Easy read guide to voting and registering to vote
A support pack for people with a learning disability, their support workers and families to help understand what voting is, why it is so important, and how they can register to vote.
### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Guidance for use</td>
<td>How to get the most out of this guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>This section is for supporters and not in easy read</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The importance of voting</td>
<td>This guide explains why voting is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>This section is for supporters and not in easy read</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What is voting?</td>
<td>This guide explains what voting is and how it works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Guide to registering to vote</td>
<td>This guide explains how someone can register to vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Voting by post</td>
<td>This guide explains how someone completes a form that allows them to vote by post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Voting by proxy</td>
<td>This guide explains how someone completes a form that allows them to vote by proxy (this means someone votes on behalf of someone else)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Voting by polling station</td>
<td>This guide explains how someone votes at a polling station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Terms we use in this pack</td>
<td>This guide explains specific useful words, like councillor, ballot box and polling station, which you will come across in this pack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Frequently asked questions</td>
<td>Questions that may arise whilst working through the guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>This section is for supporters and not in easy read</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Flash cards</td>
<td>Clear visual prompts to help people remember key details about voting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reminder cards</td>
<td>Cards to put on an individual’s front door to remind them about key dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(when to register to vote, when to post their ballot if voting by post and attending a polling station if voting in person)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Guidance for use

How to get the most out of this guide

This section is for supporters and not in easy read
This resource pack should help people with a learning disability to understand voting and politics. It helps people with a learning disability and their support workers to understand what voting is, why it is so important and how you can vote. Its aim is to encourage as many people with a learning disability to register to vote and finally vote.

This pack has been developed in partnership with Cabinet Office and people with a learning disability. It has been designed as a collection of resources.

These guides can be used as a way to start a conversation about voting, politics and important issues. There should be enough material to cover any question that may arise when discussing these issues.

If you are supporting someone to register to vote, it is recommended you start by reading The importance of voting, Frequently asked questions and Guide to registering to vote.

There is no need to use every guide in the pack.

Anyone who registers to vote will need to register again every time they move home. They are also obliged to complete an annual canvass every year and check all of their details are still the same.

Once someone has registered to vote, there are different ways to vote. We talk about these in this pack.

Mencap will also help local groups to organise voter registration awareness workshops.
The importance of voting

This guide explains why voting is important

This section is for supporters and not in easy read
Learning disability issues are regularly discussed by members of the main political parties.

In the last six years, learning disability has been mentioned in debates or official letters from MPs over 1,200 times. That is over three times a week.¹

Over 150 MPs supported Mencap’s last campaign to encourage people with a learning disability to vote.

The Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 made it illegal to discriminate with respect to employment, services, education and transport based on someone’s disability.

In 2010, the Act was brought into the Equality Act, making it illegal to discriminate based on someone’s age, gender, partnership, belief, sexual orientation or disability.

Over 150 years ago only one in seven men could vote.
Now, everyone over the age of 18 can vote.

Over half the UK voted during the 2015 General Election.

In 2005, fewer than 1 in 5 people with a learning disability voted in the General Election.²

In 2010, almost 1 in 3 people with a learning disability voted in the General Election.³

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1. An approximate figure from TheyWorkForYou.com from a basic search of learning disabilities.
What is voting?

This guide explains what voting is and how it works
What is voting?

This guide will explain what **voting** is and why it is **important**.

It’s important to remember that you must register to vote in order to vote!

The people who run the country are called politicians.

They make important decisions that can affect people’s lives.

For example, the Government makes important decisions that can change:

- Hate crime laws
- How people with a learning disability get support
- How people with a learning disability get healthcare.
What is voting?

Different politicians have different ideas about the best way to run the country.

Most politicians are elected. This means people get to decide which politicians they would like to run the country.

People call this an election.

You can decide which politicians run the country by voting.

Voting is one of the best ways for people to have their voice heard by people in power.
What is voting?

Politicians are usually part of a political party. There are lots of political parties. Each party is made up of politicians who agree on how the country should be run. You can also vote for candidates who are not part of a political party. They stand as independent candidates.

In England, some political parties are:

- The Conservative Party
- The Green Party
- The Labour Party
- The Liberal Democrats
- The UK Independence Party.

In Northern Ireland, some political parties are:

- Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
- Democratic Unionist Party
- Green Party in Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Conservatives
- Progressive Unionist Party
- Sinn Féin
- Ulster Unionist Party
- UK Independence Party.

In Wales, some political parties are:

- Welsh Conservative Party
- Welsh Green Party
- Welsh Labour
- Welsh Liberal Democrats
- Plaid Cymru
- UK Independence Party.
What is voting?

In Scotland, some political parties:

- Conservative and Unionist Party
- Labour Party
- Scottish Green Party
- Scottish Liberal Democrats
- Scottish National Party
- UK Independence Party.
People with a learning disability have the same rights to vote as everybody else. If you are over 18 years old you may be able to vote.

People with a learning disability should vote so they have a say about things that affect their lives.
Guide to registering to vote

This guide explains how someone can register to vote
This guide explains how to register to vote.

It is important that you register to vote. You cannot vote unless you register.

You can find out more about voting on the Mencap and Electoral Commission websites:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting
www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

Elections allow you to choose who you want to run the country and to run your local area.

Online registration
To register to vote, you can go online to www.gov.uk/register-to-vote or fill in a form. A copy of this form is at the end of this guide. Please register to vote!
Completing an electoral registration paper form

The form has four sections:
- Your name
- Your address
- Other information
- Declaration.

Your name

You will need to write your first names, your last name and your nationality.

You may have changed your name in the last 12 months. For example, you may have become married.

If you have changed your name, you should write your old name and when you changed your name.

You will need to write your date of birth.

Your address

Next, fill in your address and post code in the Address section.

You may have changed address in the last 12 months. You should write your previous address if you have moved house in the last 12 months.
Other information
Please write your nationality. You may have more than one nationality. For example, you may be English and Bangladeshi. You should write all your nationalities.

Please fill in your National Insurance number. You should be able to find this on your payslip or any letters about your tax or your benefits.

Declaration
Next, fill in the Declaration section.

You will need to sign your name or make your mark and write the date.
4.4 Guide to registering to vote

Now you need to post the form to your local electoral services team. They will make sure you hear about future elections before they happen.

Here is how you find out where to post the form:

- You can call Mencap Direct on 0808 808 1111.
  - Tell the operator you would like to find out the address for your local electoral services team.
  - The operator will ask for your postcode. They will then search online for the address of your local electoral services team.

- Or you can search for your local electoral services team on www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

- Once you have registered you will be sent a poll card when there is an election.
What happens next?
Once you have registered to vote, you can vote in the local and General Elections.

Local elections let people choose which politicians will run your local area.

General Elections happen every five years. These elections let people choose their MP.

Need help?
You can find out more about voting on the Mencap and Electoral Commission websites:
www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting
www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

If you get stuck or have any questions, you can call the Mencap team on 020 7696 5583.
There are three ways to vote:

• **At a polling station** - Before an election you will be posted a poll card. Your poll card will tell you where your polling station is. Your local polling station is where you can vote in person. Polling stations are often at churches, community centres and schools. However they can be in all sorts of places.

• **By post** - You will be sent a form similar to the registration form. You should fill out the postal vote application and send it to your local electoral services team. Before elections, you will receive a ballot paper in the post. It will tell you when to post it.

• **By proxy** - Voting by proxy means choosing someone else to vote for you. You need to fill in a new form to choose who will vote for you. This person can visit a polling station or apply for a postal vote in order to vote on your behalf.
Voting by post

This guide explains how someone completes a form that allows them to vote by post
This guide explains **how to apply to vote by post**.

You can find out more about voting on the Mencap and Electoral Commission websites:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting  
www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

This guide includes the form you will need to fill in to register to vote.

**You need to register to vote every time you move home.** To do this, you can register online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote or fill out the registration form at the back of the pack. You can find out more information about registering to vote in section 4 of this guide.

First, complete a voter registration form.

If you would like to vote by post, you can tick the box on your registration form.

You can also call your local electoral services team at your Local Authority to say you would like to vote by post.

You will be sent another form. The postal vote application will be very similar to the electoral registration form.
5.2 Voting by post

Completing the Postal Vote Application

Address
First, fill out the Address section.
You will need to write the address where you are registered to vote.

About You
Next, fill out the About You section.
Write your name.

How long do you want a postal vote for?
Fill out the ‘How long do you want a postal vote for?’ section.
You will need to say for how long you would like to vote by post.

You can vote by post until further notice. This means you will be able to say later when you don’t want to vote by post anymore.

You can choose to vote by post for a certain length of time. For example, you could say you only want to vote by post between 2014 and 2020.

You can choose to vote by post for a specific election. You will need to give the date and type of the election.
Address for postal ballot paper
Next, fill out the ‘Address for postal ballot paper’ section.

Write the address to which you would like your ballot paper sent.

Declaration
Finally, fill out the ‘Your declaration’ section.

Write your date of birth, sign in the box or make your mark and write the date you signed the form.

Post your form to the address provided.
What happens next
Before elections, you will receive a ballot paper in the post. This is a form that shows you who you can vote for.

The ballot paper will tell you where you should post the paper.

You can also take your ballot paper to your local polling station on election day.

Need help?
You can find out more about voting on the Mencap and Electoral Commission websites:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting
www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

If you get stuck or have any questions, you can call the Mencap team on 020 7696 5583.
Voting by proxy

This guide explains how someone completes a form that allows them to vote by proxy (this means someone votes on behalf of someone else)
This guide explains how to register to vote by proxy.

Registering by proxy means that you choose someone to vote for candidates on your behalf.

You can find out more about voting on the Mencap website:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting

First, register to vote, either online here at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote or by completing the electoral registration form in this guide.

On the form you will be asked to tick a box if you would like more information about voting by proxy. You should tick this box if you want to register to vote by proxy.

You can also call your local electoral services to say you would like to vote by proxy.

You will be sent a form called ‘Application to vote by proxy due to disability’. The form will be very similar to the electoral registration form.

This guide includes the form you will need to fill in to register to vote.

You need to register to vote every time you move home.
6.2 Voting by proxy

Now fill in the following sections

About You
First, fill out the ‘About you’ section. You do not have to write your telephone number or your email address.

You will need to write the address where you are registered to vote.

About Your Proxy
Next, fill out the details of the person you have chosen as proxy.

How long do you want a proxy vote for?
Next, fill out the ‘How long do you want a proxy vote for?’ section.

You will need to say for how long you would like to vote by proxy.

You can choose to vote by proxy until further notice. This means you will say when you don’t want to vote by proxy anymore.

You can choose to vote by proxy for a certain length of time. For example, you could say you only want to vote by proxy between 2014 and 2020.

You can vote by proxy for a specific election. You will need to give the date and the type of election.
Why do you want a proxy vote?
Next, fill out the ‘Why do you want a proxy vote?’ section.

You can vote by proxy for many reasons including:
- You are registered blind
- You get the higher rate of the mobility component of the personal independence payment
- You need to work away from home.

You can also explain why you think you should have a proxy vote. You will need someone to support your explanation.

The following people can support your application:
- A doctor, dentist, pharmacist or nurse
- A social worker
- A manager of a residential care home.

Need help?
You can find out more about voting on the Mencap and Electoral Commission websites:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting
www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

If you get stuck or have any questions, you can call the Mencap team on 020 7696 5583.
Voting at a polling station

This guide explains how someone votes at a polling station
This guide explains **how to vote at a polling station**.

You can find out more about voting on the Mencap and Electoral Commission websites:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting
www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

First, register to vote, either online here at [www.gov.uk/registertovote](http://www.gov.uk/registertovote) or by completing the electoral registration form in this guide. When you have registered to vote, you can vote in person at a polling station.

Before an election, you will be sent a poll card. This will tell you where your polling station is.
7.2 Voting at a polling station

Polling stations are often at churches, community centres and schools. However they can be in all sorts of places.

Polling stations are usually open from 7am to 10 pm.

It can be useful to take your poll card with you.

When you arrive at a polling station, you will be asked to give your name and address.

You will be given a ballot paper. This is a form that shows who you can vote for.

Different elections have different rules about how many people you can vote for. This will be explained on your ballot paper.
Voting at a polling station

There will be people working at the polling station. You can ask them to help you read and understand your ballot paper. **They can also help you fill in your ballot paper.**

You can go to a polling station with a support worker. **They can also help you fill in your ballot paper.**

Everyone who is registered to vote has the right to vote.

You can find out more about voting on the Mencap and Electoral Commissions websites:

- [www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting](http://www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting)
- [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk)

If you get stuck registering to vote or need help to understand voting, you can call the Mencap team on **020 7696 5583.**
Terms we use in this pack

This guide explains specific useful words, like councillor, ballot box and polling station which you will come across in this guide.
Annual Canvass
You will be sent a form each year from your Local Authority to check all of your details are still the same. Your support worker or family can help check this information.

Constituents
These are people in an area who are represented by locally elected politicians.

Councillor
These are local politicians who make decisions about what happens in the area where you live. For example, they will decide how recycling works in your local area.

Election
This is when anyone who is registered to vote and is 18 years old or older gets to vote. Elections decide who should speak for us and make choices for us. There are General Elections, local elections and European Parliament elections.

Electoral Register
The electoral register is the list of everyone that is allowed to vote in elections. You need to be on the electoral register to be able to vote.

Government
The Government is usually the political party that gets the highest number of MPs at the General Election. Sometimes political parties form a Coalition Government. This is when political parties work together to form a Government.
8.2 Terms we use in this pack

Local council
The council is the name for a group of local politicians called councillors. Your local councillors make decisions about what happens where you live. There is also a council building that people sometimes just call the council.

Local election
A local election decides who your local council will be and which political parties make up your local council.

Member of Parliament
Members of Parliament (MPs) are politicians who are elected to represent your area at the Houses of Parliament. They help make decisions that affect the whole country.
Parliament
Parliament is where new laws are discussed and agreed. Parliament meets at the Palace of Westminster next to Big Ben.

Political Parties
A political party is a group of people who think the country should be run in a certain way. Politicians are usually in political parties. There are also candidates that are independent from political parties.

Politician
Politicians are elected by people voting for them. They make important decisions that can impact on most people’s lives. Different politicians have different ideas about the best ways to run the country.
Polling station
A polling station is a place where you go to vote. Polling stations are often at churches, community centres and schools. However, they can be in all sorts of places. You will be told where your nearest polling station is on your polling card.

Referendum
This is when people vote yes or no on an important decision. You don’t elect a politician.

UK Parliamentary General Election
A General Election decides which political party or parties will govern the country. The political party that has the most MPs elected usually wins the election. They will usually become the Government.

Voting
Voting means that you and other people choose who represents you on a council or in Parliament. In politics, voting happens during an election. Voting is very important. It is one of the best ways to get your voice heard by some of the most important people running the country.
Frequently asked questions

This gives answers to some questions that may come up as someone goes through these guides.

This section is for supporters and not in easy read.
What if I don’t believe voting is important?

We hope we can show that voting is very important.

Even if you do not see the importance of voting, the person you support may want to vote. Therefore, you should support them to vote.

It is important you understand how to talk about what voting means and how it can affect the issues people care about.

If you are asked about why you vote and who you vote for, you do not have to disclose any information.

If you are comfortable talking about why you do or do not vote, you should feel free to discuss this with the person you support.

What happens if the person I support does not know if they are registered or not?

If you and the person you support are unsure if they are already registered they can check with their local electoral services team. To contact your local electoral services team, go to www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

Re-registering a person who is already registered will not cause a problem. If in doubt, register online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote or fill out the registration form at the back of this guide.
What happens if the person I support doesn’t want to register or vote?

Please explain how important it is to vote and how it can help people to have their views heard.

You can use our What is voting? and The importance of voting guides to help explain this.

It is important to point out that most people (including people with a learning disability) have the right to vote and voting impacts on who runs the country.
9.3

How can I support someone at a polling station?

You can visit a polling station with the person you support.

You are allowed to help the person you support complete their ballot paper. This includes reading out and explaining the choices available and marking the ballot paper on behalf of the person you support.

There should be a Presiding Officer on duty. They can answer any further questions you might have. You should talk to them first – they will ask you to sign a form saying that you will be supporting someone to vote.
I am a support worker. How do I talk about political parties without showing bias?

You may work for an organisation such as Mencap, which is apolitical, meaning it does not support any political party. These organisations want to improve the lives of people with a learning disability with the help of whoever is in Government.

You must not tell the person they support how they should vote.

You can present them with the choice of parties by referring to page six of our What Is Voting document and information about who is standing in their area.

It is recommended you mention the leader of each political party and help the person you support to find out more information on the parties’ websites.
You can find the websites for these political parties here:

The Conservative Party  
www.conservatives.com

The Democratic Unionist Party - Northern Ireland  
www.mydup.com/

The Green Party  
www.greenparty.org.uk

The Labour Party  
www.labour.co.uk

The Liberal Democrats  
www.libdems.org.uk

The Scottish National Party  
www.snp.org.uk

Plaid Cymru - the party for Wales  
www.plaid.cymru

The UK Independence Party  
www.ukip.org

It’s important to note that there are more political parties. There are also candidates independent of political parties. You can find out more information about which parties have candidates in your area by visiting your Local Authority’s website closer to elections.

Mencap will post links to any easy-read manifestos, as they become available, on its website. Mencap will also post links via its email alerts. If you would like to receive email alerts please contact Mencap.
How do I make sure the person I support has the ability to make a meaningful democratic decision?

We do not want to make assumptions about the ability of individuals. This guide has tried to make voting, democracy and politics as accessible as possible with the information given.

It is best to address voting by explaining the various political parities and politics in general as you would explain any other complex decision.

It is best to involve anyone else who is usually involved in supporting the individual to make complex decisions. This will ensure that everyone who offers support understands how the issue of voting has been explained.

If the person you support wants to vote, you should support them to do so.

It is important to remember that it may take some time to develop a good understanding of the political process and how registering to vote is relevant. It is important to carry on a conversation around politics when relevant. (For example, when the Prime Minister is on TV or when someone talks about their local services).
Where can I find the forms I need?

The local electoral services team at your Local Authority should be able to send you all the forms you need to register to vote, to vote via post and to vote via proxy.

You can find details for your local electoral services team at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk. Your local electoral services team is part of your local council.

You can also visit www.aboutmyvote.co.uk to find the forms you might need. You can use the search function to find postal, proxy and large print registration forms.

You can also register to vote online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

What if I get stuck at any point?

If you get stuck at any point, you can call Mencap Direct on 0808 808 1111

You can also email Mencap at help@mencap.org.uk
9.8 Frequently asked questions

Who can register?

You can register to vote in the UK if you are:

• resident (usually live in the UK), and

• aged 16 or over (but you will not be able to vote until you are 18).

You must also be either:

• a British, Irish or European Union citizen, or

• a Commonwealth citizen who has leave to remain in the UK or who does not require leave to remain in the UK.

What happens next?

The Local Elections for some Local Authorities in England will be on 5 May 2016. To vote in this election you must be registered to vote 12 days before.
Flash cards

These flash cards aim to explain politics to anyone who learns best through pictures and visual displays.

These cards can be used to fit each person’s abilities and the situation. There is no right or wrong way to use the flash cards.

For example, the card showing the Houses of Parliament could be used to remind someone where MPs debate issues.

Alternatively, the card showing Parliament could be used to see if an individual knows the name of the building. This could be used as a way to gauge their general understanding of politics.

We have provided some prompt questions on the back of each card to suggest how each card could be used to relay more information about politics.
Questions you could ask:

What do MPs do in Parliament?

Answer: Debate and discuss things in Parliament such as health and education.
Flash cards

10.5

Contact information
email: help@mencap.org.uk
telephone: 020 7696 5583
Mencap Direct: 0808 808 1111

Easy read guide to registering to vote and voting
Questions you could ask:

Where are laws made?

Answer: Parliament makes laws.
Flash cards

Contact information
email: help@mencap.org.uk
telephone: 020 7696 5583
Mencap Direct: 0808 808 1111

Easy read guide to registering to vote and voting
Questions you could ask:

What do MPs do?

Answer: Represent the views of their constituents, including you.
Questions you could ask:

What do MPs do?

Answer: Speak up for their local area.
Questions you could ask:

Where do MPs debate issues?

Answer: The House of Commons, part of the Houses of Parliament.
Flash cards

Contact information
email: help@mencap.org.uk
telephone: 020 7696 5583
Mencap Direct: 0808 808 1111

Easy read guide to registering to vote and voting
Questions you could ask:

What do MPs do?

Answer: Talk to local people.
Register to vote

Only one person can register to vote using this form.

Use black ink and write in CAPITALS or go online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

Your name and address
Forename(s)

Surname

Your address

Postcode

Do you live at another address?
☐ No ☐ Yes

Changed your name in the last 12 months?
☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes, please give us your previous name.

Please tell us the date you changed your name (DD MM YYYY).

Moved in the last 12 months?
☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes, please give any previous address where you have lived during the last year.

Postcode

If this address was overseas, were you registered in the UK as an overseas voter?
☐ No ☐ Yes

Your date of birth (DD MM YYYY)

If you don’t know your exact date of birth, please give the date of birth you put on other official documents (for example, your passport or driving licence) or tick one of the boxes.

If we have printed information which is incorrect, please cross it out and write the correct information.

If you also live at another address don’t give us the address now, but we may ask you for more information later.

For example, you may have got married.

Don’t know your exact date of birth?

Please give the date of birth you put on other official documents (for example, your passport or driving licence) or tick one of the boxes.

Go online

You can fill in this form at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote
Your nationality

If you have more than one nationality, please include them all. You can only register to vote in the UK if you have leave to remain. We may check your immigration status with the Home Office before we include you on the electoral register.

Your National Insurance number

You may find this on your payslip, or on official letters about tax, pensions or benefits.

If you cannot tell us your National Insurance number, we may need to ask you for proof of your identity. We will contact you about this, and it may take longer to deal with your application.

Don’t know your date of birth, nationality or National Insurance number?

Please tell us why.

Contact details

Telephone number(s)

Email address (if you have one) in CAPITALS

You don’t have to give us your contact details, but if you do it will help us if we need to contact you about your registration.

The open register

☐ I don’t want my name and address to be included in the open register.

There’s more information about the open register on page 4 of this form.

Can’t vote in person?

If you are unable to go to the polling station in person on polling day, please choose how would you like to vote and we will send you a form.

☐ By post

☐ By proxy (someone voting on your behalf)

You can also download an application form at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk.

Declaration

To the best of my knowledge, the information in this form is true.
I understand that the information I have given on this form will be used on the electoral register.
I understand that if I do not make an application for registration when required to do so I could face a fine of £80.
I understand that it is an offence to knowingly give false information in this form, and that I could face a fine of up to £5,000 and/or up to six months in prison.

Signature

Date (DD MM YYYY)

Now sign and return the form

Send the signed form in the pre-paid envelope – or to the address on page 1 of this form.
Reminder cards

Cards to put on an individual’s front door to remind them about key dates (when to register to vote, when to post their ballot if voting by post and attending a polling station if voting in person)
Don’t forget to **register to vote** and post the form.
You need to do this by...
Don’t forget to **post your vote** if you are voting by post. You need to do this by...
Don’t forget to vote!
You need to visit a polling station on...
Contact us

Democratic Engagement Team
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Telephone: 029 2074 7588

This guide is also available to download at www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting

Mencap provide a wide range of services and advice for people affected by learning disability, to find out more please contact:

Telephone: 0808 808 1111
Email: help@mencap.org.uk

Northern Ireland Learning Disability Helpline
Email: helpline.ni@mencap.org.uk

Wales Learning Disability Helpline
Email: helpline.wales@mencap.org.uk

#registertovote
@mencap_charity

facebook.com/Mencap

Charity number 222377 (England and Wales); SCO41079 (Scotland)
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