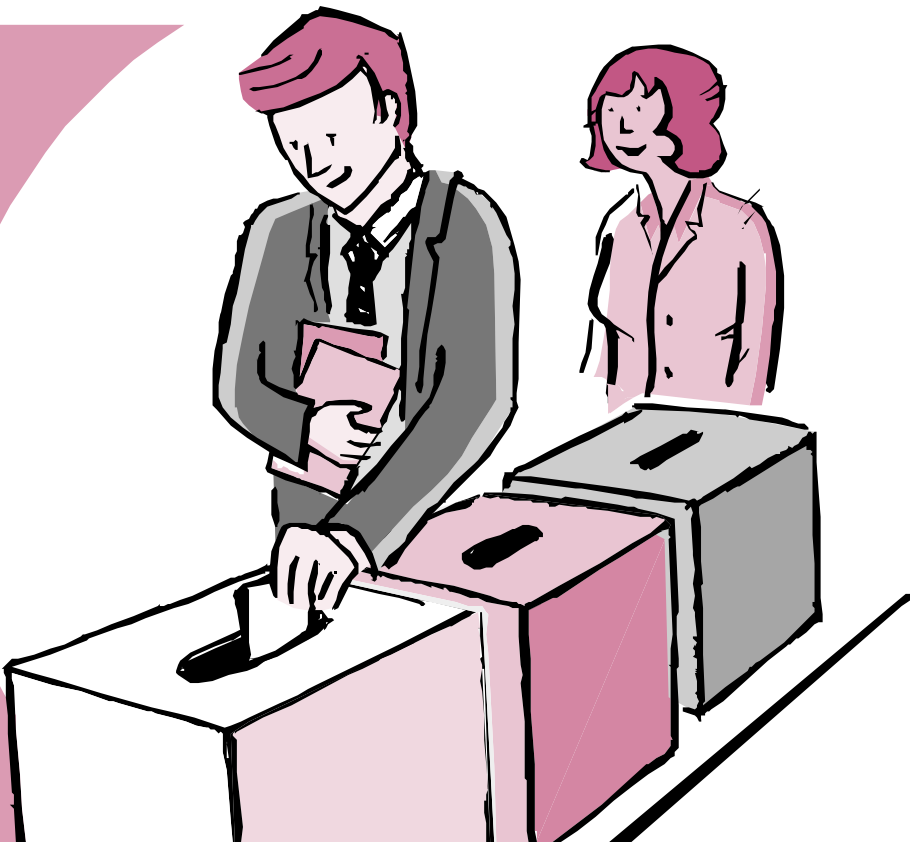
 CAPABILITY SCOTLAND  
TURNING DISABILITY INTO ABILITY  
Supported by the Community Fund

## Introduction

Capability Scotland is the country's leading disability organisation working for a just Scotland. We are running a project called Vote2003. Vote2003 aims to raise disabled people's awareness of their rights in relation to voting. Hopefully more disabled people will then vote in the Scottish elections on 1 May and in future elections. Vote2003 is also working with election staff in local authorities to improve access to voting for disabled people. The project is supported by the Community Fund.

"X Marks the Spot" is a Guide to Voting for Disabled People. It tells you all you need to know about the elections on 1 May. It also tells you what rights disabled people have to vote. The law now gives support to disabled people so they can vote in person more easily.

Copies of this Guide are available in a range of formats and languages to suit your needs. Contact Capability Scotland's Advice Service to find out more – details are on the back page of this Guide.



## What are the Scottish elections?

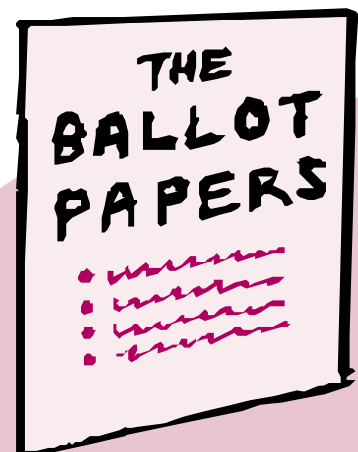
There are two elections on the same day. The first is for the Scottish Parliament, where you vote for MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament). The second is for the local council, where you vote for councillors. Together, these elections are being called the Scottish elections. They are happening on Thursday 1 May.

## What will I be voting for?

Every voter will have three votes to cast in the Scottish elections. You will get three ballot papers on which to mark your X.

The first ballot paper is for you to vote for a constituency MSP. This is someone to represent the area you live in. This ballot paper will be a greeny-blue or aquamarine colour. The candidates will be listed in alphabetical order. If they are standing for a political party, the name of the party will be below their name. The party's emblem or symbol will also be shown. You simply mark your X next to the name of the candidate you want to be your MSP.

The second ballot paper is for you to vote for regional MSPs. These MSPs cover the region you live in. They also represent the political party they are standing for. This ballot paper will be a light orange or peach colour. All the political parties are listed with the names of their candidates below. You will also see the parties' emblems or symbols. The parties will be listed in alphabetical order. There might also be some independent candidates' names at the bottom of the ballot paper. These are people who are not representing a political party. You simply mark your X next to the political party or candidate you want to vote for.



The third ballot paper is for you to vote for a local councillor. Your councillor covers a much smaller area, called a ward. A ward is usually part of the town or the village where you live. This ballot paper will be white. The candidates will be listed in alphabetical order. If they are standing for a political party, the name of the party will be below their name. The party's emblem or symbol will also be shown. You simply mark your X next to the name of the candidate you want to be your councillor.

When you have voted on each of the three ballot papers, you put them into the ballot boxes. There are 3 ballot boxes, one for each colour of ballot paper. You should be able to find and reach them easily. When the voting finishes at 10pm that night, all the ballot boxes from all polling stations in your area are taken to the same place. This is where the votes are counted. The boxes will be emptied and your ballot papers counted, along with everyone else's.

## Why should I vote?

Voting is the way you get to have your say in the way the country and your local council are run. Every person over the age of 18 in Scotland has the right to vote. Lots of people use their vote because who runs the country and what they do is important to them. Some people vote because they want to change the way the country is run. Or because they are upset at a particular issue in the area they live. People often complain that they don't get to have a say or that politicians don't listen to them. The easiest way to have your say or to make politicians listen is by voting.

## Who should I vote for?

You choose who to vote for. You can listen to friends' and relatives' views but it is your decision. You don't even have to tell anyone who you vote for. It's up to you.

Political parties and candidates in the elections say they are going to do things in different ways. They will often talk about issues that are important to you and others who live in your area. All the parties put together documents called manifestos which set out what they promise to do. You can use their manifestos to help you make up your mind who to vote for.

## Do I have to vote in person?

Anyone can now choose to vote by post. If you are going into hospital or have moved house or don't think you'll be feeling up to going out to vote – whatever the reason, you can vote by post. You do this by applying for a postal vote. The form is quick and easy to fill in. Forms are available from the Vote2003 website or from your local council. You need to apply for a postal vote by 23 April.

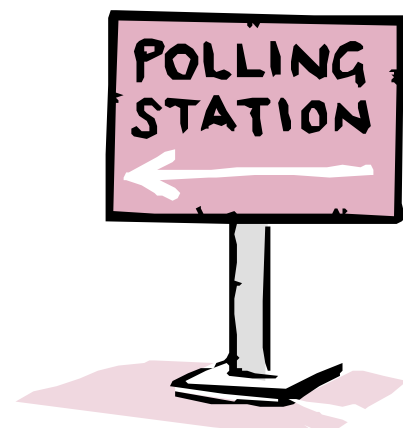
## Where do I go to vote in person?

People go along to their local polling station to vote. Every voter will be sent a poll card before the election. Your poll card will have your name and address on it. It will tell you where to go to vote. You should take this card with you to the polling station. Don't worry if you can't find your poll card. You can still vote as long as your name is on the electoral roll. This is the list of voters in the area you live in. Just go along to your polling station and give your name and address to the staff working there. If you are not sure what to do, contact your local council and ask to speak to the election staff.

## Getting To the Polling Station

Sometimes disabled people find it hard to go and vote. This can be because the polling station is in a hard place to reach or they live too far away and have no transport.

If you are worried about getting to the polling station then contact one of the candidates standing in the elections. There should be a telephone number or an address on all candidates' leaflets. A candidate can arrange a lift for you to get to your polling station and home again. But just because they have given you a lift doesn't mean that you have to vote for them!



## Who is there to help when I go to vote?

**The Presiding Officer:** This person is in charge of running the polling station. If you need help to vote, ask the Presiding Officer. The law allows him or her to help you vote and they must not tell anyone who you voted for.

**Polling clerks:** They are the staff working in the polling station. Most of them will be sitting behind a desk. It is their job to give you your ballot papers. They check your poll card or your name and address against the list they have. This list is called the electoral roll. They then give you your ballot papers. They can also help you vote if you are disabled but they must not tell anyone who you voted for.

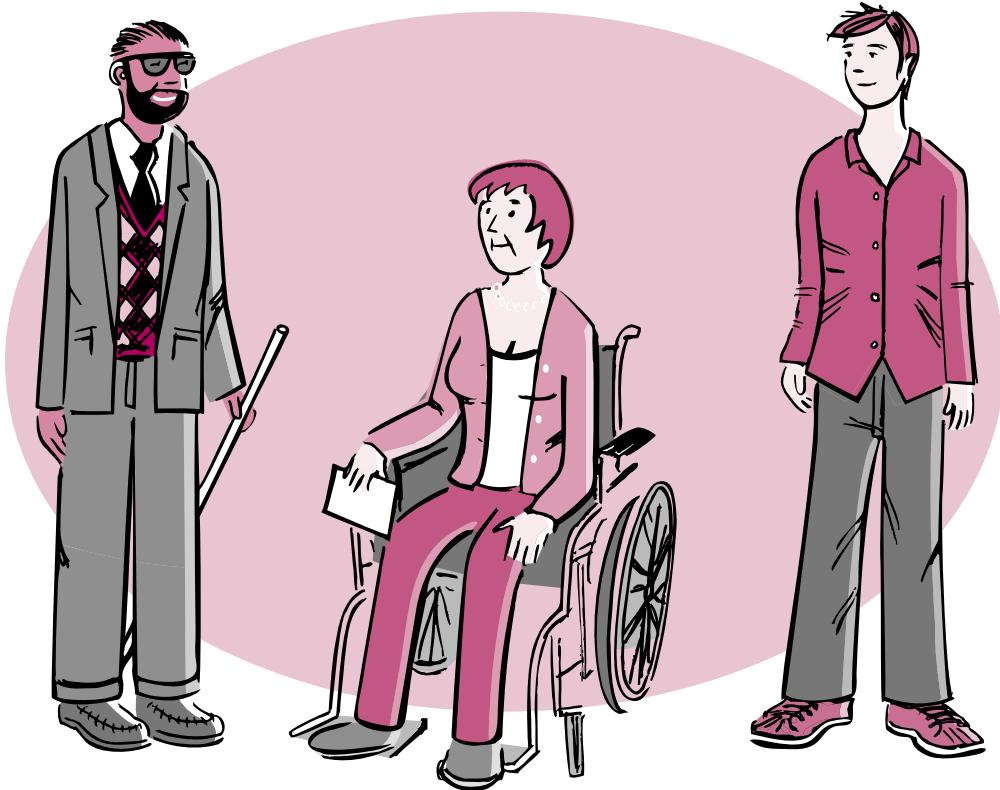
**Political parties:** There might be people outside the polling station from different political parties. They might give you some information on the way in to the polling station. When you come out, they might ask for your poll card or your voter number. You don't have to give them this information if you don't want to.



## What help can I get to vote?

The law now provides rights to disabled people to have help and support when they vote in person. This is to make voting more accessible. There are other things election staff in local authorities are doing to make voting more accessible. These are not needed by law but many councils now realise that improving access to voting will help all voters, not just disabled voters.

But not every disabled voter needs or wants help. If you think you will need help, take someone with you when you go to vote. Or you can ask the Presiding Officer when you get there. But don't be afraid to say no to help if you know what to do and know you can manage to do it on your own.



### Rami

Rami has lived here for 20 years but still feels more comfortable using Urdu for official business.

### Jean

Jean has used a wheelchair all her life to get around and has difficulty using her hands to write. She also has a communication disability.

### John

John is 19 and has a learning disability. He has no problems getting around, seeing or hearing but sometimes finds it difficult to read.

Can these voters get support? Yes they can.

### Disabled Parking

If there is parking next to the building where your polling station is, there should be a reserved space for disabled people. It should be clearly marked. If you are driving or getting a lift, look out for this space that will be closer to the entrance. If you have a disabled parking badge, take it with you.

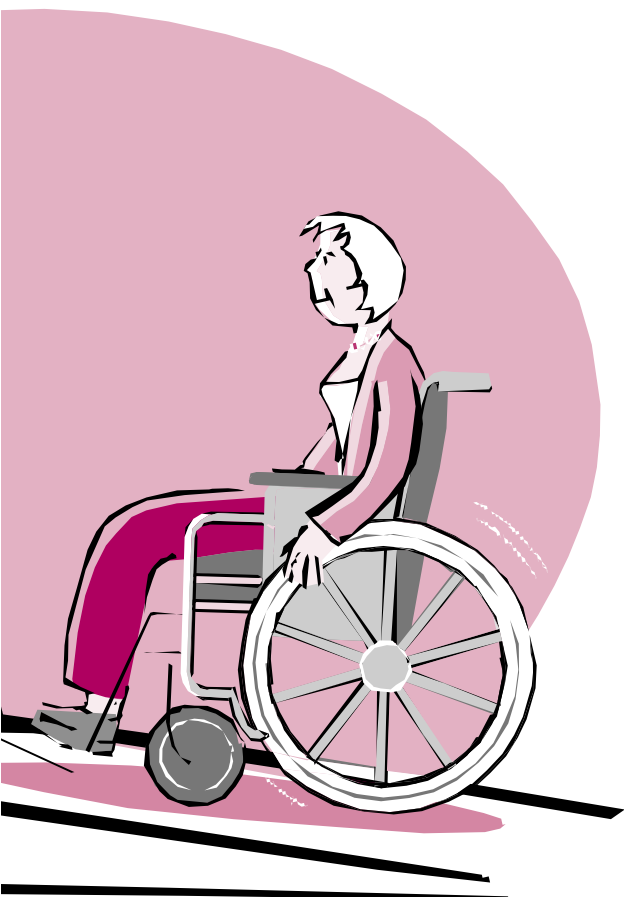
### Ramped access

Where possible, temporary or permanent ramps are being put in at the entrances to polling stations. This is to create flat access for wheelchair users and other people who find steps difficult.

### Disabled access

Election staff all over Scotland are working hard to make sure buildings used as polling stations are accessible to disabled people. But in some areas, there might still be some problems. Where there are access problems at the entrance, there should be a separate accessible entrance. If there is, there should be signs showing you where to go.

**Extra help:** - Ask the Presiding Officer or a polling clerk to take you round to the disabled access if it is dark or the path is slippery.



## Notices

There will be quite a lot of notices and signs to help all people vote. These are called 'Guidance to Voters' notices. You will see posters on the way into the polling station, inside the room where you vote and even inside the polling booth. Some of these might be in large print to help people who find it hard to see or read. These notices tell you what you are voting for and how to vote.

**Extra help** - If you cannot see or read any of the notices very clearly, ask the Presiding Officer to tell you what is written on them.

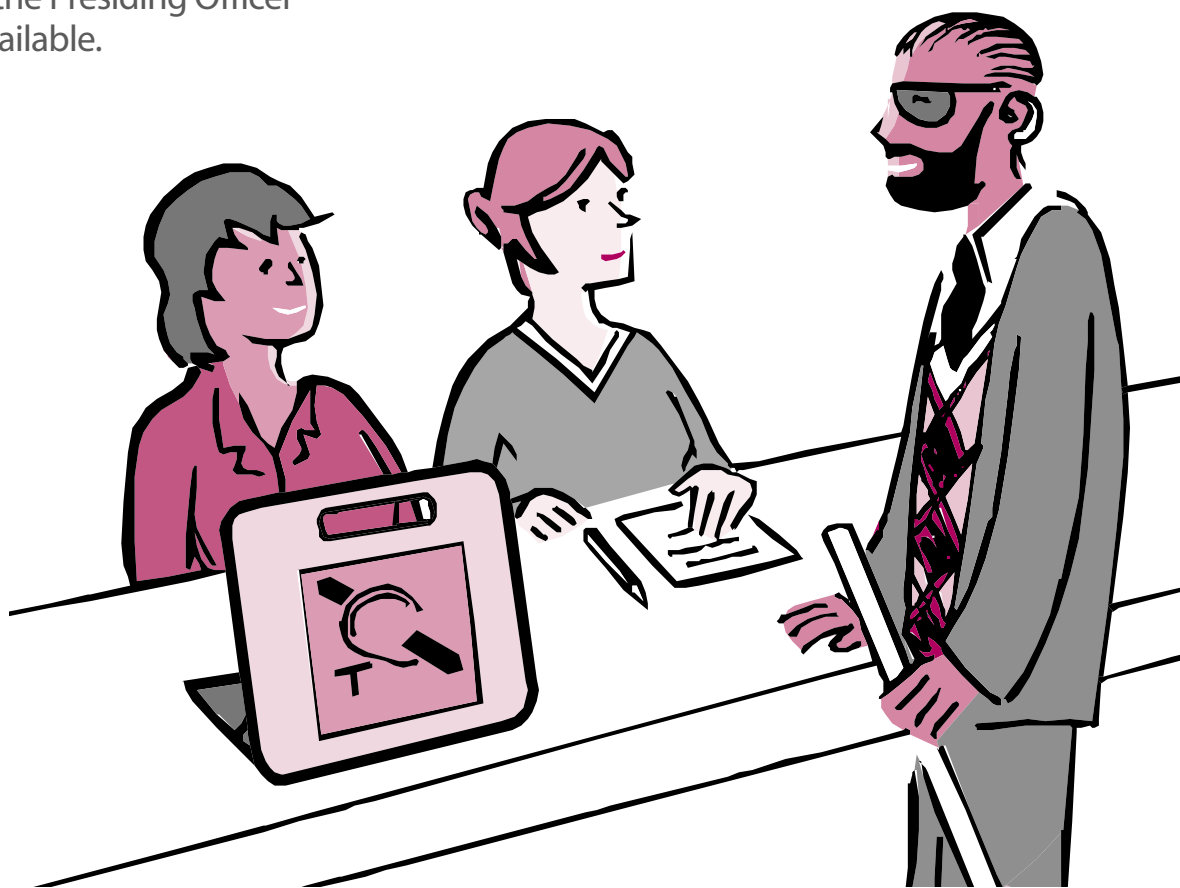
## Large Print Ballot Paper

The law says that a large print ballot paper should be put up in the polling station. For the Scottish elections, there should be three large print ballot papers. They should be close to the polling booths. This is so people who find it hard to see or read can look at it and compare it to their ballot paper.

**Handy Hint** – If you think it would help, ask to take the large print ballot papers into the polling booth. That way you can look at them next to your actual ballot papers.

## Portable Induction Loops

Some polling stations will have a portable induction loop. But the law does not require them to be available. It is something extra that election staff are being encouraged to provide. If you have a hearing impairment and can use a loop system, ask the Presiding Officer if they have one available.



### Tactile Voting Device

Anyone with a disability who finds it hard to read or understand words can use the device. That includes people who have a visual impairment, a physical disability or a learning disability.

It is called different things by different people. You might hear it being called a “blind voters’ template” or a “tactile voting template.” The device is made of plastic and fits over the ballot paper. If you need to use it, there will be one for each of your three ballot papers.

The device sticks onto the ballot paper. It has flaps covering each of the boxes on the ballot paper where you mark your X. Each of these flaps has a number. The numbers are also in Braille for anyone who is blind and uses Braille to read and write. You can use it yourself. Or a friend or the Presiding Officer can help you by reading out the numbers and the candidates. All you need to do is remember which number matches the candidate or party you want to vote for, you lift the flap with that number and mark your X on the ballot paper.

#### Extra help:

There should be instructions telling you how to use the voting device. Or ask a polling clerk to show you how it works.

### A companion

Anyone with a physical disability or a sensory impairment can take someone with them to help them vote. This person is called a companion. They must be someone who can vote in the Scottish elections or a relative. It would be better to take someone you know well to help you vote. Your companion can explain how to vote to you, can tell you what is on the ballot papers and can help you mark your X. If you find it hard to write or can’t write at all, your companion can vote for you. You tell them the candidate you want to vote for and they mark your X on the ballot paper. If you do this, check they have put the X in the right box on the ballot paper.

If you do take a companion along to help, the Presiding Officer will have to go through a quick list of questions with you. This is just to check that your companion can vote in these elections.

#### Handy Hint:

If a companion is going to vote for you, discuss who you want to vote for before you get to the polling station. Otherwise people might hear who you are voting for and you won’t be voting in secret.

### Accessible Polling Booth

If you use a wheelchair or need to sit down while voting there should be an accessible polling booth. These booths do not need to be provided by law but many councils now have one available in every building they use for voting. An accessible polling booth is wider and has a lower shelf to lean on for you to vote. This means you get to cast your vote in secret, the same as everyone else. If you need to use an accessible booth and can't see one, ask for it. They can be moved around.

### Ballot Boxes

The ballot box is where you put your ballot paper after you have voted. There will be three boxes. Each one will be marked in the same colour as each of the three ballot papers. They should be easy to find. Election staff are being encouraged to put them somewhere accessible in the polling station. They should also put them at a height that wheelchair users can reach. The slots where you post your ballot papers should also be marked clearly. There might be white or yellow tape round the slots so everyone can see where to put their ballot papers.



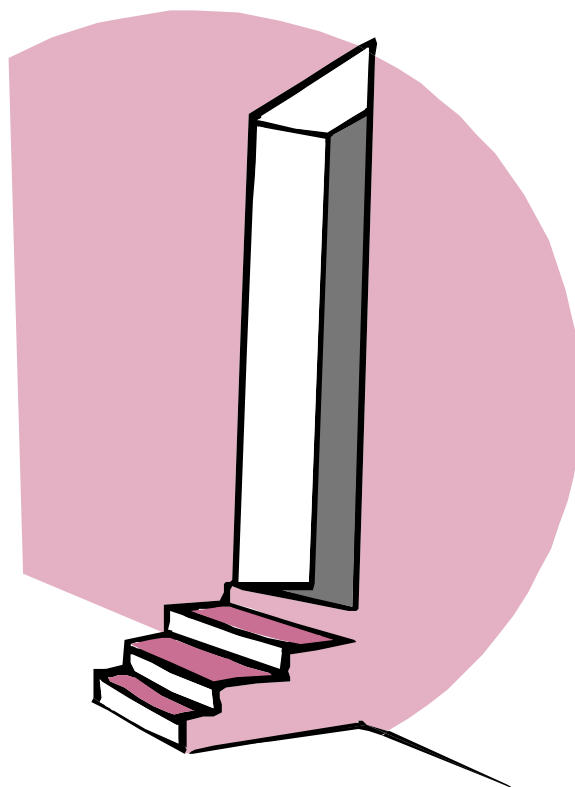
## What happens if I can't get into my polling station?

Election staff all over Scotland are working very hard to make sure all the buildings with polling stations are accessible to all. The law says that where possible, only buildings that are accessible should be used. But sometimes that might not be possible. Some areas have only one public building that can be used for voting. You may still find that you cannot get into your polling station to vote if the problems are really bad.

You still have the right to vote. If you cannot get in, ask someone to get the Presiding Officer to come and speak to you. He or she should have a plan in place so that you still get to vote. The Presiding Officer can bring your ballot papers to you. If you are out in the open, they should have thought about providing a dry, private place for you to go to vote. You should be brought a polling booth if possible or a table to lean on. And the ballot boxes should also be brought out to you so you can put your ballot papers in yourself. Ask for this to happen – don't just let the Presiding Officer or someone else take your ballot papers away inside.

If this happens to you, the Presiding Officer should say sorry and tell you what the problem is. It doesn't make it right, but voting in this way is better than not voting at all.

Not getting to vote inside will only happen in certain places. We hope it will happen in very few places but tell us if it happens to you!



## The meaning of some words used in voting

**Ballot Box** – you put your ballot paper in this black box when you have voted

**Ballot Paper** – you vote by marking your X on this paper

**Candidates** – these are the people listed on your ballot paper who want you to vote for them

**Companion** – this person can help you vote if you have a physical disability; he or she should be related to you or be able to vote in the election

**Electoral Registration Officer** – this person is in charge of registering people to vote and making up the electoral roll of voters; he or she also makes sure people who apply for postal votes get them

**Electoral Roll** – this is the list that has all the voters' names on it in the area where you live

**Polling Booth** – this is where you stand or sit to actually vote on your ballot papers; the booth has three sides so no one else can see you voting; there are accessible booths

**Poll Card** - a card sent by post to tell you when you vote and where you vote; it has your name and address and voter number on it; you should take it with you when you go to vote



**Polling Clerk** – this person works in the polling station and gives people their ballot papers

**Polling Day** – this is the day you go to vote

**Polling Station** - this is the place where you go and vote; it is usually a room in a building like a school or community centre in the area you live in

**Presiding Officer** – this person is in charge of the polling station; he or she can help you vote

**Returning Officer** – this person is in charge of running the elections in your area; he or she works for the local council

**Tactile Voting Device** – this helps people who find it hard to read or understand lots of words vote

## Who can I speak to about Voting?

### The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. The Commission aims to increase public confidence in the democratic process within the United Kingdom - and encourage people to take part - by modernising the electoral process, promoting public awareness of electoral matters, and regulating political parties. They are encouraging people to vote in the Scottish Parliament elections. To find out more contact them on 0131 225 0200 or visit their website at [www.electoralcommission.gov.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk)

### The election team at your local council

Every council has a Returning Officer. There is also an election team who set up and run elections in your area. Here are the contact details for every council in Scotland.

#### Aberdeen City Council

Election Unit, Room 205  
Summerhill Centre  
Stronsay Drive, Aberdeen  
Telephone: 01224 346295  
Contact: Dave Harris

#### Clackmannanshire Council

Election Office  
Greenfield  
Alloa, K10 2AD  
Telephone: 01259 452 103  
Contact: Rod Richardson

#### East Ayrshire Council

Council Headquarters  
London Road  
Kilmarnock, KA3 7BU  
Telephone: 01563 576135  
Contact: Bill Walkinshaw

#### Aberdeenshire Council

Woodhill House  
Westburn Road  
Aberdeen, AB16 5GB  
Telephone: 01224 665119  
Contact: Alan Bell

#### Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Council Offices  
Sandwick Road  
Stornoway, HS1 2BW  
Telephone: 01851 709220  
Contact: Bill Howat

#### East Dunbartonshire Council

Tom Johnston House  
Civic Way  
Kirkintilloch, G66 4TJ  
Telephone: 0141 578 8000  
Contact: Vicki Nash

#### Angus Council

Council Headquarters  
The Cross, Forfar, DD8 1BX  
Telephone: 01307 473 473  
Contact: Catherine Coull

#### Dumfries and Galloway Council

Council Offices  
English Street  
Dumfries, DG1 2DD  
Telephone: 01387 264020  
Contact: James Smith

#### East Lothian Council

Election Office  
John Muir House  
Haddington  
East Lothian  
Telephone: 01620 827200  
Contact: Lilian Pryde

#### Argyll and Bute Council

Kilmory Castle  
Lochgilthead  
Argyll, PA31 8RT  
Telephone: 01546 604351  
Contact: Val Watson

#### Dundee City Council

20 City Square, Dundee  
Telephone: 01382 434403  
Contact: Stuart Galloway

#### East Renfrewshire Council

Council HQ, Eastwood Park  
Rouken Glen Rd, Giffnock  
Telephone: 0141 842 5922  
Contact: Jeff Hawkins

**City of Edinburgh Council**  
Elections Office  
12 St Giles Street, Edinburgh  
Telephone: 0131 529 4980  
Contact: Tom Aitchison

**Falkirk Council**  
Municipal Buildings  
West Bridge Street  
Falkirk, FK1 5RS  
Telephone: 01324 506111  
Contact: Dale Robb

**Fife Council**  
Fife House, North Street  
Glenrothes, KY7 5LT  
Telephone: 01592 513999  
Contact: Liz Higgins

**Glasgow City Council**  
City Chambers, George  
Square, Glasgow, G2 1DU  
Telephone: 0141 287 4194  
Contact: Angus Livingstone

**Highland Council**  
Council Offices  
Glenurquart Road, Inverness  
Telephone: 01463 702017  
Contact: John Bruce

**Inverclyde Council**  
Municipal Buildings  
Greenock, PA15 1LY  
Telephone: 01475 712795  
Contact: Chris Robertson

**Midlothian Council**  
Midlothian House  
Bucleuch Street  
Dalkeith, EH22 1DN  
Telephone: 0131 271 3255  
Contact: Allan R Brown

**Moray Council**  
Council HQ, High Street  
Elgin, IV30 1BX  
Telephone: 01343 563101  
Contact: Moira Patrick

**North Ayrshire Council**  
Cunninghame House, Irvine  
Telephone: 01294 324121  
Contact: Gerard Lawson

**North Lanarkshire Council**  
PO Box 14, Civic Centre  
Motherwell, ML1 1TW  
Telephone: 01698 302486  
Contact: Gavin Whitefield

**Orkney Islands Council**  
Council Offices, Kirkwall  
Orkney, KW15 1NY  
Telephone: 01856 876222  
Contact: Malcolm Burr

**Perth and Kinross Council**  
Council Buildings  
2 High Street  
Perth, PH1 5PH  
Telephone: 01738 475135  
Contact: Brenda Mackie

**Renfrewshire Council**  
North Building HQ  
Cotton Street  
Paisley, PA1 1WB  
Telephone: 0141 842 5179  
Contact: Paul Gannon

**Scottish Borders Council**  
Council Headquarters  
Newtown St Boswells  
TD6 0SA  
Telephone: 01835 825009  
Contact: David Hume

**Shetland Islands Council**  
4 Market Street, Lerwick  
Shetland, ZE1 0JN  
Telephone: 01595 744554  
Contact: Anne Cogle

**South Ayrshire Council**  
Election Office  
County Buildings  
Wellington Square, Ayr  
Telephone: 0129 612 222  
Contact: Alison McCord

**South Lanarkshire Council**  
Election Office  
23 Beckford Street  
Hamilton, ML3 0BT  
Telephone: 01698 455747  
Contact: George Fairbairn

**Stirling Council**  
Council Buildings  
Old Viewforth  
Stirling, FK8 2ET  
Telephone: 01786 443 370  
Contact: Joyce Allen

**West Dunbartonshire Council**  
Council Offices  
Garshake Road, Dumbarton  
Telephone: 01389 737502  
Contact: Anne Laird

**West Lothian Council**  
West Lothian House  
Almondvale Boulevard  
Livingston  
Telephone: 01506 777208  
Contact: Gordon Blair