



An alliance of Disabled People
& our organisations in England

ROFA General Election Guide 2019

Introduction

The next UK General Election will take place on 12th December 2019. Traditionally disabled people have faced barriers to voting and democratic engagement. Although the Electoral Commission does not keep statistics on the percentage of disabled people who vote, anecdotal evidence from disabled people indicates multiple barriers including a lack of accessible information, inaccessible polling stations and society's failure to properly value the voices and choices of disabled people. In today's economic climate political decisions are having a direct and dramatic impact on the day to day lives of Deaf and Disabled people. Research shows that disabled people are being hit harder by the cuts than other people. This is despite the pre-existing link between disability and poverty and continuing discrimination. Our rights and interests are not being prioritised by politicians. If we want to change this, we need to make sure our voices are heard in the democratic process. Voting and getting involved in activity in the lead up to elections is one important way to do this.

Individuals may feel that none of the political parties properly represents their views but we still need to show them that we have a vote, that we use that vote and that we have a say in who is elected. Only then will politicians give more thought to the impacts on Deaf and Disabled people when they set policy and start to prioritise the issues that matter most to us.



Key Dates

- 6th November 2019: Dissolution of Parliament
- 14th November 2019: Nomination deadline
- 26th November 2019: Voter Registration Deadline, postal vote application deadline
- 4th December 2019: Proxy vote application deadline
- 12th December 2019: Polling Day (7am to 10pm)

More information: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/elections-and-voting/general/general-election-2019-timetable/>

Purdah

Purdah is the pre-election period in the United Kingdom. During this time, central and local government departments are prevented from making announcements about any new or controversial government initiatives, which could be seen to be advantageous to any candidates or parties in the forthcoming election, or which may commit any incoming new administration to policies which it would not otherwise support. The formal end of the parliamentary session is marked by what is known as 'prorogation'. This can occur before dissolution of Parliament or the House of Commons may decide that it will not prorogue. Purdah is now in place in the UK.

Information for Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs)

Individual Electoral Registration

The voter registration system has changed. Under the previous system voter registration was done on a household basis. This meant that one person could register everyone living in the same household on the electoral roll. Now it is up to each person over the 18 and eligible to vote to register themselves. Anyone wanting to check if they are on the electoral roll should contact the local electoral registration office at their local Council. To find their contact details go to:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk> and enter your postcode.

Individuals can register on-line or by post. In order to register you need to know your **National Insurance Number**. If you do not know your National Insurance Number, you will need to contact your local electoral registration office.

Not enough is being done by government to make sure people are registered to vote. This means it is more important than ever that Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations make sure our members know how to register and how to vote.

Registering to Vote

- To register online go to:
<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>
- To download and print out voter registration forms go to:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/register-to-vote-paper-forms>
- An easy read voter registration form is available at:
<https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/easy-read-guide-voting-general-election>
- Let your members know how to register to vote: include the Election on your groups' agendas; print out voter registration forms and make them available in your office and at meetings for your members; organise a stall to talk to the public about voter

registration; use social media to remind people following you about voter registration

Rights and access for disabled voters

All voters have a right to vote independently and in secret.

Local authorities have a duty to ensure polling stations do not disadvantage disabled people and that disabled voters are not offered a lower standard of service than other voters.

Polling station staff have a responsibility to explain what assistance is available to voters wishing to vote in person at their polling station.

A person who is registered to vote cannot be refused the opportunity to vote on the grounds of mental or physical incapacity.

Although everyone eligible to vote must be given the opportunity to vote there is no duty on local authorities to ensure that all polling stations are fully accessible. In the case of an inaccessible polling station the Presiding Officer will bring the ballot paper out to a disabled voter. Many disabled people consider this unsatisfactory. If you are aware of inaccessible places having been previously designated as polling stations, contact your local authority as soon as possible to request they explore alternatives.

If disabled voters have any problems on election day they should call their local authority to resolve the issue or call the Electoral Commission for further guidance on 020 7271 0592 or 020 7271 0728.

Disabled voters have a right to request:

- Assistance to mark the ballot paper. Disabled voters may request the assistance of the Presiding Officer at the polling station to mark the ballot paper for them. Alternatively, they can bring someone with them to provide this assistance. This person must either be an immediate family member over 18 years of age or a qualified elector.
- A tactile voting device. This is a plastic device that is fixed onto the ballot paper to assist people with visual impairment or limited dexterity.
- Large–print version of the ballot paper. A large-print copy of the ballot paper should be clearly displayed inside the polling station. Voters can

request to take this copy into the polling booth with them if needed for reference. The large-print copy cannot be used to vote on however.

- Assistant to voters who are unable to gain access to the polling station. Councils must have regard to access when designating polling places. If a disabled voter cannot physically access the polling station, the Presiding Officer must take the ballot paper to the voter.

This information is taken from www.electoralcommission.org.uk

If you become aware of any Deaf or Disabled voters whose voting access needs are not met do keep a record, support them to make an individual complaint but also get in touch with your local electoral office as the local DDPO to express concern and offer assistance.

Case Study: Merton Polling Station Access Audit

Barriers to voting and inaccessible polling stations in the local elections in May 2014 led to a number of concerns being raised with the presiding officers. As a result, the Council commissioned their local DDPO, Merton Centre for Independent Living, to carry out an access audit of the 13 polling stations where concerns had been raised. The audit template they used is available to download from <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/how-to-campaign/elections-and-voting/elections-and-voting/>.

The Lobbying Act – what it means for DDPOs

The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 brought in new rules governing activity in the run up to elections. For the December 2019 General Election, the “regulated” period began once the snap General Election was called, and will be in place until polling closes on the 12th of December. The regulations cover campaign activities taking place between these dates.

If your total spend on regulated campaign activity is going to be more than £20,000 in England or £10,000 in any of Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales you need to register with the Electoral Commission. If you are joint working with other organisations/campaigns, then it is the total combined spend on regulated campaign activity that determines whether or not you need to register.

To be covered by the rules your planned activities need to pass two tests:

1) The Purpose Test:

This is whether your campaigning activity can reasonably be regarded as intending to influence voters as to how they vote. This includes influencing people how to vote according to the positions different candidates or parties hold with respect to certain issues or policies, eg disability. An organisation’s activities could be acting in line with charity law and still meet the purpose test because although the organisation is not stating a preference for a particular party or candidate, the information presented by the organisation can be reasonably regarded as intending to influence the way a voter votes.

2) The public test:

This is met if planned activities meet the purpose test and are aimed at the public, for example if materials and information are available to the general public rather than only disseminated among members, for example social media or website posts.

Activities that meet these two tests occurring within the regulated period are known as ‘regulated campaign activity’. Regulated campaign activity could include production of election materials, media events, any transport in connection with publicising your campaign and staff time spent on campaign activity.

(For more information see Inclusion London’s briefing “Non-party Political Campaigning –implications of the Lobbying Act available at <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/how-to-campaign/elections-and-voting/elections-and-voting/>”).

Hustings are NOT necessarily included within regulated campaigning activities and there is a specific ‘Situations and procedures’ factsheet produced by the Electoral Commission about hustings that explains this.

In order to pass the test as a ‘nonselective’ hustings ALL candidates or parties standing must be invited and all of them must be given an equal chance to participate unless you can present impartial reasons as to why only some parties or candidates have been chosen. This could include resources and practicalities constraining numbers of invitees, security concerns or prominence of some parties over others. It is unlikely that local DDPOs will be affected by these rules but it is also important that DDPOs understand the changes.

Inclusion London has produced a longer briefing on the Lobbying Act which can be found at <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/how-to-campaign/elections-and-voting/elections-and-voting/>.

A longer guide containing information on charities’ legal obligations regarding political activity is available here:

<http://www.trust.org/publications/i/?id=512be9f9-4b42-474e-9f28-a3918f863363>

For further information, contact the Electoral Commission on 020 7271 0616 or pef@electoralcommission.org.uk (England).



Election Checklist for DDPOs

- Organise a management committee meeting to make formal decision on whether to register or not under the lobbying act.
- Disseminate information to members to make sure they know how to register to vote.
- Contact the local electoral office at your Council to check the accessibility of local polling stations ahead of 12th December .
- Contact local candidates to find out if they will be putting information into accessible formats like easy read and BSL.
- Write to the political parties standing in your area to ask them key questions on disability issues. You will find some suggested questions from Inclusion London, Transport for All and the Alliance for Inclusive Education in the following section.
- Organise a hustings event for local Deaf and Disabled People to question local candidates.
- Make available to members accessible information comparing the positions of the different parties on disability issues. This could be answers you have received to written questions, information from a hustings event or information from Inclusion London.
- Support your members to run stalls at key locations in your local area to engage with the public and encourage people to use their vote on 12th December.
- Contact the local media to cover your election activity and get your message out to the wider community (see later section on media top tips).
- After the election ask your members for feedback on their experiences of voting. Report any problems with access to polling stations to the local electoral office at your Council.
- Contact your newly elected MP to meet with your members and follow up on any commitments made in the pre-election period.

General Election Pledges and Questions for Candidates

Reclaiming Our Futures Disabled People's Manifesto

The Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance is a grassroots collaborative network of Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations.

This month, we released our 'Reclaiming Our Futures UK Disabled People's Manifesto'.

The manifesto sets out a vision of a society:

- where every person is valued and is recognised as contributing value;
- that actively makes equality of opportunity a reality for everyone and eliminates discrimination and disadvantage;
- that enables disabled people and all people to live lives of equality, independence, inclusion, participation and dignity.

The full manifesto can be found here:

<https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/act-now/disabled-peoples-manifesto-2019/>

An Easy Read version is also available.

Questioning Candidates

In the following section we have included the questions that Inclusion London, as a member of ROFA, will be asking to the four main political parties. We have also included some suggested questions that may be more appropriate to ask your local candidates. We will be disseminating the responses we receive.

If you are not able to hold a hustings event, you can still write to local candidates and ask for their responses to a set of questions to then distribute among your members.

Remember that the same questions should be asked to all candidates.

Do we have to contact every single candidate standing in our area?

You may decide not to engage with every single candidate where there is not the capacity to do this (for example holding a hustings with more than three candidates can dramatically cut down on number of questions

you can ask or the time for discussion as each candidate should be given the same amount of time to answer questions). It is reasonable to only engage with candidates representing the main political parties but you should have impartial and transparent reasons for this. For example, Inclusion London will only be putting questions to the parties who currently have MPs in England.

Putting questions to candidates is an opportunity to raise their awareness of the issues that matter the most to disabled people. It is also a chance to identify areas where there may be the possibility of working with the candidate who gets elected, for example they have committed to following an issue up if they get elected.

When prioritising which questions to ask candidates think about:

- Which are the most important issues you want local candidates to be aware of – this is a chance not just to find out what they think but also to educate and raise their awareness.
- Areas where there is the potential to influence and work together after the election – don't see this as a one-off interaction but as part of a continuing relationship and opportunity to promote the interests of local disabled people.

For example: Local politicians may not be aware of the social model of disability and the distinct and important role that fully user-led Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations play in the local community. Remember to include questions about candidates' commitment to their local DDPO and to promoting the social model of disability. After the election, if you need to contact your elected MP you can refer back to any positive responses to the questions you asked to encourage them to meet with you.

- What will be within their remit as MP to influence – call for commitments that they as individual MPs can act on rather than just asking them about party policies.
- For example: Do they have an accessible constituency office?

- What will they do to support individual local families where family members have been placed miles away in Assessment and Treatment Units?
- How will they support local people who have been hit by Personal Independence Payment delays?
- Will they commit to working with your DDPO?
- How will they ensure they understand the needs and issues affecting Deaf and disabled constituents?

When analysing responses from candidates remember:

- Candidates who are not likely to get elected are freer to say what they think you want to hear, knowing they will not be in a position where they have to honour any commitments they have made.
- Candidates will have to follow their party policies if elected but they will also have responsibilities towards their constituents. Good constituency MPs listen to, and give time and attention to, constituents who come to them with issues.
- No MP will ever be an expert in all the issues that matter to their constituents but they should be in touch with the major issues of the day and also the key priorities affecting marginalised groups such as disabled people.

For a full copy of the Reclaiming Our Futures UK Disabled People's Manifesto see here: <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/act-now/disabled-peoples-manifesto-2019/>

Hustings – getting your voice heard and building your organisation's profile

Hustings is the name given to meetings where 'political campaign speeches are made'. A husting usually involves inviting a number of candidates standing for election to come and speak about why people should vote for them and to answer questions and comments from the audience.

A non-selective hustings is where either:

- All candidates standing are invited. It does not matter if not all of them attend, it is only your responsibility to invite them.
- Candidates are invited based on impartial reasons. Impartial reasons do not include your views on a particular party or their policies. They may include local prominence, the number of candidates standing or recent election results in the area.

The Electoral Commission gives these good practice recommendations:

- Be able to give objective reasons why you have not invited particular candidates. You should also be prepared to explain your reasons to candidates who you haven't invited.
- Make sure that candidates you invite represent a reasonable variety of views, from different parts of the political spectrum.
- Be transparent in your publicity for the meeting, about who is arranging and funding the event and the reasons you are holding it.
- Allow each candidate attending a fair chance to answer questions, and where appropriate, a reasonable opportunity to respond to points made against them by other candidates.
- Inform the audience at the meeting of candidates standing who haven't been invited.

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/are-you-holding-a-hustings>

Inclusion London Top Tips for Hustings

- Involve your members in planning the event from the beginning.
- Find out if other local organisations are also holding hustings to make sure you don't clash and explore running one jointly.
- Have a clear structure for the event, for example divided into sections based on the most important issues for your members (see Appendix D template hustings programme).

- Prepare with members in advance to think of the most useful questions to ask.
- Remember this is also an opportunity to engage with and raise awareness among your local politicians – are any of your members willing to share their own experiences at relevant points in the event to illustrate the impact of the issues you are asking candidates about?
- Choose a strong Chair who can keep the event to time, make sure everyone has a chance to speak and that the candidates answer the questions put to them! (See hustings guidelines produced by Merton CIL: <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/how-to-campaign/elections-and-voting/elections-and-voting/>).
- Think of how to accessibly record the candidates' responses to questions. For example, put a list of key questions that each candidate will be asked up on the wall, with a space for a tick or a cross next to each party depending on how they answer.
- If inviting the local press give a time either at the start or end of the event for a press call for photos.

Media Top Tips

- **Getting interest from your local paper** - things they look for are anything involving celebrities, personal interest stories and things that are 'new', for example the publication of a new piece of research or results of a survey. If you are holding an event or something that will provide a photo opportunity, it is worth getting in touch with their photo desk as well as their news desk (but make sure they know you are speaking to both).
- **Letters to Editors** - these can be a very useful way of getting your message across as they allow you to provide a comment on an issue and this section of papers is well read. By asking other organisations and supporters to sign up to your letter it can also be a good way of building local alliances.
- **Social media** - this can extend your reach not only putting you in contact with local media and bloggers but also directly to the public. Livestreaming events can enable people to take part who are not able to attend in person. Do remember to advertise the livestream channel in advance.

- **Create a list of journalists**, local media outlets and popular bloggers as well as supporters to tweet at about and during your event to widen your coverage. Remember to agree and publicise a hashtag.
- Stories can be an attractive and accessible way of reporting back from an event. (For more information see: www.storify.com)

Ruils 'Fairness for All' (FF) Campaign – using the media in their campaign

Following several years of cuts made locally by Richmond Council, Ruils wanted to capture the impact of the austerity measures on disabled residents. We conducted a postal and online survey (Survey Monkey) and then published the results in a report that was circulated to key council officers and senior councillors. We only had a response from the party in opposition on the Council. That is, until we issued a press statement and an article then appeared in the local paper. This press coverage prompted a reply from a Conservative spokesperson and his statement that 'reports of any cuts were a 'myth'. This was then followed by a letter from us in response, appearing in the Letters Page of the local newspaper.

Questions for Candidates

These are the questions that Inclusion London asked the three main political parties.

Questions for Candidates

These are the questions that Inclusion London asked the three main political parties.

We have also included in yellow boxes some suggested questions that may be more appropriate to ask your local candidates.

1. How will your party ensure a fully inclusive education system?

Disabled people are often severely disadvantaged throughout their education by lack of support in mainstream education or lack of access to mainstream education in their local community.

- How will you improve the level of support disabled people receive in their local mainstream school so disabled pupils or students are not forced into residential schools or units miles away from their home and community?
- Changes to the Disabled Students Allowance have shifted the responsibility for resourcing support that disabled students need from central government to higher education institutions. This measure had a substantial impact upon disabled students' access to higher education:
- What would your party do about the Disabled Students Allowance?
- How will you ensure local academies and free school are fully inclusive and do not discriminate against disabled pupils?

2. How will your party promote independent living for disabled people?

- The social model of disability is key to disabled people's equality and inclusion: Is your party committed to the social model of disability, as opposed to the medical or biopsychosocial model?
- The closure of the Independent living fund (ILF) has had a serious impact on disabled people's independent living: Will your party commit to enshrining the UN CRPD Article 19 Living Independently and Being Included in the Community and the implementation of a National Independent Living Support Service funded from general taxation?
- Do you support the creation of a legal right to independent living as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?
- The shortfall on social care funding is undermining disabled people's dignity, independence, choice and control: How will you ensure social care support needs of disabled people are met? Will your party ensure that social care is free at the point of delivery paid from general taxation in an integrated health and social system?
- What is your understanding of the social model of disability and how would you apply it in your work as an MP?
- What steps would you take to ensure former Independent Living Fund recipients in your constituency have not been adversely impacted

due to the closure of the Fund and transfer to Local Authority care and support?

3. How will your party meet the additional costs of disability?

- Disabled people's incomes are being disproportionately hit by austerity measures: How will you ensure the social security system meets the needs of disabled people and additional costs of disability?
- What is your position on Universal Credit? Do you think it is working for Disabled people? If not, what will your party do about it?
- The spare room subsidy removal (bedroom tax) is having a disproportional impact on disabled people: Do you agree that the spare room subsidy removal (bedroom tax) should be abolished?
- Benefits assessments, such as PIP and the Work Capability Assessment has proved disastrous on many counts. What will you do to improve the assessment process and ensure it is co-produced with disabled people?
- ESA, JSA and Universal Credit sanctions are pushing disabled people further into debt and ill health and further away from employment. What will you do to improve this system?
- How do you think the link can be broken between poverty and disability and what would you do as MP to address this?
- How will you support disabled constituents left with no income as a result of benefit changes, delays, and sanctions?

4. What will your party do in order to provide effective support for disabled people to get into, stay in and get on in employment?

- What support do you think disabled people need to gain and maintain meaningful employment. Do you think current measures, such as non-discrimination legislation, system of sanctions, the Work and Health programme, Disability Confident campaign are working well?
- Changes to the Access to Work (AtW) have undermined what was previously a successful programme: What will you do to improve AtW so

the scheme can support disabled people to obtain, maintain and progress in paid employment?

- What are the major barriers to employment that disabled people face?
- How will you promote disabled people's employment on a real wage in your constituency?

5. What measures will your party put in place to remove the barriers that exclude and disadvantage Deaf and Disabled people?

- Will you support the change in law so that disability hate crime is treated the same as crimes motivated by race and faith.
- Disabled people with learning difficulties autism and experience of mental distress do not have the same rights as everybody else. Will you support the radical change in law that would bring an end to involuntary detention and treatment for those people?
- Disability Discrimination legislation was in place for 24 years and still Disabled people face discrimination on daily basis. What do you think should be done to enforce the Equality Act 2010 better.
- Deaf people continue to be disadvantaged because British Sign Language is not fully recognised and BSL interpreters are not provided by public services (e.g. GP surgeries). Will you support the creation of a legal status for British Sign Language through a BSL Act?
- What do you think are the major barriers facing disabled people in (insert constituency/London borough) and what would you do as MP to address them?
- What would you do to tackle disability hate crime in (insert constituency/London borough)?
- How will you ensure that Deaf and disabled constituents can contact and meet with you, for example through provision of BSL interpretation support and a wheelchair accessible constituency office?

6. Real and effective co-production with Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations

- Co-production with disabled people will ensure that the design of services and assessments meet the needs of disabled people: Is your

party committed to co-production with disabled people and our organisations?

- Local Deaf and Disabled people organisations provide services with 'Added Value' that are responsive to local needs, but these organisations find it difficult to compete against large organisations: How will you ensure that public bodies commissioning and procurement practices stop disadvantaging Deaf and Disabled people's organisations, and other local community organisations that are losing contracts to big private and volunteer sector providers?
- As our MP how would you promote and support the work of your local Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation?



Appendix A: Template Diary Notice for Press

(Insert name of Organisation)

DIARY NOTICE: Disability Election Question Time

As the General Election campaign gets underway, local Deaf and Disabled People will be questioning candidates on the issues that matter most to us: (insert candidates confirmed to attend)

PHOTO CALL: (insert a time)

Local Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations including (insert names) will be holding a General Elections hustings on (insert date) at (insert location).

Deaf and Disabled people attending the hustings with questions for candidates on issues that impact on their day to day lives are available for interview.

ENDS

Media information, interviews, briefings: (Insert contact name and details)

Appendix B: Template Press Release

(Insert name of Organisation)

Local Deaf and Disabled people hit the streets to boost voter registration

PHOTO CALL: (insert time and place)

Deaf and Disabled people from (insert name of organisation), are taking an election bus to the streets of (insert name of borough/area) on (insert date) to promote voter registration ahead of the General Election.

Traditionally Deaf and Disabled people have faced barriers to voting from polling stations that aren't wheelchair accessible to a lack of information about candidates in accessible formats such as easy read and British Sign Language. The move to individual electoral registration has created more barriers for disabled people who cannot access online registration and it is estimated that since the change-over a total of around one million voters are missing from the electoral roll.

X Disabled People's Organisation is encouraging everyone who can, whether Deaf or disabled or not, to use their vote on 12th December.

(Insert brief description of where you will be going and what you will be doing, for example distributing polling station access guidelines/easy read voter registration forms/easy read copies of party manifestos.)

Case study – insert a case study from a member who is willing to speak to the press about barriers to voting that they have personally experienced in the past.

Quote – Chair/CEO of X Disabled People's Organisation said: ""

ENDS

Media information, interviews, briefings: (Insert contact name and details)

Appendix C: Template hustings programme

Hustings Programme

(timings can be adjusted according to the amount of time available)

Chair's welcome - ground rules and outline of the event.

Introductions - each candidate has a set number of minutes to introduce themselves and say why you should vote for them.

Questions - for each topic a member of the audience will ask a pre-prepared question and share a personal experience relevant to why that question is important to them. The topic will then be opened to the floor for two further questions from those indicating they wish to speak. Each candidate will then have a set number of minutes each to respond.

(Topic areas to be chosen by members, but for example:)

Inclusive Education

Health and social care

Welfare reform and employment

Disability hate crime

Barriers and accessibility

Co-production with Disabled People's Organisations

(There may not be time for everyone to ask the questions they want to. You could use flipchart paper and post-it notes for people to write down any questions they did not get to ask. Explain that these will be collated and sent to each candidate for written responses. Circulate these along with notes from the event).

Summary - each candidate has a set number of minutes to sum up.

Next Steps and Close - Chair to thank everyone for attending and explain that a written note from the meeting will be circulated along with responses to any post-it note questions; that you will be following up with whoever is elected in December to come and meet your members.