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1

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. This pack helps people with a learning disability (PWL) and their support workers to understand what voting is, why it is so important, and how you can vote. Our aim is to encourage as many people with a learning disability to check if they are registered to vote, and if not to register to vote and finally vote.

This pack 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. We hope to have produced enough material to cover any question that may arise when discussing these issues.

If you are supporting someone to register to vote, we recommend 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.

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

We will also be helping local groups to organise voter registration awareness workshops. We will keep Mencap staff updated about these plans.



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

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The importance of voting

This guide explains why voting is important
This section is for supporters and not in easy read

The importance of voting

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**

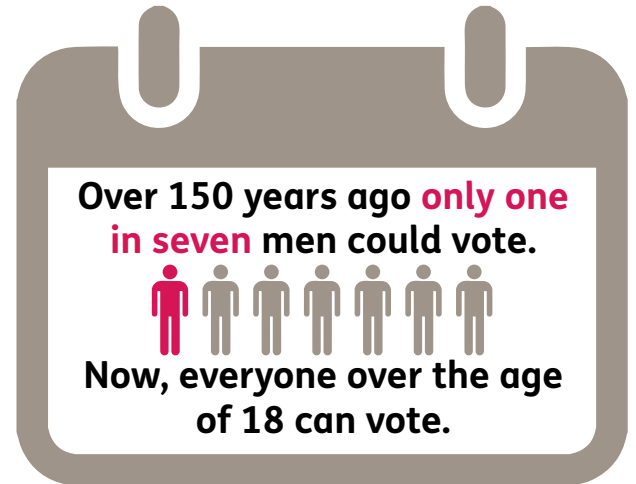
Over 150 MPs supported our last campaign to encourage people with a learning disability to vote.

1995

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

2010

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.

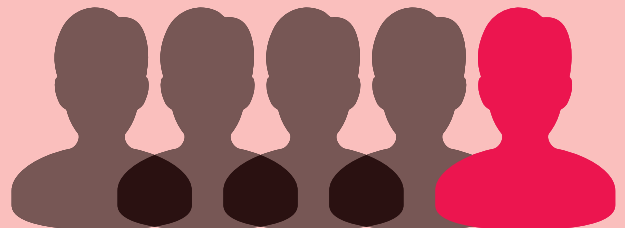


Over half the UK voted during the last General Election.

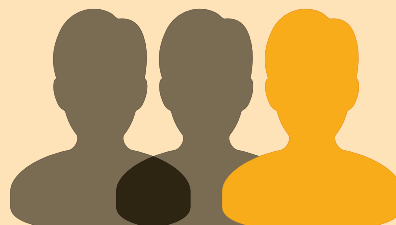
The last General Election was also the first time that **three of the main parties** produced easy read manifestos.



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.³



1. An approximate figure from TheyWorkForYou.com from a basic search of learning disabilities. This is undoubtedly a conservative estimate.

2. <http://www.mencap.org.uk/campaigns/take-action/get-my-vote>

3. <http://www.getwestlondon.co.uk/news/local-news/learning-disability-charity-run-voting-6988132>



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What is voting?

This guide explains what voting is and how it works

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 that run the country are called politicians.

They make important decisions that can affect some people's lives.

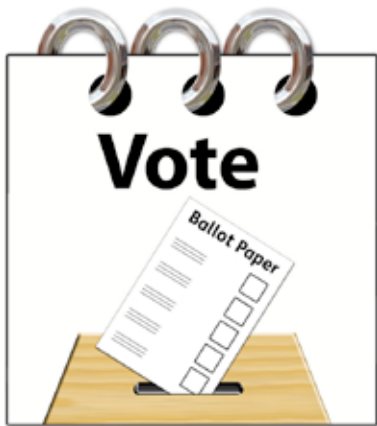


For example, the Government makes important decisions that can change:

- Hate crime laws
- How people with a learning disability get support
- How people with a learning disability get healthcare.



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



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.

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.

In Scotland, some political parties:

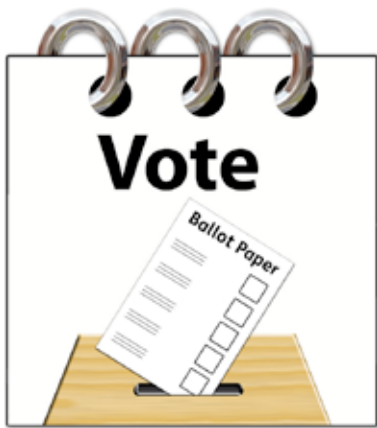
- Conservative and Unionist Party
- Labour Party
- Scottish Green Party
- Scottish National Party
- Scottish Liberal Democrats
- UK Independence Party.



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 effect their lives.



The next General Election will be on the 7 May 2015.

In this election you can vote for who you would like to make some of the most important decisions in the country.

People will vote to choose who they would like to be their local MP.

MPs make important decisions that affect the whole country. Most MPs are part of a political party.

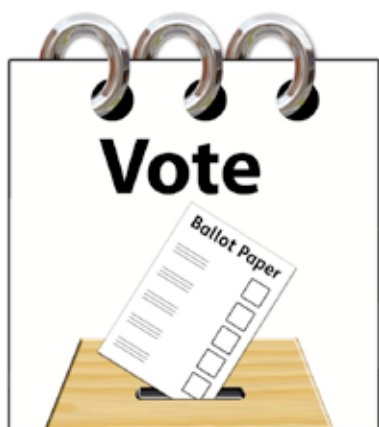
The party with the highest number of MPs usually forms the Government.

The leader of the winning party then becomes Prime Minister.

4

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 website:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting

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

To register to vote, you can go online to **www.mencap.org.uk/register tovot e** or fill in a form. A copy of this form is part of the 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, your title (Mr, Ms, Mrs etc.) 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.



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 service.
 - The operator will ask for your postcode. They will then search online for the address of your local electoral services.
- Or you can search for your local electoral services on **www.aboutmyvote.co.uk**
- Once you have registered you will be sent a poll card when there is an election.



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 nearest 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 where and 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.

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



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 website:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting

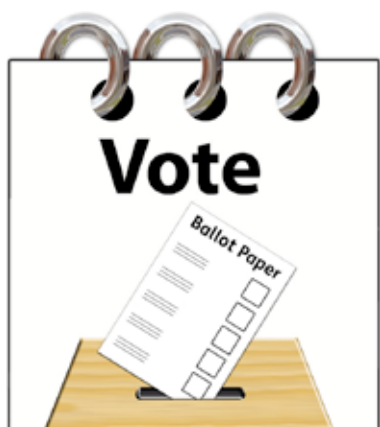
If you get stuck or have any questions, you can call the Mencap team on **020 7696 5583**



5

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 website:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting

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.mencap.org.uk/registertovote or fill out the registration form at the back of the pack.



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.



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 and your title (Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms).



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 later say 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.

Contact information
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 telephone: **020 7696 5583**
 Mencap Direct: **0808 808 1111**



Address for Postal Ballot Paper

Next, fill out the 'Address for postal ballot paper' section.

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



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 website:



www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting

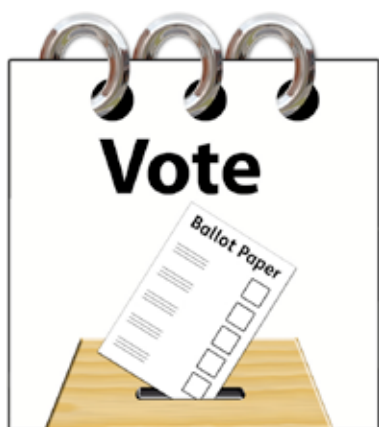
If you get stuck or have any questions, you can call the Mencap team on **020 7696 5583**.

Contact information
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telephone: **020 7696 5583**
Mencap Direct: **0808 808 1111**

6

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 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.mencap.org.uk/register tovote** or by completing the electoral registration form.

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.



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 website:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting

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



7

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 website:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting



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 nearest polling station is to your address.

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 polling 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.

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



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 website:

www.mencap.org.uk/allaboutvoting

If you get stuck registering to vote or need help understanding voting, you can call the Mencap team on **020 7696 5583**.



8

Terms we use in this pack

This guide explains specific useful words, like councillor, ballot box, polling station etc. which you will come across in this pack

Councillor

These are **politicians** who make decisions about what happens where you live in your local area. 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 most amount of **MPs** at the **General Election**. Sometimes political parties form a Coalition Government. This is when political parties work together to form a Government.

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 the name for all the **MPs** in the country. **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 life. 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 in the country.

9

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 registration officer. To contact your local electoral services, go to **www.aboutmyvote.co.uk**

Reregistering a person who is already registered will not cause a problem. If in doubt, register online at **www.mencap.org.uk/register tovot e** or fill out the registration form at the back of this pack.

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.

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'm a Mencap member of staff. How do I talk about political parties without showing a bias?

Mencap is apolitical, meaning we do not, and we cannot support any political party. We want to improve the lives of people with a learning disability with the help of whoever is in Government.

Mencap staff must not tell the person they support how they should vote.

Mencap staff 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.

We recommend 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 the five biggest political parties here:

The Conservative Party
www.conservatives.com

The Green Party
www.greenparty.org.uk

The Labour Party
www.labour.co.uk

The Liberal Democrats
www.libdems.org.uk

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 close to elections.

We will post links to the parties' easy-read manifestos as they become available on the Mencap website. We will also post the links via our email alerts.

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 individuals' ability. We have tried to make voting, democracy and politics as accessible as possible with the information in these guides.

It is best to address voting by explaining the various political parties 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's important to carry on a conversation around politics when relevant (when the Prime Minister is on TV, when someone complains about a particular service, etc).

Where can I find the forms I need?

Your 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 out the details for your local electoral services team by searching on the internet. Your local electoral services team will work for 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.mencap.org.uk/register tovote**

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**

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 next General Election will be on the 7 May 2015. To vote in this election you must be registered by 20th April 2015.

10

Flash cards

These flash cards are to help 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.



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

Questions you could ask:

Who is the Prime Minister?

Who is the leader of the Conservative Party?

Who is the leader of the Green Party?

Who is the leader of the Labour Party?

Who is the leader of the Liberal Democrat Party?

Who is the leader of UK Independence Party?



Questions you could ask:

What do MPs do in Parliament?

Answer: Debate and discuss things in Parliament such as health, education etc.



Questions you could ask:

Where are laws made?

Answer: Parliament makes laws.



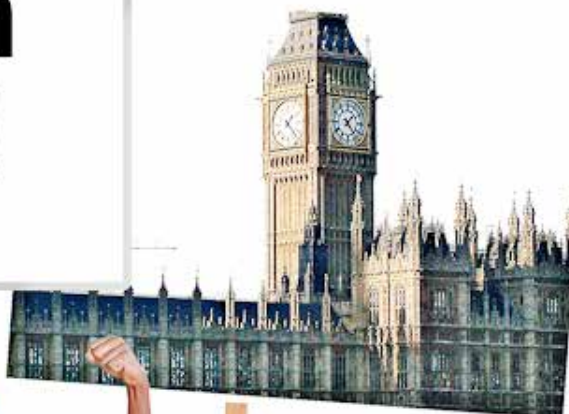
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Questions you could ask:

What do MPs do?

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

**Listen
to us!**



Contact information
email: help@mencap.org.uk
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Questions you could ask:

What do MPs do?

Answer: Speak up for their local area.



Contact information
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Questions you could ask:

Where do MPs debate issues?

Answer: Houses of Parliament.



Contact information
email: help@mencap.org.uk
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Questions you could ask:

What do MPs do?

Answer: Talk to local people.



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Questions you could ask:

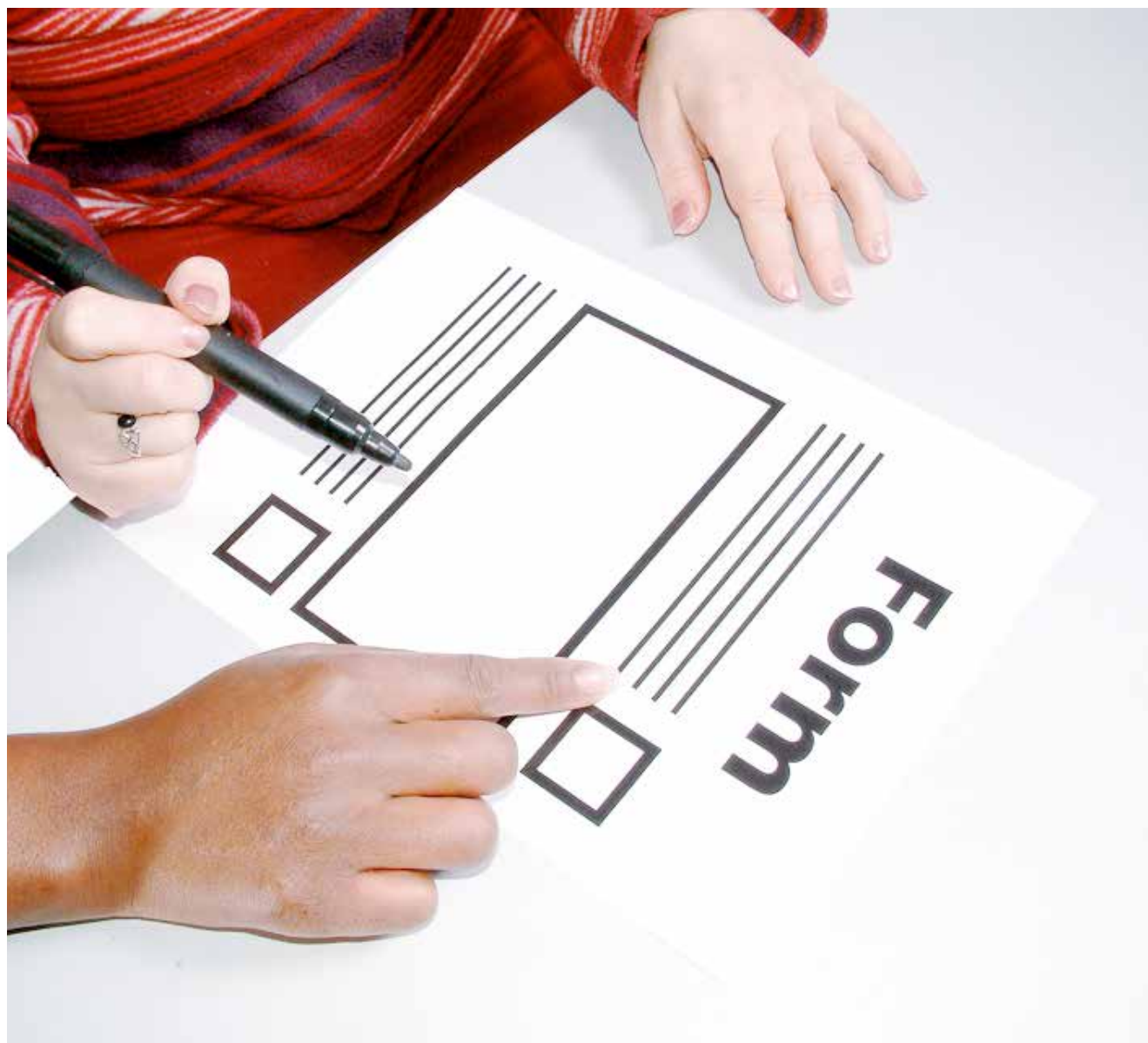
Where do MPs debate things?

Answer: The House of Commons, part of the Houses of Parliament

11

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...**



Contact information
email: help@mencap.org.uk
telephone: **020 7696 5502**
Mencap Direct: **0808 808 1111**

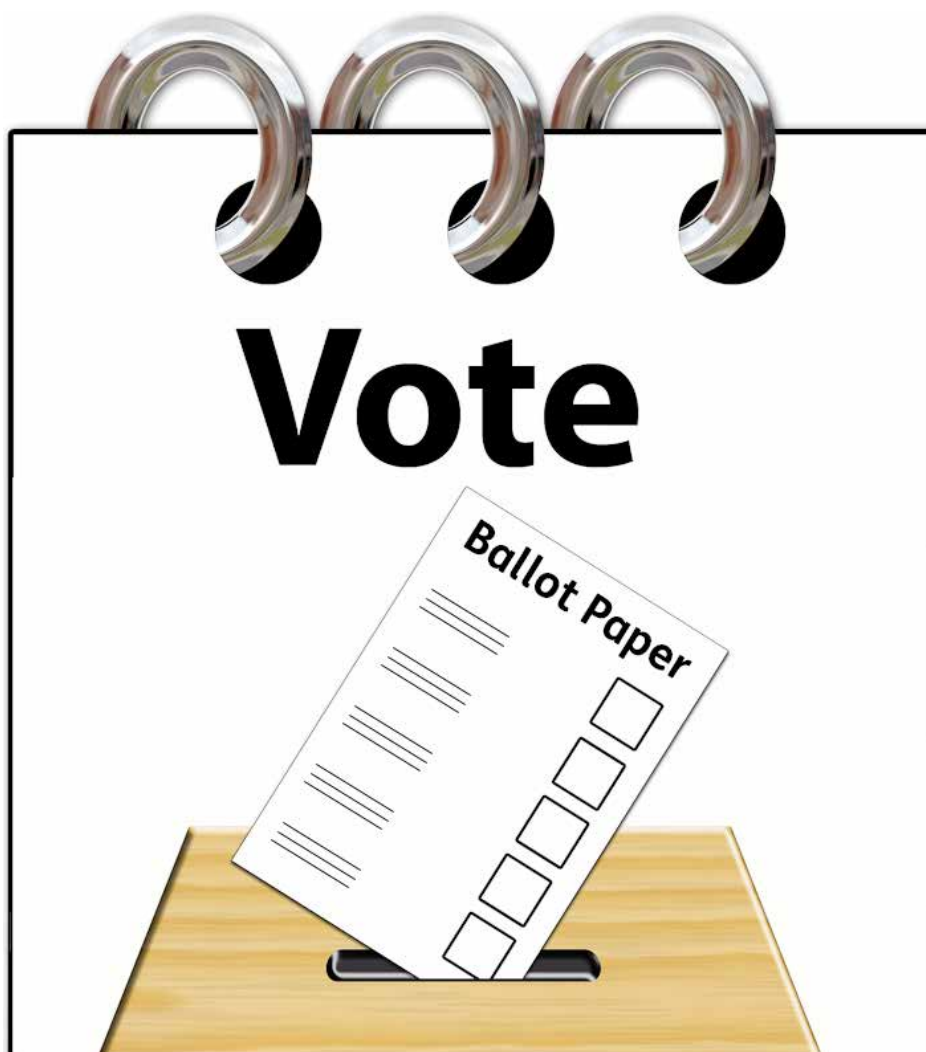


Don't forget to **post your vote if you are voting by post. You need to do this by...**

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