



Applying for a Voter Authority Certificate

Guidance for homelessness services

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Introduction

On the 4th of May 2023, the UK Government introduced a requirement for voters to show photo ID when voting at polling stations, in some UK elections and referendums.¹ This includes the UK general election on the 4th of July 2024.

A large proportion of individuals experiencing homelessness may not have photo ID, often due to the costs of application or replacement or the inability to keep their ID safe. Additionally, barriers such as having no proof of address and lack of access to computers for online applications make obtaining photo ID incredibly challenging.

With the UK Government having now made it a requirement for everyone to have photo ID in order to vote in certain elections, this ultimately restricts the ability of some individuals to exercise their right to vote, especially for those experiencing homelessness.

The Government has introduced a 'Voter Authority Certificate'² for those without an accepted form of photo ID, to use to vote in some UK elections and referendums. This certificate cannot be used as proof of identification for any other reason. The deadline to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate for the UK general election on the 4th of July 2024 is **5pm on Wednesday 26th June 2024**.

All individuals will need to register to vote³ before they can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. When they register to vote, they will be asked whether they have photo ID, or if they would like to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. The deadline to register to vote is 11.59pm on Tuesday 18th June. The Electoral Commission has produced a guide for staff working with people experiencing homelessness⁴ which includes information on how to register to vote without a fixed address.

It is important to note that those individuals who wish to vote by post, **do not** need to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. The deadline to apply for a postal vote is 5pm on Wednesday 19th June 2024.⁵

This briefing outlines the process of applying for a Voter Authority Certificate. It is important that frontline workers in homelessness services and local authorities are aware of the process of application, so they are able to support individuals to exert their right to vote.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/how-to-vote/photo-id-youll-need>

² <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id/applying-a-voter-authority-certificate>

³ <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/register-vote-and-update-your-details>

⁴ Guide available here: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media/9633>

⁵ <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/apply-vote-post>

Please note, the information in this briefing has been pulled from the [Electoral Commission Website](#). If you are reading this briefing after the 4th of May 2023, please check their website for any updates in relation to policy change.

How to apply

Apply online

You can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate online via gov.uk⁶. Applying online is free of charge and the individual will need:

- A recent, digital photo of themselves
- Their National Insurance Number

Individuals can still apply if they do not have/know their National Insurance Number. However, they will need to provide other documents to prove their identity, for example, a birth certificate, bank statement or utility bill.

For those that have a National Insurance Number but do not remember it, they can obtain this on:

- Their personal tax account online⁷
- The HMRC App⁸
- A document they already have, for example, a payslip or P60.

Alternatively, if none of the above are available, individuals can contact the National Insurance Numbers helpline (0300 200 3500) and answer some questions. HMRC will not disclose their National Insurance Number over the phone but will post it out to arrive within 15 working days. If an individual doesn't have, or can't find their National Insurance Number, there are other options to confirm identity, as detailed below.

Apply by post

For some people, applying by filling out a paper application form will be easier. This form needs to be sent to their local council or alternatively, individuals can apply in person at their local council office⁹.

To request an application form, you can either contact your local council, call the Electoral Commission Helpline (0800 328 0280) or download and print the form on gov.uk¹⁰.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/lost-national-insurance-number>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/download-the-hmrc-app>

⁹ <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a-voter/your-election-information>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-voter-authority-certificate-by-post-if-youre-living-in-the-uk>

Information needed to apply

When applying for the Voter Authority Certificate, the individual will need to provide their:

- Name (same name as they registered to vote with)
- Address (this could be a care of address, for example a Day Centre)
- Date of birth
- National Insurance Number

If the individual has followed the steps above to obtain their national insurance number but has been unable to get through the questions over the phone/provide other forms of proof of identity, it is possible for them to ask someone they know to confirm their identity. For support with this process, call the Electoral Commission Helpline (0800 328 0280).

Providing a photograph

All individuals will need to submit a photo with their application. To be accepted, it must meet certain requirements in terms of style, quality, and size.

Photo style

The photo must be:

- Of the individual facing forward and looking straight at the camera
- A close up of their head and shoulders, without any head covering (unless they wear one for religious beliefs or medical reasons)¹¹
- Of plain expression with their eyes open and clearly visible

If any individual is unable to meet the requirements due to a disability, it is advised they speak with their local council.

Photo quality

The photo must:

- Be a true likeness
- Be in colour
- Be taken against a plain, light background
- Be in sharp focus and clear
- Be free from 'redeye', shadows which obscure the face, or reflection
- Not be damaged

Photo size

For those applying online, the photo must be:

- At least 750 pixels in height and 600 pixels in width

¹¹ The face must not be covered for any reason, even religious or medical reasons.

- Contained in an electronic file which is no more than 20MB in size.

For those applying using a paper form, the photo must be:

- at least 45 millimetres in height and 35 millimetres in width
- no larger than 297 millimetres in height or 210 millimetres in width.

Processing the application

The individual's local council will process their application. They will send the Voter Authority Certificate to them via post to the address provided on the application, along with information on how to use the certificate.

Certificates do not have an expiration date, but it is recommended that they are renewed after 10 years.

Key Deadlines (for the UK general election on 4th July 2024):

Registering to vote
11.59pm on Tuesday 18th June 2024

Applying for a postal vote
5pm on Wednesday 19th June 2024

Applying for the Voter Authority Certificate
5pm on Wednesday 26th June 2024

What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

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Let's End Homelessness Together

