



Have a voice.
Have a choice.



Have a voice. Have a choice.

Contents

- 3 Understanding Politics & Democracy - A UK-wide perspective**
- 13 12 Ways Young People Can Get Involved in Politics**
- 24 Local government - Get involved by getting elected!**
- 41 How to host a hustings**

Understanding Politics & Democracy

A UK-Wide Perspective

Written by Kirstie Edwards, Project & Participation Officer at Youth Cymru



Politics and democracy across the UK can look a little different depending on where you live. Over the next few pages we'll explore how democracy isn't just about voting and turning up at the polls on election day- although this is an important part of it- and how you can get involved in your corner of the UK.

Democracy is about [having your say](#) and [getting involved](#) all year round. The first step is to [recognise](#) what you are passionate about. The second step is to [choose](#) what the best course of [action](#) is; whether it's social action or a petition, protesting, campaigning, voting or contacting your elected representative.



What does that look like in your country?

Now listen carefully this is where it might get confusing!

You have more than one elected representative. Everyone in the UK is represented by an MP and several Councillors, and some also elect a Mayor. If you live in a **devolved nation** (Wales, Scotland & Northern Ireland) you **elect members of that devolved parliament/legislature** too. In Wales they are called **MS** (Members of the Senedd), in Scotland **MSP** (Members of the Scottish Parliament) and in Northern Ireland **MLA** (Members of the Legislative Assembly). Councillors are **elected by Ward/District** to represent you at local government level. You will have several Councillors who represent you at City or County Council Level which is often called your Local Authority.

Northern Ireland has 90 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). In Northern Ireland you would have 5 Constituency MLA.

Wales has 60 Members of the Senedd/Welsh Parliament (MS). If you live in Wales you would have 1 Constituency MS & 4 Regional MS.

Scotland has 129 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSP). If you live in Scotland you would have 1 Constituency MSP & 7 Regional MSP.

UK has 650 Members of Parliament (MP). Each member represents a single constituency.



What are the different levels of governance & how does it affect me?

Local Government: Local Government (your Council/Local Authority) deals with the local stuff – your **bins, streets, public buildings** and **open spaces** like your local parks and schools. Some people in the UK will also have a **Community, Town or Parish Council**. Most local authorities (Councils) opt for the ‘**leader and cabinet**’ model where the council leader is selected from the councillors, but in some areas they have a ‘**mayor and cabinet**’ model, where a directly elected mayor is established to replace the council leader. The **Leader or Mayor chooses the Cabinet**.

Devolved Government: Devolved Governments (Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland) oversee the big things e.g. **Health, Education, Culture, Sport, Agriculture, Transport and Local Government**. Devolved governments have **law making powers** for these. The **leader** of the political party with the **majority of seats** in a devolved parliament becomes **First Minister** and forms a government and chooses the cabinet.

UK Government: The **leader of the political party with the majority MPs** in the UK parliament becomes **Prime Minister** and forms a government and chooses the cabinet. The UK Government looks after things for people in **England only**, and decisions on these **issues are devolved to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland**. The UK government also looks after **foreign relations, defence, the constitution, immigration** and many aspects of **economic policy** for the whole of the UK. These are reserved powers. This means that **only the UK parliament and government can make decisions on these matters**.

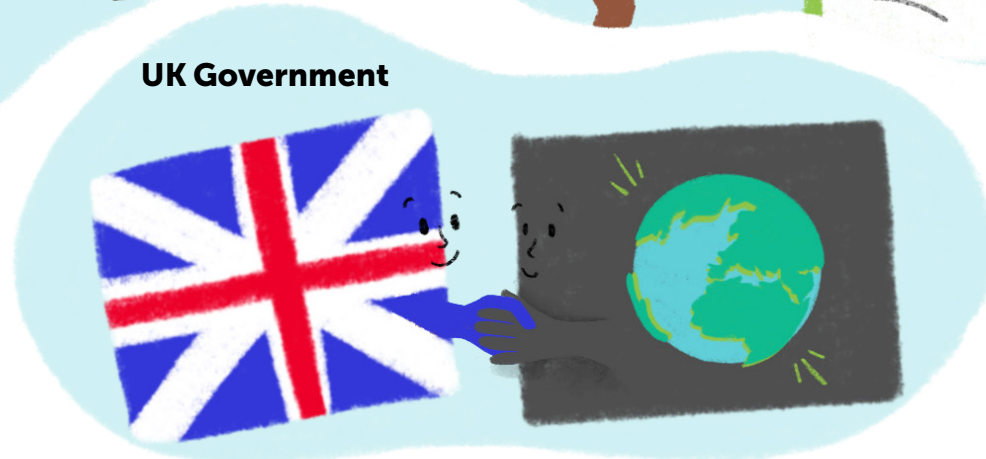
Local Government



Devolved Government



UK Government



The UK Parliament makes laws for England and for the UK. The UK Parliament scrutinises the UK Government. The UK Parliament (Westminster in London) is made up of 3 things.

1. Monarch

Has the final seal of approval on any legislation – this is called ‘Royal Assent’. Although the Monarch has the right to refuse Royal Assent, nowadays this does not happen, and it is regarded today as a formality.

2. The House of Commons

“Ordinary people” who have been elected by ordinary people.

3. The House of Lords

These are not elected. Historically these were passed down through families, however members now get their role by being appointed by the Queen on the advice of the prime minister or nominated by the House of Lords Appointment Commission.

Decisions made in one House generally have to be approved in the other. If the **House of Commons propose** a new law, the **House of Lords** need to **approve** it before it gets approved and **signed off** by the **Queen**. This is called a **two-way chamber system**.

Similar to the UK parliament, the **devolved parliaments scrutinise the devolved Governments**. So the Welsh Parliament/Senedd makes laws for Wales and challenge, examine thoroughly and closely inspect. A difference in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is that they **do not have a second chamber like the House of Lords** in Westminster. All **devolved parliaments have law making powers** and can create laws about devolved areas without reference to Westminster. It is therefore very important that people in the devolved nations vote in the General election (UK Government) and the Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish elections.

Voting

One way of taking part in democracy is by voting for someone to **represent you** and **your passions** in councils and parliaments. You **elect** the people **who you want to represent you** in your **local area**, councils, your country and parliament to discuss things and make laws on your behalf. All those **elected representatives** are paid by you (the taxpayer) and **work for you**, and they have to listen to you all year round not just at election time.



To be able **to vote** on election day you **must be registered**. It takes 5 minutes and you can do it via this [link](#).

What you will need to vote:

A **National Insurance Number** – you can find this on your **pay slip** or on a **letter** sent to your home. If you are **under 18** and **don't have a National Insurance Number** you can **register without** it. If you're stuck on what to do contact your Electoral Registration Office.

Who can vote?

Depending on where you live and the type of elections you can vote at different ages.

For local/devolved elections:

From **May 2021 16-17** year-olds and **qualifying foreign nationals** in **Wales**, will have their **first opportunity to vote** alongside the rest of the population in Senedd elections. In **Scotland 16–17** year-olds **gained the vote** during the **independence elections** in **2014**.

While in **England** and **Northern Ireland** the voting **age** is still **18**. For UK **general elections the voting age is 18** no matter where you live.

Who could I vote for?

See below who you can vote for depending on your area.

Wales:

- Welsh Labour
- Welsh Conservatives
- Plaid Cymru
- Abolish the Welsh assembly Party
- Reform UK
- Welsh Liberal Democrats
- Welsh National Party
- UK independent Party
- Green party

UK:

- Conservative Party
- Labour Party
- Scottish National Party
- Liberal Democrats
- Democratic Unionist Party
- Sinn Féin
- Plaid Cymru
- Social Democratic and Labour Party
- Green Party of England and Wales
- Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland:

- Fianna Fáil
- Sinn Féin
- Fine Gael
- Green Party
- Labour Party
- Social Democrats
- Solidarity- People Before Profit
- Aontú
- Right To Change
- Independents 4 Change
- Human Dignity Alliance
- Workers and Unemployed Action
- Workers' Party

Scotland:

- Scottish National Party
- Scottish Conservatives
- Scottish Labour
- Scottish Liberal Democrats
- Scottish Greens
- Reform UK
- Orkney Manifesto Group
- Independence for Scotland Party
- Rubbish Party
- Scotia Future
- Scottish Libertarian Party
- West Dunbartonshire Community Party

There are also several parties who have representatives at local government level, raising awareness on a range of **local or marginalised issues** many of these groups are classed as **independents or have their own party name**.

Whichever political **party wins** an election is then in Government and gets to **form a Cabinet**. Whichever **party** (or parties) came **second** becomes the **opposition**. If there is **no clear winner there may be a Coalition Government**.

Key words:

Mayors:

Most local authorities opt for the 'leader and cabinet' model where the council leader is selected from the councillors, but in some areas a 'mayor and cabinet' model has been adopted, where a directly elected mayor is established to replace the council leader. Many authorities with or without elected mayors have a ceremonial mayor who holds no executive power and the two roles of elected mayor/nominated council leader and ceremonial mayor exist concurrently.

Members of parliament:

(MPs) Elected by Constituency. Elected to represent you at UK Government level (Westminster) Everyone in the UK is represented by an MP in the UK Parliament in Westminster. There are 650 MPs representing 650 Constituencies.

Members of devolved governments:

(MS, MSP, MLA) Elected by Constituency & Region. Elected to represent you in the devolved Government realm if you live in Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland.

Parliament:

comes from the French word parler, which translates as to speak.

The most common meaning refers to a country's legislative (law-making) body. This is the group of people who are elected to make and change the laws of a country.

Legislature:

an institution that has the power to make or change laws.

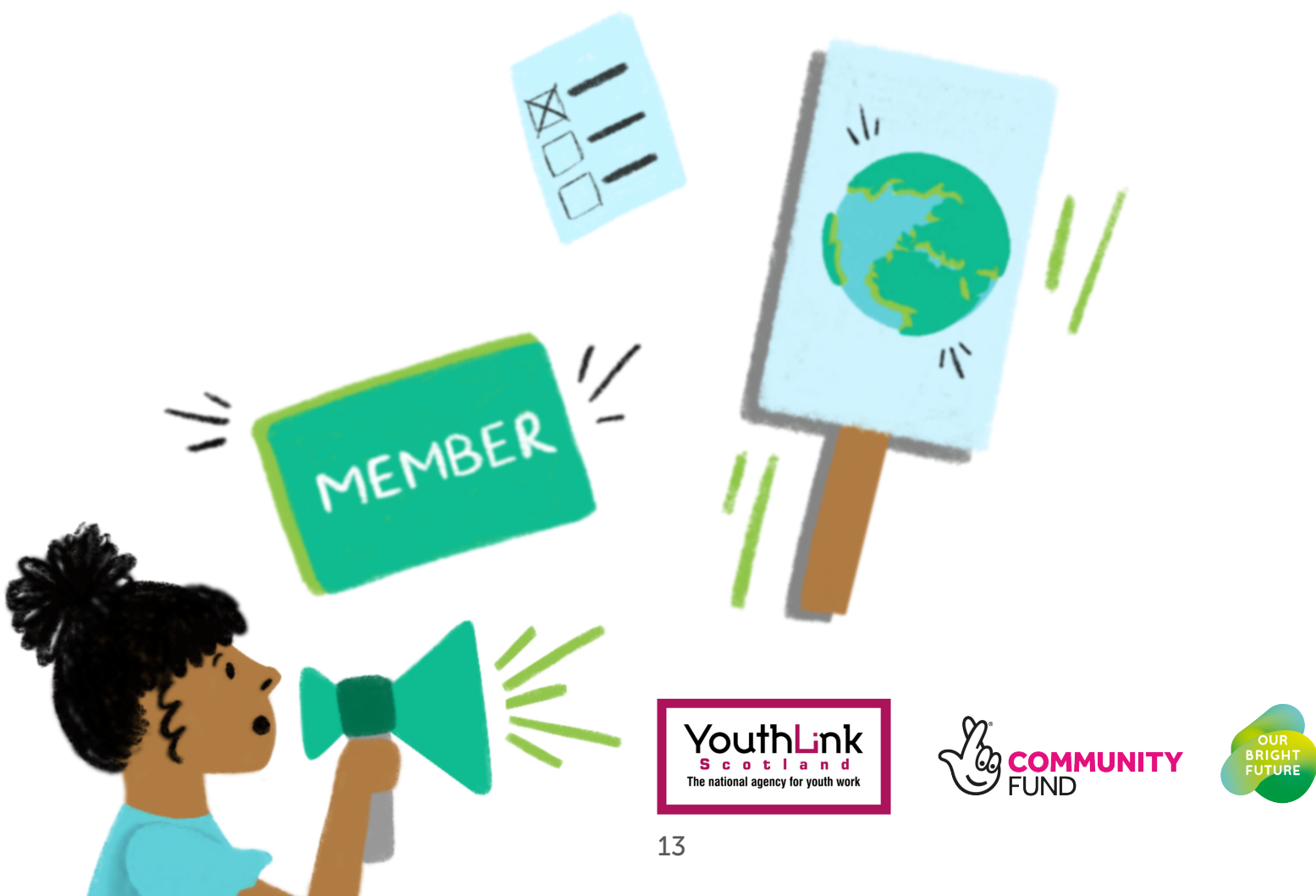
Government:

the group of people who are officially responsible for governing (running) the country or political part of the country.

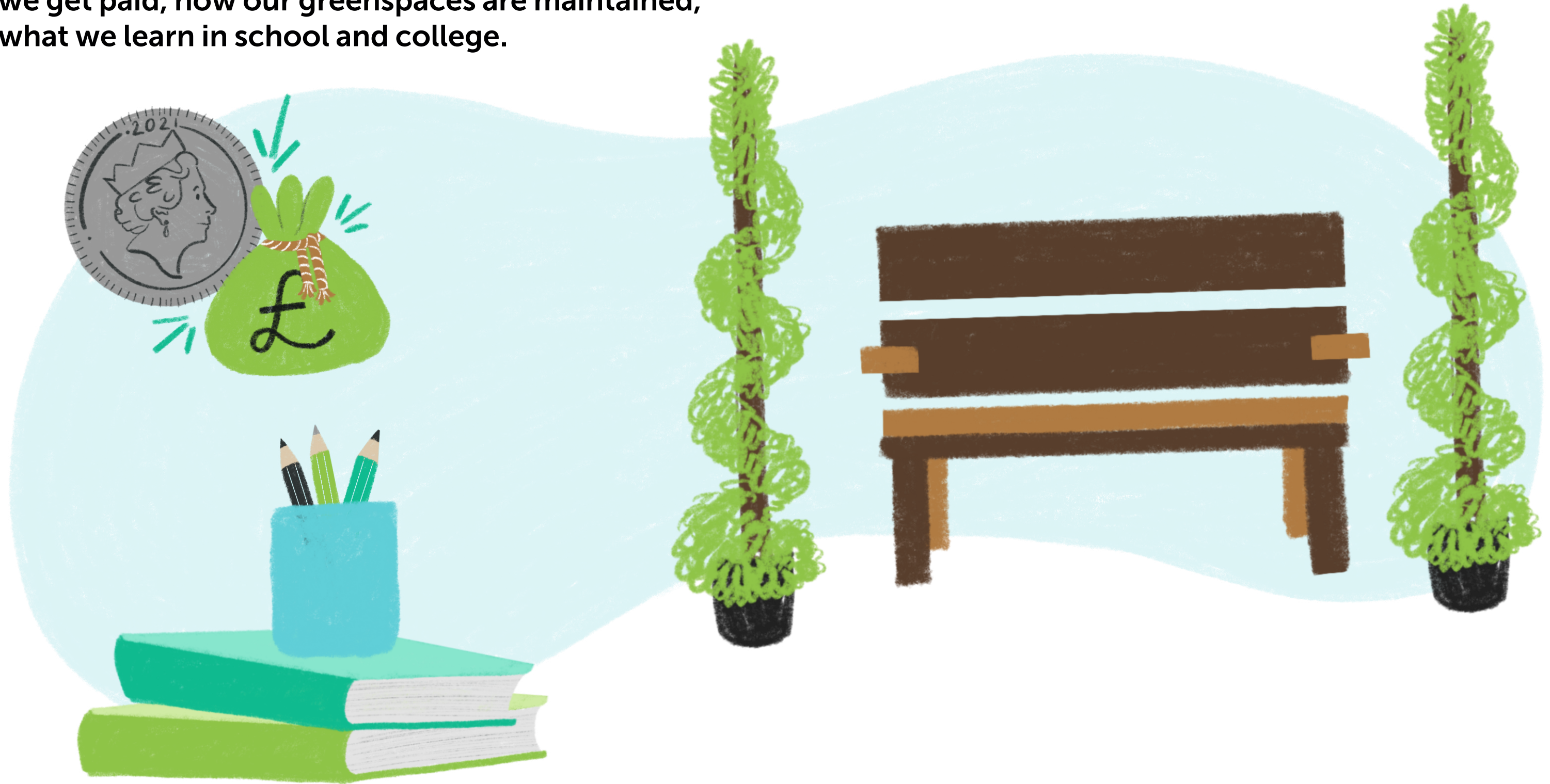


12 Ways Young People Can Get Involved in Politics

This guide was written by Emily Beever, Senior Development Officer at YouthLink Scotland.



Politics affects everything around us – how much we get paid, how our greenspaces are maintained, what we learn in school and college.

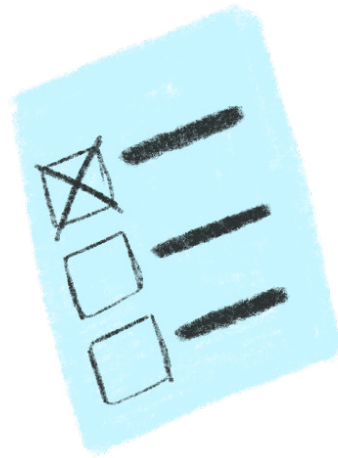


But **how do we have a say** in that?

All young people have a right to have their voice heard on matters that affect them and there are many ways for young people to get involved in politics, even if you aren't yet old enough to vote.

1. VOTE

Voting deserves the top spot on this list – it is the **ultimate way** that democracy works and the **voice of the people is heard**. Voting isn't just restricted to UK-wide elections either. Look out for local council elections, parliamentary elections if you live in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, or **local mayoral** elections. You can **vote from age 16 in Scotland and Wales**, and **18 in England and Northern Ireland**.



2. GET INVOLVED IN YOUR YOUTH PARLIAMENT

There are now **Youth Parliaments** or **Assemblies** in **every nation** of the **UK**. Getting involved in your youth parliament will give you an opportunity to **represent other young people** and help their issues to be heard.

[UK Youth Parliament](#)
[Youth Assembly for Northern Ireland](#)
[Scottish Youth Parliament](#)
[Welsh Youth Parliament](#)

3. LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW IT ALL WORKS

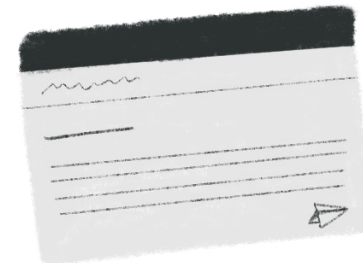
Politics can seem really confusing if you're not in the know. **Never fear** – there's ways to get the essential info without being overwhelmed. The **UK Parliament runs online sessions to support people** to get their **voice heard** and to **strengthen community** ties.

You can find more [here](#).



4. CONTACT YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

If there is something happening that you **don't agree with** or want to **take action on**, you can **contact your elected representatives directly**. They all have email addresses and lots of them are also on social media. You may want to discuss a question or issue with your representatives face to face, and you can do so by attending a **surgery**. A political surgery or constituency surgery, in British and Irish politics, is a series of one-to-one meetings that a Member of Parliament (MP) or other political officeholder may have with their constituents. This is often the **best way to raise an issue with them directly!**



5. RESPOND TO CONSULTATIONS

The **government**, **parliamentary committees** and **government agencies** often **run consultations on different issues** they are exploring, for example before a law is passed. Usually they anticipate a **written response**, sometimes through a **digital form**, but increasingly they will accept **video responses**. You don't need to answer every question they ask – just **share how the issue impacts you** and what you would like to see happen.

[Scottish Government consultations](#)
[Welsh Government consultations](#)
[NI Government consultations](#)
[UK Government consultations](#)

6. START OR SIGN A PETITION

A petition is a document of **agreed ideas** or actions to be **changed to Laws on a national level**. You can now do this digitally via the government's website. Each national parliament (except NI Assembly) has its own petition function where you can start and sign petitions. If a petition gets **over a certain amount of signatures**, the parliament are **obligated to take action** on it, like hold a debate. There are also other petition websites like Change.org but politicians don't have to recognise petitions on these sites. In Wales you need 50 signatures for the Senedd to discuss the petitioned topic. In England you need 100,000 signatures for parliament to discuss the petitioned topic. In Scotland you only need 1 signature for the public petitions committee to discuss the petitioned topic.



[Scottish Parliament petitions](#)
[UK Parliament petitions](#)
[Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru petitions](#)

7. JOIN A CAMPAIGNING GROUP OR ORGANISATION

There are loads of national or local organisations that are already working on an issue you care about. You could join them as a [member](#), [volunteer](#), or even get involved in their decision-making as a [youth trustee](#).

The Wildlife Trusts
Friends of the Earth
RSPB
WWF



8. JOIN A POLITICAL PARTY

This is a great way to [stay involved with a political party that reflects your views](#). By being a member of a political party, you can also play a [role in deciding the party's priorities](#) and [who the local candidates are](#).

9. HOST AN EVENT WITH LOCAL POLITICIANS

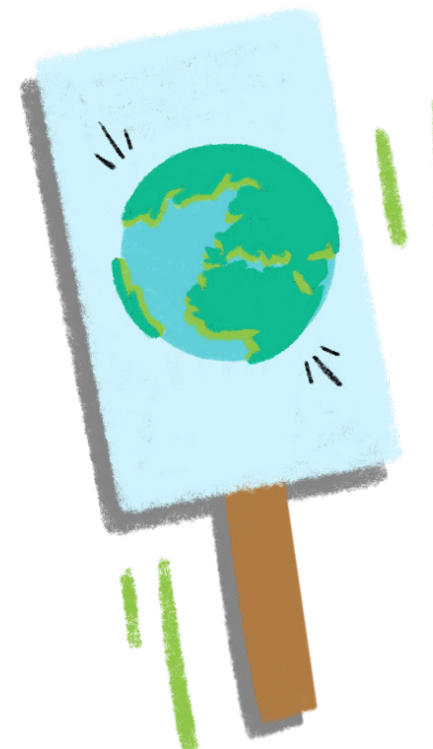
Want to make sure other young people know what's going on in your area? Why not host an event with local politicians! It could be a simple [question and answer](#) format on a [specific issue](#), an assembly or even a hustings event in the run up to an election.

An [assembly](#) is a group of people brought together to discuss an issue/s, and reach a [conclusion](#) about what they think should happen. Assemblies give members of the public the time and opportunity to learn about and discuss a topic, before reaching conclusions. Sometimes politicians are invited to assemblies to hear the needs of the public. For more information on organising a hustings, see our other guide in this series.

A hustings is a meeting where election candidates or parties debate policies and answer questions from the audience. Hustings provide voters with an opportunity to hear the views of candidates or parties. When all candidates or parties standing are invited, a hustings [does not promote any particular candidate or party](#) because they all have the opportunity to speak and be questioned.

10. SHARE YOUR MESSAGE

Get your message out to others by [sharing what you've learnt](#) or experienced. [Social media](#) is a great way to [connect with others](#) and you can be really innovative in how you do this. Youth Cymru have started a [podcast](#) to educate and engage young people on different topics.



11. PROTEST

The [school strikes for climate](#) are an example of how [powerful collective action](#) can be. Protests come in many forms – even a few people can make a difference.

12. RUN FOR A POLITICAL POSITION

This one is a big commitment but if you're [18](#) you can [run for political office](#). For more information on running in a [parish council election](#), see our other guide in this series.



The **youngest** members of parliaments
across the UK at the time of their election:

21

Northern Ireland Assembly

21

Scottish Parliament

**'All young people
have a right to have
their voice heard.'**

23

Welsh Parliament/
Senedd Cymru

23

UK Parliament

Useful Links

- [Our Bright Future](#)
- [Welcome to Your Vote – Electoral Commission](#)
- [UK Student Climate Network](#)
- [Youth Politics](#)

Local government

get involved by getting elected!

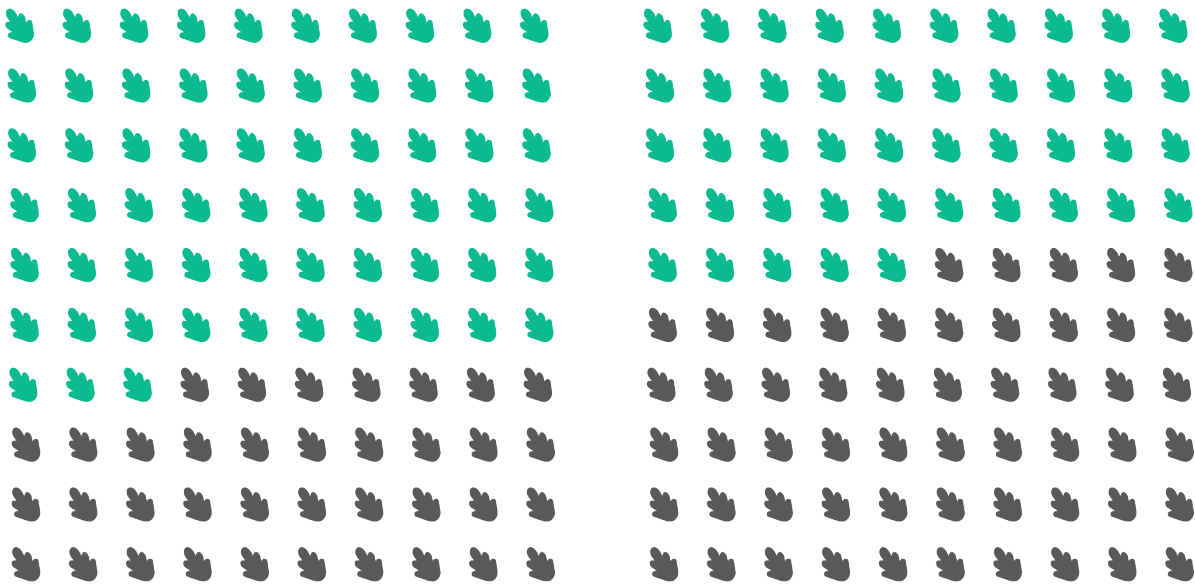
This guide was written by Rachel Coxcoon, Our Bright Future Steering Group member. Rachel is a local politician in her own right, and works on Climate Emergency Support for local councils



SO YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

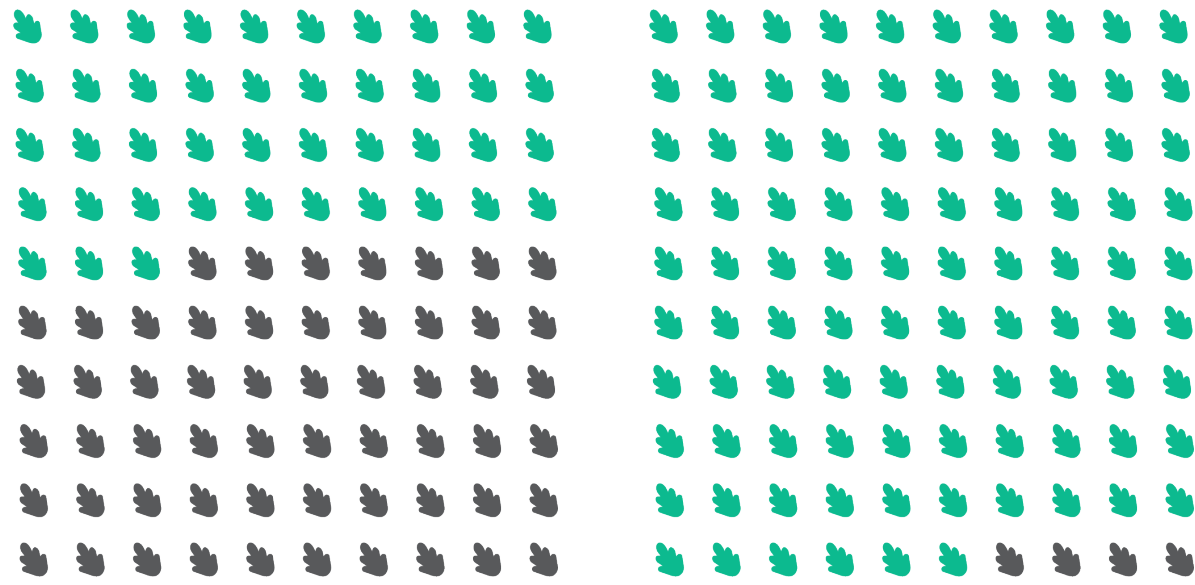
And so you [should](#).

Local government has a poor reputation for diversity.
A Local Government Association report from 2018 showed that, in England:



63% MALE

45% RETIRED



43% 65+

and the average age was 59

96% WHITE

At the civil parish level, the lack of diversity was even more telling. The **average age** of parish and town councillors was **61**, and the proportion of councillors aged between **18-25** was only **1%**. For comparison, **10.4% of the national population** are in this age bracket, so **young people are underrepresented** at parish and town council level by a **factor of 10!**

Why are there so few young councillors?

On the whole, many young people are simply not aware that these opportunities exist for them. Most young people don't realise that they are **legally able to run for public office at 18**, and often, by the time they are reaching their late 20's, time is tight. People start to work longer hours, are commuting or might have started families of their own, meaning less time to devote to public service. Young people are often more transient – they may be away at university some or all of the time, or move through a series of jobs in different places. **The net result is that local government is dominated by retired people who are settled in a local area.**



Why is it important that there are more young councillors?

When we are not direct users of a service in that moment, how can we comment fairly on it? For **councillors in their 60s**, their experience of affordable housing, schools, nursery and play provision for example, might be **outdated**. It is **less likely to be of immediate concern** to them, alongside other aspects of daily life. This means that those **viewpoints will get less airtime** in council meetings than the issues that affect older people, such as the provision of care home places, accessible shops and so on.

They are also **less likely to be concerned** in general about certain issues that young people feel more strongly about or connected to, like the climate crisis. Indeed, they are more likely to be part of the system that perpetuates some of the problems. It may be a crass generalisation, but if you've spent all your life aspiring to own a Range Rover, and are now a 60-year old Range Rover owner, you're not that likely to be promoting car-free town centres and a massive increase in cycling and walking infrastructure!



What does local government even do?

There have been many attempts to reform or streamline local government over the last 200 years, and each one seems to have left the job half done. Devolution created differences in the four UK nations, but in summary, Northern Ireland has only one layer of local government, whereas some parts of England have three.



Confused?

Let's break it down, starting with [England](#)....

Most rural parts of England have what is called a 'three tier' structure of government.

The biggest unit in a three-tier area is a county council, for example Gloucestershire. Inside that county will be around four to six 'District councils'. And within each district council area, there will be a large number of 'civil parishes'. In the eyes of the law, all civil parishes are called 'parishes', but if you live in a very large village or a small market town, you'll find that your local parish council is referred to as 'The Town Council'.

Still confused?



Don't worry, pretty much [everyone](#) is! Here's a bit more information...

Three tier local government

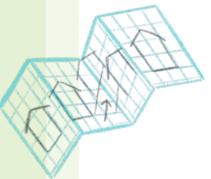
County Council

Responsible for — education, social services (including old folks homes), libraries, public transport, most main roads, trading standards, waste disposal.



District Councils (4-7 in each county)

Responsible for waste collection, housing, the planning system (i.e. what gets built where, which is decided via the 'Local Plan'), leisure, some local roads, environmental health (e.g. noise pollution, flytipping), council tax collection, business rates collection, some benefits payments.



NAMING — sometimes, the district council's full name will actually include the word 'District', but sometimes they will instead be called 'Borough Council', or even a 'City Council' (e.g. Waverly Borough Council in the county of Surrey, or Lancaster City Council, in the county of Lancashire).



Civil Parishes (50-200 in each district)

Responsible for: local facilities like allotments, cemeteries, green spaces, playparks, bus shelters, public seating, public toilets, village halls. Sometimes also some footpaths, street lighting and large areas of towns or villages belong to the parish council, e.g. the market place itself. Civil parishes can also make a '[Neighbourhood Plan](#)', which is like a small scale '[Local Plan](#)'.



There is no requirement in law for a part of England to have a parish council. Some small villages and hamlets only have a '[Parish Meeting](#)', which meets [once a year](#).

Most urban parts of England are not parished at all.



NAMING — don't confuse '[civil parish](#)' with '[church parish](#)'. They are not the same. The parish councils that exist today were established by the '[Parish Councils Act 1894](#)', which took local decision making away from churches and put it in the hands of elected local people.

Some civil parishes are called '[Town Councils](#)'. These tend to be the bigger ones, but their powers in law are the same as the tiniest parish. Some civil parishes are even called City Councils! this is a title that was awarded way back in history, by '[Royal Charter](#)'. Again, it makes little difference to their actual powers.

In some parts of England, and Wales, local government is arranged on a 'two-tier' system. The District councils and county councils are combined to make 'Unitary councils'.

Unitary Councils

Responsible for – **All the services** that would be provided by a **County Council** in a three-tier system, **plus** all the services that would be provided by the **district councils** too. **The district councils do not exist in a unitary area.**

Thus unitary councils provide: education, social services (including old folks homes), libraries, public transport, most main roads, trading standards, waste disposal, as well as waste collection, housing, the planning system (i.e. what gets built where, which is decided via the 'Local Plan'), leisure, some local roads, environmental health (e.g. noise pollution, flytipping), council tax collection, business rates collection, some benefits payments.

NAMING – unitary councils tend to have a name that is just relate to the former county council that they replaced. E.g. 'Wiltshire Council', 'Cornwall Council'. Sometimes, when a **large county is 'unitarised'**, the **big urban area becomes one unitary council**, and the remaining **rural area becomes a separate unitary**. This is what happened to Wiltshire (Swindon became a separate council), and to Dorset (where Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole became a single urban unitary, and the rural area became 'Dorset Council').

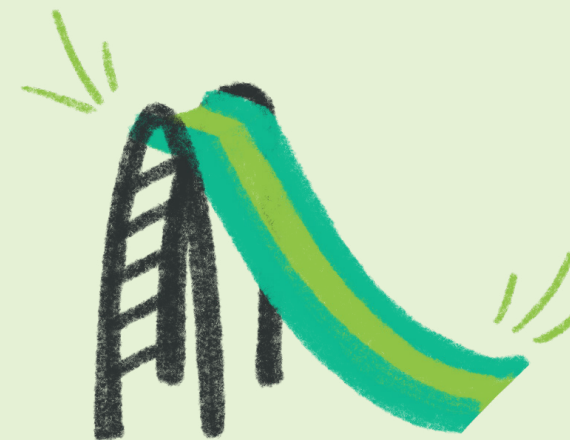
In the **north of England**, **unitary councils** tend to be called '**Metropolitan Borough Councils**'. Many south unitary councils are younger, having been formed since the mid 1990's. Most northern 'Metropolitan councils' were formed in the 1970's.

London is a special case. There are **26 councils** they're called '**London Boroughs**'. They have the powers of a unitary, but there is also a bigger body called the Greater London Authority that takes on some strategic planning and transport roles, which sits above them all. **London is almost entirely unparished.**



Civil Parishes (as many as 500 in a rural unitary council, and as few as zero in a large urban area).

Responsible for: local facilities like allotments, cemeteries, green spaces, playparks, bus shelters, public seating, public toilets, village halls. Sometimes also some footpaths, street lighting and large areas of towns or villages belong to the parish council, e.g. the market place itself. Civil parishes can also make a '**Neighbourhood Plan**', which is like a small scale '**Local Plan**'.



Northern Ireland is different to the rest of the UK. There are **11 'District Councils'**. As with District Councils in the three-tier areas of England, Northern Irish District Councils have responsibility for planning, waste and recycling services, leisure and community services, building control and local economic and cultural development. However, there is no County Council level above them. All highways, house building, education and health and social care functions are dealt with at the national level, along with the collection of business rates. There is no equivalent of civil parish, or community councils at all in Northern Ireland, and so this very local level of government is entirely absent.



Scotland is similar to Wales at the highest level. There are **32 principal local authorities**, all of which have the power and status of a **Unitary Council**. There are also **Community Councils** in Scotland, which replaced Parish Councils in 1975. However, the major difference is that these community councils in Scotland do not have legal powers of their own. Higher councils must consult them on certain matters, but in most respects they have less influence than their English and Welsh counterparts.

In **Wales**, the country entirely follows the two tier model shown on pages 8-9. All of **Wales is split into 22 councils** which either have the title '**County Council**' or '**County Borough Council**'. Their powers are the same as an English Unitary council, shown in diagram 2. Wales also has the equivalent of the parish council, with the same powers, but in Wales they are called 'Community Councils'. As in England, they are not always found in urban areas.



What do I do if I want to stand for election?

There are **elections** in a range of county councils, district councils and parish councils on **6 May 2021**. You can find out if your local councils are up for election by checking [here](#).

It's likely that, for district, county and unitary elections, you will be entering the race for this year's elections very late indeed. Many **local parties** will have started campaigning months ago, and will probably have their candidates chosen already. You could, of course, run as an **independent candidate**, but with only 11 weeks to go in the election cycle, you would have a lot of work to do to bring yourself to the attention of people across a whole ward or county division. You also need an **election agent**, to help keep track of the literature you produce and any money you spend (even if it's only £10 for a packet of paper). This might be a lot to take on for your first attempt at local politics.

Parish and Town councils (called **Community Councils** in Wales), however, are a very different proposition. They are often called the **'first tier' of local government**, because they are **closest to the communities that they serve**. For a young person in England or Wales who is interested in a more sustainable future, **parish and town councils are an excellent place for your first foray into local politics and decision making**, for several reasons.

- They tend to have **control over quite a bit of local green infrastructure** (parks, verges, cemeteries etc). These are excellent places to try different management regimes, like wildflower planting, leaving mowing until after seeding, community orchards, and tree planting.
- They tend to have a **good local 'brand'**, often accompanied by a website and newsletter, but they don't always use these assets in the best way. Most people in a community know about the town or parish council, but don't really understand what it does. You can capitalise on this level of recognition by getting onto your local council and developing projects that play to your strengths; such as communicating ways to take action on the climate emergency. **As a young person, your familiarity with social media is likely to be a breath of fresh air, and something the council would really like help with.**
- English Parishes and Welsh Community Councils have **some planning powers** of their own – **district and unitary councils have to consult them** on every planning application, and on the Local Plan. You can **help shape these responses** by asking for more sustainability features in new development. You could also work on things like **'village design guides'**, which indicate to developers **what sort of things are needed locally**, and even help write a **Neighbourhood Plan**, which could give more detail on sustainable planning for your area.

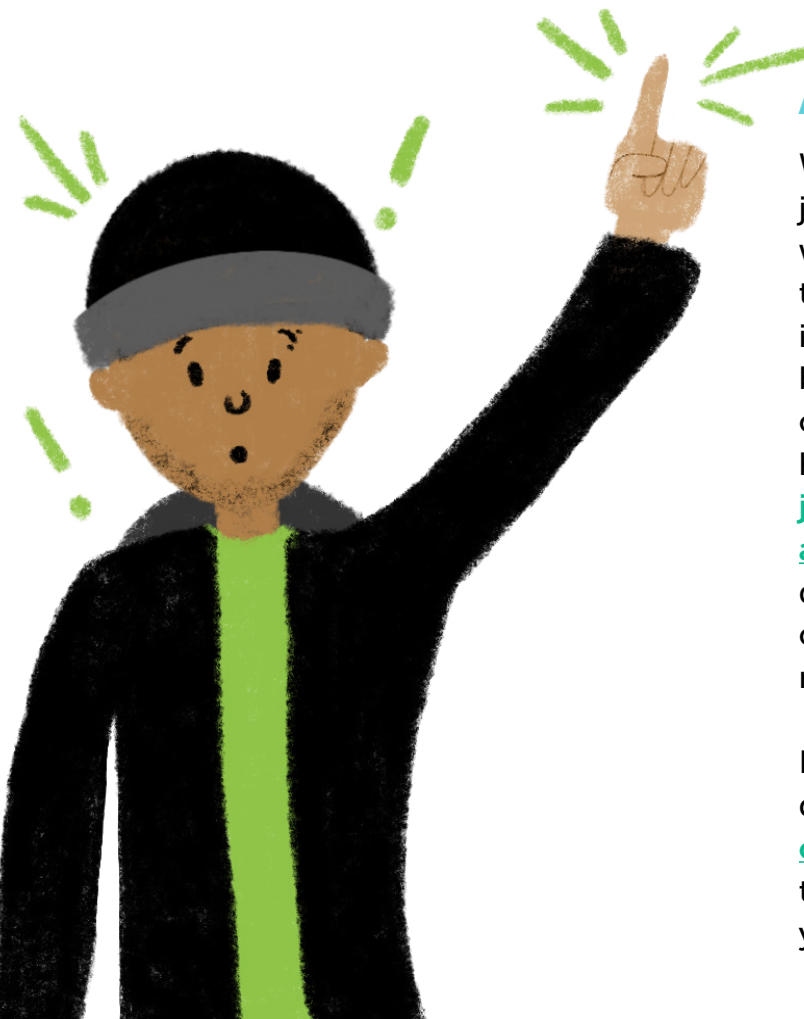
- **English parishes and Welsh Community Councils also have 'precept-raising powers'**. This means that a **small part of the Council Tax payment** from every house in your community goes back to the **Parish/Community council**. Many parishes do everything they can to avoid raising the precept, but there can be good reasons to do so. Perhaps you can drive forward a local consultation on raising the precept to ring-fence money for local environmental projects, like active travel, tree planting etc?
- Local councils tend to be **less overtly 'political'** than districts, unitaries and counties. If you want to run for your **parish council**, it's not at all unusual to just be an **independent candidate**. **You don't have to 'badge' yourself** as 'Green', 'Labour' etc, so you don't have to jump through hoops to join a political party or become an approved candidate for them. **You just stand as you, for what you believe in.** In some bigger town councils, there are political groupings, but even there, it's not unusual for people to stand as independents as well.
- Most importantly of all, parish and town councils currently suffer massively from a 'democratic deficit'. In the **May 2015** elections, **only 20% of English parishes** contested their vacancies!

If, for example, a council has eight seats for councillors and fewer than eight people put their names forward for nomination, they are duly elected, without competition. In many cases, councillors have stepped down or retired between elections, and nobody has come forward to fill their place. Many local councils thus carry several vacancies almost all the time. Your chances of getting elected at this level are therefore much higher than in a district or county.

A WORD OF WARNING.

While many parish and town councillors are lovely people, who just happen to be at the top end of the age spectrum and who would be thrilled to have younger town councillors working with them, there are bound to be some existing councillors who resist input from you or the change you want to bring. They may try to bamboozle you with 'The Standing Orders', or try to wear you out with tiresome procedures and make you feel like you don't have the life experience to do this work. But **young people have just as much right to represent their communities in this capacity as anyone else**. Don't be afraid to put yourself forward or ask questions. Your experiences as a young person living in the community give you the perspective you need to contribute and make a positive difference.

If you're worried about knowing what exactly a parish councillor does, and what skills you'd need, then the **National Association of Local Councils** (NALC) provides support, mentoring and training for new councillors, which you'll be able to sign up to if you get elected.



Okay, you've convinced me – I'm going to stand in my parish council elections.

What do I do next?

To stand for election, you must:

Be **18** on the day your nomination papers are submitted AND

1. be on the **Register of Electors** (the 'electoral roll') for the parish or parish ward that you are standing for, or;
2. have been **resident in the parish where you are standing** (or within 4.8 kilometres of it) for the whole 12 months leading up to nomination), or;
3. have been **working at an address in the parish** for the whole 12 months leading up to the nomination, or;
4. have been **renting a property in the parish** for the whole 12 months leading up to the nomination

It is possible for someone to actually qualify four times over, for example if they are on the electoral roll, work in the parish, and rent a property there that they have lived in for 12 months. But don't worry, you only need to be able to [tick one of the above](#).

To submit yourself for election, you can download the papers [here](#).

There are three papers that make up the nomination form:

1. the nomination form
2. a home address form
3. your consent to nomination

The nomination form has to also have the name and signature of one person who will act as your 'proposer' and one person who is your 'seconder'. Your proposer and seconder **must not** be related to you, they **must** be on the electoral roll for the ward/parish ward where you are standing for election, and they **must** be of voting age.

The full details of what you will need to do can be found [here](#).

This all sounds a bit complicated – where can I get more support and check I'm doing it right?

Every district council and unitary council runs the elections in their area. They are required to have a person working for the council whose job title is '**Returning Officer**'. This person oversees all the elections in that area. You can contact your council and **ask to speak to the Returning Officer**, or a member of their team, if you need help with filling out the forms for nomination etc.

Your Returning Officer will have to publish the '**Notice of Election**' not later than **25 working days before the poll**. This informs the community that there will be an election, and when people can start submitting nomination papers. After that time, you can submit nomination papers, which you will be able to do **until 4pm on the 19th working day before the poll**. Make sure you do this early, so you can get the Returning Officer to check your forms for mistakes, and make changes if you need to - **don't leave it to the last minute**.

Do I need to campaign, and how do I do that?

Under Covid-19 restrictions, door-to-door campaigning has been suspended since January, but Government has announced that **door to door campaigning and leafleting can start again from the 8 March 2021**. And of course, as well as hard copies that you put through doors, you can use social media, and put posters up. Talk to local shop owners and see if they will let you put up a poster in their window, or on any noticeboards they have.

There is talk of restrictions on campaigning being lifted in the next few weeks, so you may decide to print some leaflets or letters, and either hand deliver them or post them. Be aware that there are spending limits for all campaigns, even at the Parish level, so you have to make a note of what you spend and submit this to the Returning Officer after the election (even if you don't win!). These are sensible rules to stop people 'buying' elections by throwing money at them, but it does mean another form to fill in and a bit of record keeping. Make notes and keep receipts for things like packets of printer paper, stamps and envelopes, and printer ink. All the information on spending limits, and a form to submit, can be found [here](#).

A simple leaflet on no more than two sides of A4 would be plenty for a parish election. Just tell people **why you want to stand**, and **what you hope to change** or improve in your town or village if you win. Talk about **what the town means to you**, what **skills** you think you can bring to your local council, and the **attributes** you have (such as dedication, hard-working, good attention to detail etc). Put in a cheerful picture of yourself, and **just be honest**. Many people will be so pleased to see someone younger putting themselves forward that your leaflets will most likely be very well received.

An alternative that also works well is to write a handwritten letter introducing yourself, explaining why you are standing etc. Make copies of this and put those through people's doors, preferably in envelopes with actual addresses on them. People receive so very few real letters these days that this approach can really stand out, and as long as your handwriting is legible, the personal touch can be very impactful!

You don't have to send one to every house in your parish. You might just focus on a few streets. It's all down to how much effort you want to put in, and how competitive you think the election will actually be. You can ask your Returning Officer for details about whether there have been un-contested elections in your parish recently, to help you judge this.



'Young people have just as much right to represent their communities in this capacity as anyone else.'

Still not sure? Here's an inspirational case study to leave you with...

Joe Harris is the Liberal Democrat Leader of Cotswold District Council in Gloucestershire. At 28, he is the youngest council leader in the country. The Liberal Democrats took control of Cotswold District Council in May 2019 (which had previously been run by the Conservative Party for around 20 years). As Leader of Cotswold District Council, he is ultimately responsible for setting the direction of the council, working with a Cabinet of other councillors, (all of whom are definitely old enough to be his parents!). Joe has worked closely with his cabinet to create an entirely new corporate plan, which sets a new direction for the council. This plan has a central focus on the Climate Emergency, the provision of genuinely affordable housing, better access to health and wellbeing facilities, green spaces for all, and building back a green economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. None of these were central to the work of the council pre-2019.

At 28, Joe is young compared to most local politicians, but still older than most participants and alumni of the Our Bright Future Programme. It's worth noting though, that the 2019 election win was not the beginning of Joe's political career in this part of the world. Joe had been elected to public office when he was just 18, getting himself elected to Cirencester Town Council (a civil parish, and the largest town in the Cotswolds). He became interested in local politics after he was mugged in the town centre and felt that the council and police had not done enough to make the local area safe.

Not long after becoming elected to the Town Council, Joe became the Mayor of Cirencester, and was the youngest mayor in the country at that time. Over the next few years, he then successfully stood in both the Cotswold District Council and Gloucestershire County Council elections, which means he is one of a select group of 'three hatted' politicians who sits on every level of local government in his local area, and was instrumental in building up his local party's support base and finding new people who also wanted to stand for election, which ultimately led to his party gaining control of the District Council as a whole.

By getting involved in local politics in a very direct way, at a very young age, Joe's influence on his local area has been immense. The voice of young people is now central to the work that the council does, not least because the leader is himself, a young person! Environmental issues, affordable housing, sustainable jobs, and health and wellbeing are central to the council's plans, all of which are the sorts of things that young people value in local politics, but often feel are ignored by the current cohort of their councillors.

'The voice of young people is now central to the work that the council does, not least because the leader is himself, a young person!'

How to host a hustings

This guide was written by Emily Beever, Senior Development Officer at YouthLink Scotland and Dawn Patterson, Youth Project Officer at Ulster Wildlife



There's an election going on in my area. How can I have my voice heard?

All children and young people have a right to have their voice heard on matters that affect them, including the environment. Almost half of young people aged 18-24 in the UK think the environment is one of the top issues facing the country ([YouGov, 2019](#)).

Young people in Scotland and Wales can now vote from age 16 in local council and Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly elections, and age 18 for UK-wide elections. In England and Northern Ireland, young people can vote from age 18.



What is a hustings?

A hustings is a type of event usually **run in the lead up to an election**, whether that is **local or national**. It is an opportunity for members of the public to speak directly to people who might end up being decision makers for their area, like a local councillor or Member of Parliament (MP), and ask them questions about what they would do if elected. It is **good practice to invite all candidates running in your area** so that audience members can hear a variety of perspectives and opinions.

Hustings can have a **broad scope** or they can be **more focused**, for example focusing on only environmental or educational issues. They can also have a **specific audience** like young people, people from a specific organisation or religion.

A hustings is a great way for young people to hear directly from politicians and for politicians to hear directly from young people.

1. GET A TEAM TOGETHER

It's a good idea to have some people to help you out when organising the hustings event. Social media and organising skills would be particularly helpful.



2. DECIDE THE FORMAT OF YOUR EVENT AND A DATE/TIME/LOCATION

This could be online or in-person. In-person hustings may involve venue costs.

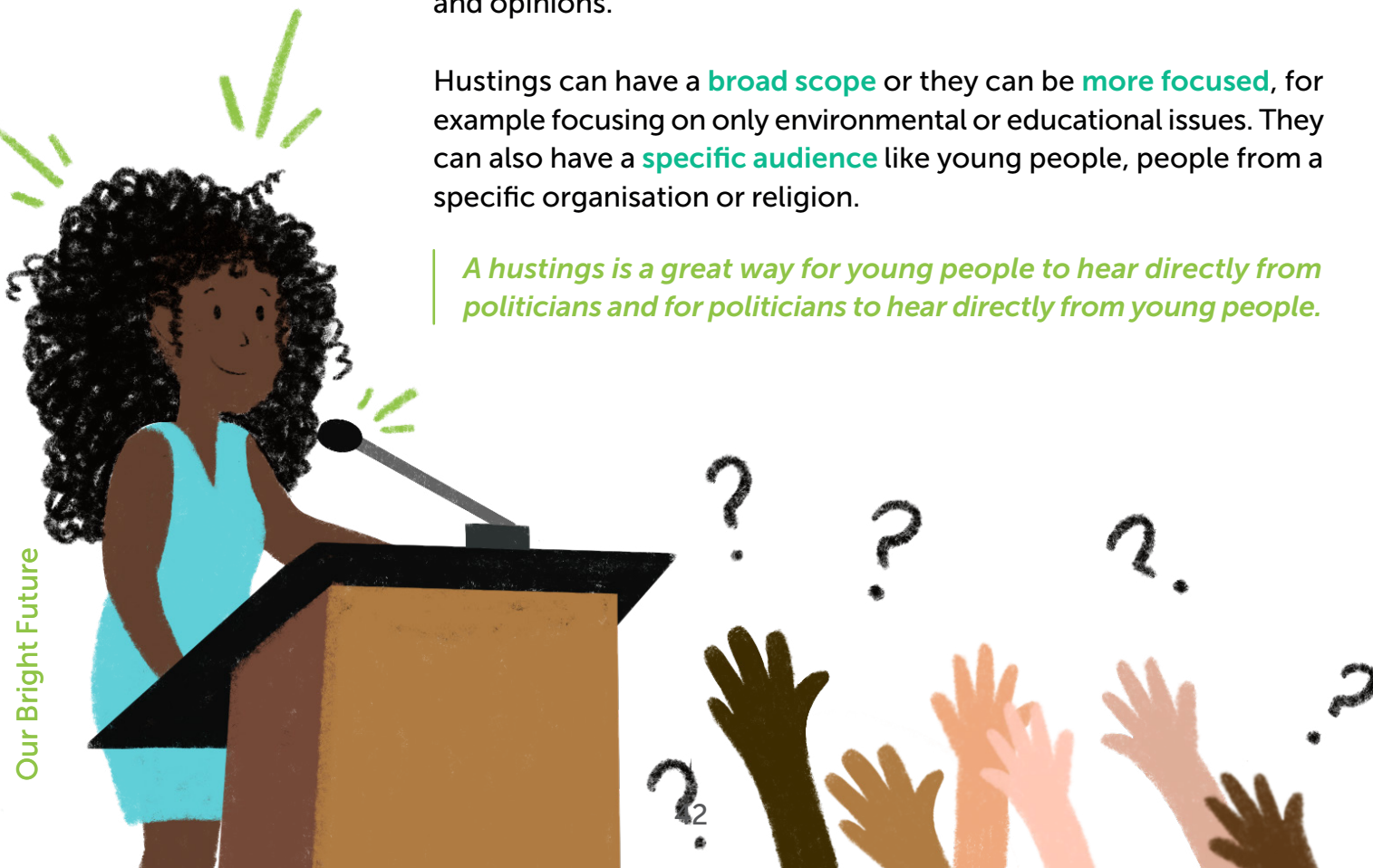
Something to consider for both online and in-person events is **accessibility**. **Can everyone take part** or are there barriers to participation (physical barriers like stairs or other barriers like not being able to understand what candidates are saying)?

There's different things to consider when planning your hustings event – will you set the **questions** in advance or only take questions from the audience? How long will your event be? This will depend on your event type, audience and candidate availability but around an hour to an hour and a half generally works well.

Why not include a voter registration drive as part of your event? This could be as simple as having one person at the venue with **paper copies of voter registration forms** or sending all attendees a **link to the online voter registration page**.

Thinking about the practicalities early on will help your planning process.

[Welcome to Your Vote – Electoral Commission](#)



3. FIND OUT YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATES AND INVITE THEM

Check the websites or social media for the different parties running in your area. If you still can't find the information, you could address your invitation to the local branch of the political party and ask them to forward it on to the correct person.

In the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, there are both constituency candidates (candidates for your specific area) and list candidates (candidates for your larger region). It depends on the focus for your hustings event who you might invite but the constituency candidates are a good place to start.

4. DECIDE ON A MODERATOR AND HELP THEM PREPARE

Anyone can take on this role but they should be fair and make sure all candidates are treated equally. You could also have a [panel of moderators](#) to share the workload. They also need to be able to keep the event to time. Preparation for the moderator should include:

- Knowing all the candidate names and parties
- Some back-up questions for the candidates
- A [basic script to keep to time](#) and know any important information to give the audience

5. PROMOTE YOUR EVENT

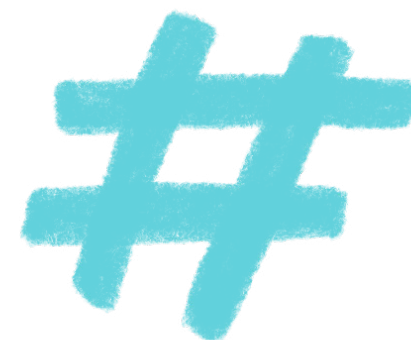
[Promotion](#) will depend on who your event is aimed at and where it is going to be held. For example, if you are holding it at your school or local community centre, [posters](#) might get the attention of other young people. If your event is happening online, perhaps focusing on [social media](#) is the best method.

Remember to [involve local media](#) to report on your event. If you do this, make sure you tell the candidates speaking at your event.



5 SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS FROM YOUNG ACTIVISTS

1. Keep your message simple, clear and succinct.
2. Create a list of relevant social media accounts (political representatives, community voices, local press, charities campaigning on relevant issues etc). Tag them regularly when appropriate.
3. Use real voices. Ask people in your group if they have a relevant experience or an opinion they would like to share.
4. Do not engage in online spats. If there are negative comments or trolling, address po-litely with a factual comment then leave the conversation. Always make a point of thanking those who supported you.
5. Plan your social media campaign and content as much as possible, however be flexible and react, or adapt to, any last-minute changes or breaking news. If you decide to schedule posts, keep an eye on what's trending in case you need to edit your content.



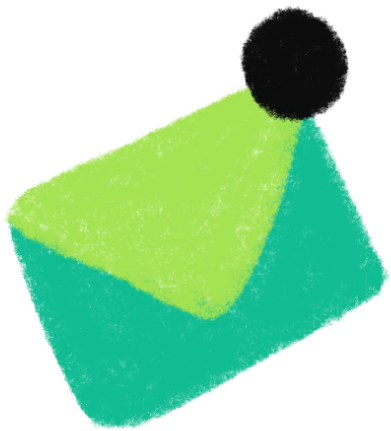
6. HOLD YOUR EVENT

Good luck! You've worked really hard to get to this stage – well done to you and your team! **Social media** during the event is a great way to spread the message from the different candidates for those who can't be there.



7. AFTER YOUR EVENT

Don't lose the momentum after all your great work! **Follow up** from your event by emailing or writing to the candidates who participated to thank them for their participation and to remind them about your key messages and asks. After the election, you could even invite those elected to visit your project or organisation, or to engage further in your campaign.



CONGRATULATIONS!

You now know how to host your own hustings event. [Good luck](#) with your planning and we hope your event is a success.

Thank
you
~~~~~  
~~~~~



Our Bright Future is an ambitious and innovative partnership led by The Wildlife Trusts which brings together the youth and environmental sectors. This £33 million programme, funded by the [National Lottery Community Fund](#), is formed of 31 [projects](#) across the UK. Each project is helping young people aged 11-24 gain vital skills and experience and improve their wellbeing. At the same time, they act as catalysts for delivering change for their local environment and community; whilst contributing to a greener economy.

