

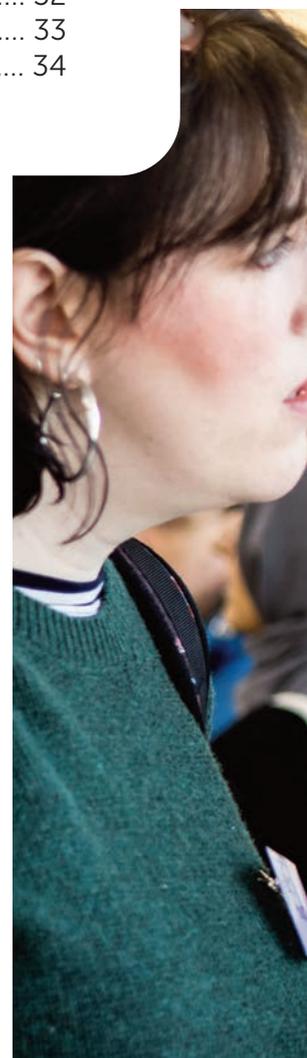
Promote the Vote:

A BASW Practice Guide



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Foreword

We are delighted to see social workers are creating the Promote the Vote guide, and that they are supporting the My Vote My Voice campaign that many Learning Disability England members support.

People with a learning disability are amongst the most impacted by government policy and also amongst the most under-represented in the polling booth.

We hope that the concerted effort by Promote the Vote, BASW and My Vote My Voice will serve to highlight that people do have power as equal citizens. Voting to keep or change a government every four years or so is at least an equal part, a right alongside all citizens in our democracy to have our voices heard. We hope that voting might be a first step for many, into a bigger engagement in politics – and support people to find more power to change their own lives and communities.

Co-Chairs, Learning Disability England

Kate Chate, Tim Keilty, Jack Marshall BEM, Scott Watkin BEM



SECTION ONE

KEY WORDS

Voting: give or register a vote. The activity of choosing someone or something in an election.

Promote the Vote: since 2017, social workers and student social workers have been working across the UK to promote participation in elections through accessible information, voter registration and reasonable adjustments to make voting accessible. By visiting supported-living houses, the PTV campaign has supported people to use their voice to influence change.

Lived experience: the things that someone has experienced themselves, especially when these give the person a knowledge or understanding that people who have only heard about such experiences do not have. In this context, lived experience refers to a person's experience, knowledge, and depictions from experiencing a physical and/or learning disability.

Human rights: according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. They protect you in many areas of your day-to-day life, including:



- your right to have and express your own opinions.
- your right to an education.
- your right to a private and family life.
- your right not to be mistreated or wrongly punished by the state.

Democracy: a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives.

Election: a time when people vote to choose someone for a political or official job.

WHAT IS PROMOTE THE VOTE?

Promote the Vote (PTV) is the name given to a campaign carried out by social workers and student social workers; this campaign aims to raise awareness with adults supported by the Learning Disability Service of their rights to register to vote and to subsequently vote in elections should they choose to do so.

PTV is linked very strongly to rights-based practice, in particular **UN CRPD Article 29** (Appendix 2) - the Right to Participate in Political and Public Life. The right to vote is a cornerstone of people's rights as a citizen. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has argued that the right to vote is the most important aspect of participation in political and democratic life. Participating in voting strengthens human rights and active citizenship.

The principles of PTV are underpinned by specific pieces of UK legislation:

- **The Representation of the People Acts 1983 and 2000** – enshrines the Right to Register to participate in UK elections.
- **Section 73 of the Electoral Administration Act (2006)** - abolished mental incapacity as being a legitimate reason to prevent a person being able to register to vote or to cast their vote.

PTV is an activism led campaign – it aims to ensure that adults with learning disabilities and the people who support them are aware of their rights and are not prevented from exercising those rights; indeed, the campaign aims to ensure that those adults are actively supported to exercise those rights *where they choose to do so*. This last part is important: PTV as a campaign is not about persuading people to vote but to understand their rights in relation to voting and to ensure that where they wish to that they have appropriate support to vote.

PTV has been an active campaign since the UK Parliamentary Election in 2017. Social workers have been working with supported living providers and adults with learning

disabilities to promote voting rights. Support has included voter registration and reasonable adjustments to create more accessibility around voting. The social workers visit supported-living properties to collect information around voting participation, including any policies and support that may already be in place, and what needs to be developed to ensure that people with a learning disability are supported during this process. With each year, we are finding that providers are getting better at knowing voting is important and planning to support people to register and to cast their vote either by post or at the polling station.

The aims of Promote the Vote

- To ensure that adults with learning disabilities and the people who support them understand that they have the right to vote and to participate in local and national elections.
- Where people decide that they want to exercise their right to vote they are supported to do so either in person or by other means (postal or proxy) with practical assistance and resources.

Who can register?

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

- a 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.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT AND CALL TO ACTION

PTV has at its heart strengths-based practice, which is important because it promotes independence and freedom of choice. As social workers, it is a duty to uphold human rights in social work practice. Upholding people's citizenship, their right to feel like they belong and that they have a voice that others hear and respect, is known as rights-based social work. PTV supports people to register from 16+ and participate in elections. This is in line with our social work values and practice. Having a voice in elections, knowing that you have the right to register, and to vote is the biggest decision people can participate in. PTV runs annually, and taking action to ensure people with learning disabilities understand their right to register and to participate, and that they are supported to be able to do so, is an integral practice across the UK.

All voters in the UK must be over 18 years old and must meet the nationality and residence criteria laid out by the Electoral Commission. People with a learning disability have the same

rights to participate in elections as anyone else, regardless of their mental capacity. According to section 5(6) of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983, in the Elections Act, a lack of mental capacity is not a legal barrier to voting. What PTV has uncovered in its various campaigns is that attitudinal barriers to capacity and voting still have an impact on participation in elections for people with learning disabilities.

In the UK, people with a disability are less likely to vote than other adults; people with a learning disability are the group with the lowest representation in UK elections for participation. User led campaign groups have identified information and support around voting as a priority for them; work done by some of these groups led to the start of PTV in specific local authority areas. Although individuals may not understand the voting process, PTV gives everyone the opportunity to get involved and to not be excluded. It allows people with disabilities to project their voice and influence change.



PTV is *“working as a team, as a family even. It is about listening to other opinions and it’s all about equality: how you feel, and another person feels. Everyone understands differently, no one knows everything, but we share experiences. Don’t judge a book by its cover”*. (Jazzmin, expert by experience)

This description captures the importance of hearing people’s voices and perspectives and supporting others to participate in civic activity.

Like anyone else, people with a learning disability have the right to choose who they want to vote for by any criteria they like. It is not up to anyone else to judge if reasons for choosing someone are valid or not. Equally, the decision over whether someone votes or not must be theirs and theirs alone. Carers and support workers are not allowed to make decisions on behalf of the person they care for when it comes to voting, even if they deem that the person lacks capacity to do so. PTV is an invaluable campaign which promotes inclusivity and equality.

Addressing how everyone experiences, views, and understands things differently, this campaign encourages team working, listening to one another, and supporting those in need to participate in voting. Allowing individuals to influence change at many levels, the PTV campaign aims to build a better understanding around voting rights, meaning support plans can be arranged when individuals choose to exercise this right.

Rumbidzai Mashavave, a social worker in Bradford Council’s Adult Social Care Preparation for Adulthood team, provides an insight into the PTV campaign. Reflecting on the importance of voting in influencing positive change, Rumbidzai comments that it is the responsibility of social workers to: *‘educate, inform, and enable people to vote as it is a human right. PTV aims to challenge the notion of incapacity by helping to unify the community and ensure that people with a learning disability have their ideas and views heard and listened to with the appropriate support in place’*.

We know that **Promote the Vote** matters because:

- ▶ *Anecdotal evidence each year lets us know that people who have never voted before have been supported to do so for the first time; and that they find it a really positive experience.*
- ▶ *Each year we still collect evidence that support staff do not think that voting is important for a significant number of people they support because they lack capacity. Until we can be confident that this is no longer the case, we need to continue the conversations around voting rights.*

The importance of empowering the people we support

The PTV campaign aims to encompass the experience and knowledge of the people we support. Lived experience/knowledge helps draw focus to the marginalisation, and discrimination, that people may feel. The experience of challenge throughout voting periods can only be understood by the people who draw on care and support. By using a practical guide, this can help create open mindedness when supporting people and delivering in accordance with relevant legislative frameworks, policies, and appropriate social work practices.

Aligned with social care values, we know that we should not judge people. Everyone is different, and they have experienced life differently. Learning and physical disability can sometimes present barriers, both physical and through communication, whereby individuals' daily lives may differ from those of others without disabilities. Complex and varied, lived experience is wide-ranging which means that as a nation, we should work harder to better understand each individual. The insights that PTV provides are extremely valuable, and it helps to give individuals a voice, and consequently a part to play in the wider community. PTV therefore provides a meaningful exploration of experiences, thoughts, feedback, and development areas provided by individuals who draw on social care support. The PTV campaign is therefore upheld and progressed by such feedback, which year on year, helps us to meet our outcomes in social work practice.

The PTV campaign endeavours to capture feedback from people with lived experience, to better develop the campaign to meet individual need and to be person-centred. As such, this can help promote and improve outcomes for people who draw on care and support. During the primary and secondary visits to supported living providers, social workers aim to capture both feedback and data about people's experiences of voting in this and previous years. This includes what support they felt they had / did not have, and any general feedback they would like to provide. As practitioners and social care

professional their role is to then create an action plan going forward aiming to ensure that this feedback improves outcomes.

During the PTV visits, people often share their positive experiences of the PTV process. This is an indication of an improved sense of empowerment and social inclusion for those accessing services. Participating in democratic processes allows people to feel connected to the wider community, bringing about a sense of positive culture and a sense of belonging. As an initiative aimed at improving the UK's rights-based approach and working, it has proven to boost self-esteem and social confidence among people who may have traditionally been marginalised from the process of voting as well as other activities, both democratic and non-democratic.



The importance of voting in delivering human rights

There is growing evidence that people with a learning disability often don't know about their right to vote, and there is still a misperception that adults who lack 'capacity' cannot vote. Section 73 of the Electoral Administration Act (2006) abolished mental incapacity as grounds to prevent someone from being able to participate in elections. We believe that the ability to cast your vote is central to rights based practice, and the support offered by social workers through this campaign is key to making explicit the connections for people between voting and the right to make other decisions about their lives, being able to choose how to spend the day and being able to decide where you want to live and who to live with.



Elections are a rights-based democratic activity. Elections are related to several other human rights, such as:

- the right to freedom from discrimination;
- the right to freedom of opinion and expression;
- the right to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly;
- the right to freedom of movement

As stated above, **UN CRPD Article 29** (Appendix 2) – the Right to Participate in Political and Public Life – and the UK Elections Act helps create an environment in which human rights activities can be possible. People with lived experience are supported to help influence change at a democratic level. Involvement in voting means people can help to choose who represents them in a local and national arena. As politics impacts everything around us, the PTV campaign supports voting for local councillors, elected mayors, regional representation and our Members of Parliament.

SECTION TWO

GUIDANCE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS AND STUDENTS

This 'How To' Guide has been designed to help social workers and social work students supporting individuals with a learning disability in the lead up to local elections and a possible General Election in 2024. It is based on the experience of social workers in Bradford.



Since the UK Parliamentary Election in 2017, social workers have been working across the Bradford district to promote participation in elections through voter registration and reasonable adjustments to make voting accessible. Social workers have so far visited over 200 supported-living houses and have helped over 600 people with learning disabilities to exercise their UNCRPD Article 29 Right to Participate in Political and Democratic Life.

Evidence collected to measure the impact of Promote the Vote shows that where social workers speak to people about their right to participate, they are significantly more likely to register and go on to vote. We strongly believe that the right to vote, is fundamental to active citizenship, and as such, it is central to upholding people's UNCRPD Article 12 Right to Equal Treatment Before the Law.

This guide covers the meaning and the value of voting, and the end-to-end process around PTV. Including feedback and good practice advice from social workers, this document encapsulates what involvement in voting looks like, and the benefit it can hold to those participating.

There are many efforts in place to enable groups who may be more marginalised to vote and to challenge any barriers that may come in their way. PTV visits to supported living providers aims to uncover three questions:

- 1) Do they have a policy on voting?**
- 2) Are their staff trained on voting rights?**
- 3) Do they include support to enable people to vote in support plans?**

Traditionally, young people, black and minority ethnic groups, and people with a disability are less likely to register or turn out and vote. To tackle the element of marginalisation, PTV aims to build representation of the voices of people with disabilities, and to support their human rights. The purpose of this resource is to highlight the work around PTV which aims to overcome this challenge and build a more positive and socially inclusive attitude and approach towards people with disabilities. To this end, it would be possible to expand visiting people in different settings according to local campaign needs.

We hope you find this guide useful as we uncover how practitioners are supporting people with a learning disability to exercise their right to vote during the elections.

WAYS SOCIAL WORKERS CAN PROMOTE THE VOTE

Have the conversation about voting during assessments with individuals. This can help you open the conversation up, understand their views and opinions, and build a picture around any previous political engagement and educate about their right to register and to vote.

Support plans can reflect any reasonable adjustment to help make the voting process more accessible. The support provider should be made aware of this, as it will help them support the individual to cast their vote.

As social workers, you can support with voter registration. Voter ID is a new requirement, so you can check that the person has voter ID to ensure that they can vote in person if they choose to.

In the run up to PTV, you can organise information sessions and provide resources for other social workers. Signing up for any national briefings or webinars can also help you familiarise yourself with the PTV campaign.

In preparation for the elections, you can contact local user-led organisations about PTV. As a strengths-based approach, you can support them with PTV, and organise information sessions and resources to be provided.

TIMELINE



STAYING WITHIN THE RULES

It is important to remember that the aims of the **Promote the Vote** campaign are to ensure that people know about their rights to register and to vote, and that they are appropriately supported to do so. If someone chooses not to register to vote or not to vote as a result of the campaign then that person is within their rights. This is not a failure but a recognition that many people in the UK are not interested in politics and choose not to vote in local elections or general elections. Turnout for local elections across the UK is generally around 30-35%; in general elections it is 70-80%. No pressure should be exerted on someone to vote when they choose not to.

WELCOME TO YOUR POLLING STATION

Please follow the signs and report to the desk, then follow the instructions given to you.

Kindly note that there are various penalties for misconduct at elections and referendums.

In particular, be aware that it is a serious offence to vote when you are not entitled to do so or to pretend to be another person.

THANK YOU FOR VOTING



POLLING STATION



DO'S

- Educate, give guidance and inform, provide election information to care providers and the people we support.
- Answer questions.
- Inform people how and when to register and give them support to do so if appropriate.
- Understand that everyone is different – allow time and space when speaking to people about voting. This topic can be complex and sometimes new for people, and therefore more time to go through the information may help them make decisions.
- Provide appropriate resources, for example easy read versions, to care providers and people we support.
- Explain the resources you are providing to individuals, family members and support staff as appropriate.
- Listen and capture feedback! Positive, negative, and constructive feedback is so important to the campaign.
- Be impartial and do not judge people's choices when voting / choosing not to vote.
- Remind people when to register and when to cast their vote. A simple timeline is very effective.
- Have fun and be creative!
- Be aware of and address your own political bias.



DON'TS

- Pressure people to vote in a certain way, or to vote if they are choosing not to. Remember voting is a personal choice, and we should not influence this in any way.
- Rush when speaking with individuals. Allowing time for PTV discussions can help reduce pressure and stress.
- Encourage and / or make decisions on anyone's behalf.
- Share your personal views on voting. The PTV campaign aims to have an open-minded and objective approach. Although you are capturing insights from people with lived experience, as social care professionals you must not share your views on voting. This may create confusion, and it may influence their decision. As above, voting is a personal choice, and it should not be influenced by anyone else.

Pre-election period of sensitivity

The pre-election period of sensitivity occurs in the weeks leading up to an election or referendum. The period is also called the period of 'heightened sensitivity'. This period starts from the publication of the notice of election, usually 25 working days before polling day.

Local authorities are required to follow statutory guidance about publicity all year round. The [Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity](#) (England)

requires that, among other things, local council communications should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns that seek to influence voters at any time of year. Similar codes operate in [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#).

For more information see here: [Recommended code of practice for local authority publicity - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

SECTION THREE

'HOW TO' ... BEFORE THE ELECTION

Preparation before the election is key if we are going to support individuals to understand their right to vote. Part of the preparation includes working closely with the carers / care providers so that there is an understanding that the work we are doing is to uphold and promote people's rights and to empower and encourage their participation for their voice to be heard within their community.



Before the election and in good time for planning and preparation social workers and social work students are asked to volunteer their time and commit to supporting with the PTV project. This is generally in the form of an email from the Head of Service and Principal Social Worker, who ask for all current students and a number of more experienced social workers to volunteer their time.

Senior leaders should host an initial briefing session to outline the aims of the campaign and what needs to happen. Attendance to this session is important as it provides an opportunity to openly reflect on the importance of upholding and supporting people's right to vote.

The time commitment for students and social workers may vary, but in general it will involve:

- Attending an initial briefing session, hosted by senior managers. This session will set out the aims of the campaign, talk about timelines for specific elections and address practical issues.
- Each pair of student/social worker will be given 2-4 properties (depending on their size). They will need to contact each of these properties, visit each one and spend time talking to residents and staff and prepare resource packs for each visit.
- At the visit we ask for an audit form to be completed, which includes detail on how many residents are already registered to vote and whether the provider has a policy on voting.
- After the election there is a follow up visit or call to gather data on how many people chose to vote – by post, proxy, or in person – and whether people were supported to vote.

Support for social workers needs to come from an allocated planning team (this could be other social workers, managers or business support staff); they will then gather the names and team people up to work together. Students are 'buddied' up with more experienced social workers, if possible with those who have worked on PTV before. This ensures that students are well supported in terms of the challenging conversations that they may have and also allows social workers

to share their experience of what has worked in previous years. Once teamed up, social workers are then allocated the properties that they will be supporting. Your allocated property information should include how many individuals live there that you will be supporting.

We aim to gather up to date information on supported living properties at the start of each year so that they can be allocated in plenty of time for local elections, which happen in early May each year.

Senior managers also have conversations with supported living providers through provider forums and newsletters, announcing the campaign and its timeline in early spring and revisiting this in the run up to visits taking place.

Resources

Social workers and students should have access to a pack of resources which will be used to start conversations with the people they are visiting. These could be easy read resources, and could include information about registering to vote, how to vote, how to vote by post etc (see appendices for local and national examples of these). In many areas local user led organisations may have campaign groups who have developed resources themselves. Prior to visiting properties social workers and students are asked to assemble packs to take out on their visits containing resources, a voting passport and voter registration forms. Resources are updated and printed off into packs in February ready for visits to start in March.

One of the most important resources is the voter passport. This sets out what reasonable adjustments are available in polling stations; if you are adopting this then it is a good idea for senior managers to work with elections teams to ensure that all polling clerks know about it and expect to see it in use on polling day.

TOP TIPS AND GOOD PRACTICE ADVICE

- ✓ Early planning: Contact your PTV buddy to agree and block out time in your diary/calendar for your PTV visits. Social work students will be teamed up with a social worker who have previous knowledge around the PTV work so they are supported and can build their understanding and expertise. This is also an opportunity to plan how you are going to work together for example, who will contact which property, who's collecting the PTV resources, etc.
- ✓ Attend the PTV session for reflection and any further information that might be needed.
- ✓ Contact the property and have a conversation with the carers / care providers about PTV and what it entails and how you really hope that they can support you with this work. For example, you could ask carers to speak to the individuals prior to your visit about voting and ask them to let individuals know when you will be coming. Be clear with support staff about everybody addressing their political bias during and after visits.
- ✓ During the call / contact to arrange your PTV visit, ask:
 - if you will need PPE?
 - is there parking?
 - what's the best time to visit? And
 - what are the communication needs of the individuals you will be seeing?

These questions will allow you to plan your visit.

- ✓ Ensure you know the location of your allocated property/properties and plan your travel accordingly.
- ✓ Plan your visit with your PTV buddy with consideration to what communication needs individuals have and what practice/ communication tool/s you will use.
- ✓ Make sure that you have picked up enough sets of documents for your visit.

These include:

- the audit forms to record provider and resident responses;
- easy read materials;
- voter registration forms;
- the voter passport. (See Appendix 3).

- ✓ On the arranged visit day call ahead to make sure it is still alright to attend, to ensure your health and safety and that of the individuals you will be supporting.
- ✓ Remember to take your staff ID with you on the visit.
- ✓ Do an online search for the nearest polling station and post box for the property that you are supporting. Find out if they are accessible: most polling stations will be in a local school or community centre.
- ✓ Become familiar with the easy read PTV information to build your knowledge and confidence for when you are supporting individuals to understand their voting rights.

SECTION FOUR

'HOW TO' ... DURING THE VISITS

In terms of approach, it is important that social work professionals remain focused on the conversation on voting. It is not necessary to discuss personal preferences, or involvement in voting, rather to stay impartial and professional. Be clear with support staff about their need to address their own political bias as well.



As people with lived experience often have multiple and/or high level needs, it is crucial that this is considered during the visits. Residents may feel overwhelmed with new faces and lots of questions. Do make sure to provide time before and after questions – this will help residents feel more at ease and to reduce the pressure of answering in a short space of time. Further, positive eye contact and body language can help. A smile and words of encouragement are positive attributes which can boost overall morale.

Each supported living property also needs to be audited to establish how many people are already registered to vote and how many are registered for a postal vote. Through conversations with residents and supported living providers, social workers and social work students have conversations around voting, voting rights, and they help to ensure that everyone who expressed a wish to vote was supported appropriately to do so. (The audit form for completion can be found in the appendices).

The audit form is the primary source of data to measure the outcomes of the campaign so it is important that it is completed in full. Most social workers and students take a hard copy of this with them and complete it with staff while there. It can also be emailed out to providers if requested. It covers the number of people who registered or who voted; the number of people who registered or who voted for the first time as a result of the visit; how people voted; whether they got the support they needed to vote; and any reasons for people not voting (including a deemed lack of capacity). It is also used to gather more anecdotal style feedback which is used to inform campaigns in the future, for example approaches that worked well or properties that were not open to the campaign issues.

Information from completed audit forms has been used by senior management in adult social care to set up further training sessions around capacity and human rights and to gather good practice and examples of voting policies and support plans to share with providers across Bradford.



Voter ID

New legislation concerning voter ID, The Voter Identification Regulations 2022, came into force in the May 2023 local elections in England. This legislation introduced a requirement for people voting in person at a polling station to produce appropriate ID. The legislation applies to all UK elections held from October 2023 (for more information see:

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2022/9780348240504/contents)

The legislation requires that voters across the UK need to show photo ID to vote at polling stations in some elections.

This applies to:

- UK parliamentary elections, including general elections, by-elections and recall petitions
- Local elections and by-elections
- Police and Crime Commissioner elections

Valid photo ID includes:

- A photo driving license
- Buss pass
- Passport
- Blue badge

For a full list of accepted ID at polling stations, see here: <https://www.gov.uk/how-to-vote/photo-id-youll-need>

If someone doesn't have voter ID they can apply for a voter authority certificate (details here: www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate)

When carrying out a visit check that people know about the requirements for voter ID if they want to vote in person; let them know what ID they need and check that they have valid ID. If they don't leave details of how to apply for a voter authority certificate or support them to apply for one if they want to.

The Electoral Commission have resources available to download to support conversations around voter ID: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/resources/democratic-engagement-resources/voter-id-resources

The purpose of the visits is to have an open conversation and below is some advice for social workers and students around visiting residents.

TOP TIPS AND GOOD PRACTICE ADVICE

- ✓ During the visits have a conversation, use the PTV information that you are sharing with people and respect people's views and wishes around voting.
- ✓ It can be fun to open up a conversation about rights and voting and making positive changes, this is community support, enjoy the lovely people in your community.
- ✓ Support individuals to register to vote or to complete their voting passport should they wish to.
- ✓ Think about the audit questions and remember to gather and record this information so that the spread sheet can be updated as this evidences our practice and support.
- ✓ Please arrange for a follow up visit or call to gather post-election data from the property. This is important as it allows us to measure the impact of the campaign, to identify good practice and also to identify where people are still being denied their right to vote.
- ✓ Remember to case note your work and support with individuals for PTV.

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

Your local electoral services will store this information. To contact them, go to www.electoralcomission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter

Alternatively, you can check with your local electoral registration officer. This information can also be found on www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter

What if I don't believe voting is important?

The aim of this guide is to highlight the value of the PTV campaign. In this rights-based approach, this guide aims to emphasise the importance of voting, and how it can affect the issues people care about. The person you support may wish to vote, or even, understand more about the democratic process. Although you may not vote / see the importance of voting, it is important that you support the person in exercising their right.

If you yourself participate in voting, you do not have to disclose this information to anyone. However, if you are comfortable talking about why you vote and who you vote for, please feel free to discuss this with the person you support. This can help build a positive picture of PTV, and it can help people to learn from one another.

How do I approach a situation where the person I support does not want to register or vote?

PTV aims to ensure that people with learning disabilities understand that they have a right to vote, and that they are supported to do so if they choose to exercise this right. During PTV conversations, please explain what PTV means in terms of the importance of voting, and how being involved can help people have their views heard. Voting can help influence change at local and general elections. The gov.uk website www.gov.uk/how-to-vote helps to highlight the background of PTV.

Although PTV does not necessarily aim to encourage involvement in voting, it is important to point out that people (including people with a learning disability) have the right to vote, and voting can impact on how the country and local area is run.

In what ways can I support someone at a polling station?

Providing practical assistance and resources are ways to help people. On voting day, you can visit a polling station with the person you support.

You can help the person complete their ballot paper. This can involve reading out and explaining the options, and marking the ballot paper on behalf of the person you support.

If you have any questions at the station, you can speak to the Presiding Officer on duty. They will ask you to sign a form saying you will be supporting someone to vote.

How do I talk about political parties without showing a bias?

Please remember: PTV aims to arm people with knowledge about their voting rights and to ensure that they are supported and not prevented or discouraged from voting if they choose to do so. We **cannot** at any stage hint or encourage people to vote in a certain way. Voting is a personal choice, and this project aims to uphold the right to vote by encouraging participation in doing so.

Approaching PTV conversations in an apolitical manner is crucial. This means we do not and cannot encourage a vote towards a particular political party. Staff must not tell the person they support how they should vote – this is entirely their choice.

Useful pieces of information include the Easy Read Guide to Voting, information on the parties' websites, and even mentioning the leader of each political party.

People with a learning disability should be included as the voice within the democratic process. PTV supports this, by making voting, democracy, and politics as accessible as

possible – especially for people who are traditionally less likely to be involved.

How do I make sure the person I support can make a meaningful democratic decision?

We should not make assumptions about an individual's ability. It is best to address voting by explaining the various political parties, and their aims. Discussing politics in general can help develop an open conversation, where the person you support can ask questions.

There are often various professionals involved in the support of people with learning disabilities. It is important to involve these individuals to help support them when making complex decisions. This will help involve everyone who supports that person and highlight the context and meaning of voting. Sometimes voting can be new, so it is important to take time when talking about voting. It may take the individual longer to develop a sound understanding of voting and the political process.

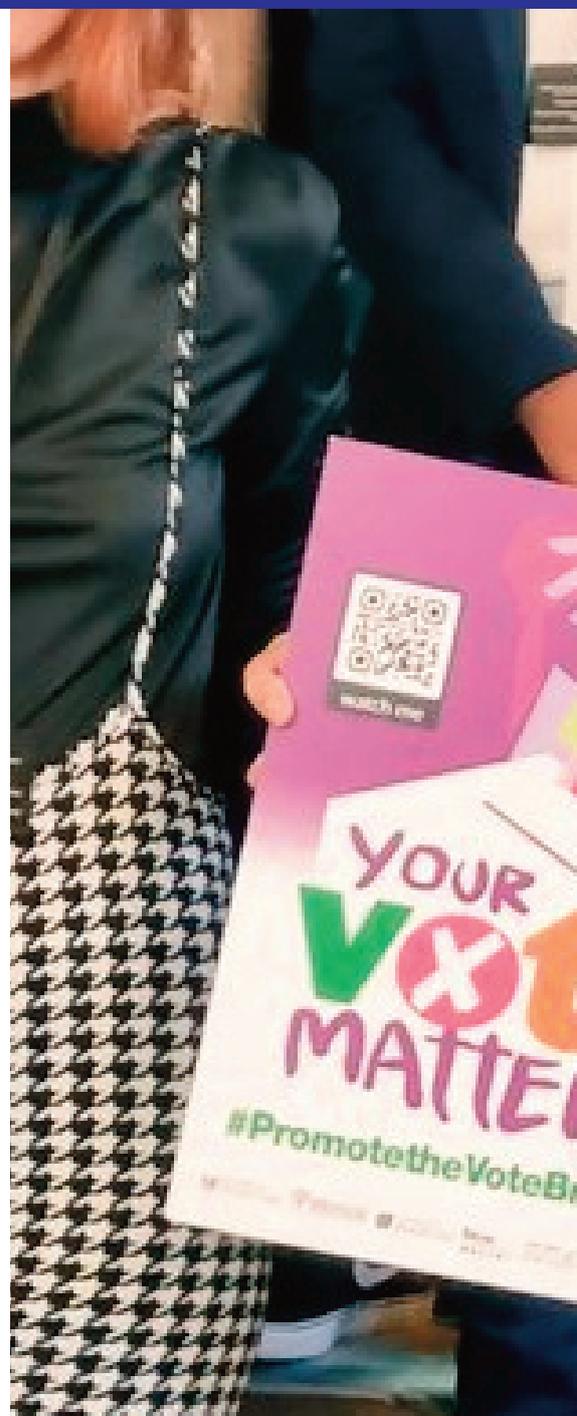
It is entirely the person's choice whether they wish to vote or not. PTV upholds the right of these individuals to be involved in the process if they choose to.



SECTION FIVE

'HOW TO' ... AFTER THE ELECTION

After the election, the social workers and students who carried out the visits are responsible for collecting the PTV responses from the audit forms. Secondary visits can either be in-person or a phone call. The aim of the secondary conversations is to discuss the impact of PTV with the residents and the support staff. During this conversation, individuals can highlight their experiences, including what they enjoyed, and what could have perhaps been improved. This helps inform future practice, and what adult social care teams can do to make the process better and more accessible. The planning team or a manager needs to be responsible for collating all of the data from audit forms and providing analysis of the outcomes.



Each year, there are challenges around amalgamating the PTV data. It is helpful if social workers and social work students have clear and focused conversations with support staff about the outcomes of the campaign visits. Another useful tip is to remind support staff that they will be visiting or calling to get the secondary data / outcome of the visit, and how this is an important aspect of the campaign in terms of measuring progress and highlighting any challenges to overcome for future campaigns.

It is also very helpful if social workers and social work students critically reflect on the visit as closely as possible in supervision and/or as a team. This can include specific feedback, comments, and advice from

residents and providers. It is a good idea to host a follow up reflective session, again organised by senior leaders. This can be a chance for the social worker and student pairings to present what they learned from their experience and provides really good PCF and reflective evidence for portfolios.

Critical reflection helps us also to assess how the PTV campaign is being received by our service providers. As providers can also experience challenges in the care environment, their first-hand insights are valuable. Moreover, by sticking to the secondary audit form questions, this helps keep the focus of PTV within the conversation amongst those who are directly involved and impacted.



LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES AND POSITIVES

Challenges

Despite having run PTV for a number of years, challenges still remain:

- Even though we visit the same properties every year, support staff often change and their own views can impact the success of any visit. Although the number has dropped significantly since 2017 when we started gathering data, there are still staff who believe that a lack of capacity equals a lack of ability to vote. This can be countered by being clear about the law, but also by talking about the reasons that people vote. It has been said in feedback sessions that very few people actually read political manifestos cover to cover or have a full grasp of who / what they are voting for. If someone wants to vote for a candidate because they like the colour of their tie, then that is as good a reason as many and should not be discounted.
- Once the excitement of the initial visits and the conversations around voting has worn off, it can be difficult to gather data after the election. This is because social workers and students have other work and have filled up their diaries and often they struggle to get through to the right person at the property to gather the data. Clear and open conversations with support staff about why we are asking for follow up data help with this as does forward planning in terms of setting a date to complete the audit after the election.
- In recent years anecdotal feedback suggests that often support staff do not value political participation in its own right and so are less likely to encourage the people they support to vote. It is important to remind staff to put their political bias and opinions to one side and focus on upholding people's rights.
- When the campaign first began, initial conversations were more challenging but as properties are visited in consecutive years staff and residents are both more

receptive and also know to expect and look forward to the visit every year. It might be an idea to 'start small' or with a specific focus to try out approaches in your area and see what works.

Positives

- Residents report being excited to cast their first vote, particularly if this is in person; it makes them feel included and part of something bigger.
- Although it has taken time and work is by no means over, the number of residents who didn't vote due to 'lack of capacity' has decreased year on year. Conversations can now be had with providers about people being able to make decisions for themselves on other things in their lives.
- Over the years of the campaign the number of people choosing to vote has steadily increased. With a general election coming up this feels very exciting!
- The more conversations you have with people about capacity not being a barrier to voting, the more obstacles you knock down. Many people report not knowing about capacity and voting and it is important to break down misconceptions.
- Schools can become involved by preparing their young people to vote for the first time. The resources are universal and we have worked with our elections team to hold mock polling sessions to give young people a chance to see how voting in person works.
- Local user led organisations have been at the heart of developing resources and training polling staff on the use of the voter passport.



Future steps

For the 2024 elections, the social work team in Bradford will be implementing some improvements to the campaign.

- The audit form now asks questions about whether someone has previously registered to vote or has voted. This will make it easier to gather data about first time voters.
- We will be holding information sessions and mock polling stations with day service providers in order to reach more people.
- Information about support planning and voting policies is being written into contracts for supported living providers.
- Audio versions of resources are being produced by a user led organisation to support people with visual impairments.
- Some simpler versions of resources are being produced by social workers who have worked on the campaign for a number of years.
- A multi-agency steering group has been set up to ensure that managers can start planning with all relevant parties as early as possible. This includes supported living commissioning managers, electoral services, social workers, user led organisations and schools.
- Work is ongoing to ensure that for a general election materials will be available from political parties in accessible formats.



Positive stories, experiences and feedback from the residents, providers, and social workers

involved. Engagement through PTV conversations helped residents feel valued, subsequently building morale. Feedback like this establish the added practical value in terms of supporting individuals, which can result in higher civic engagement and more positive perceptions around voting.



Residents engaging in PTV

content and conversations. Higher voter turnout is a positive aspect that PTV discussions can bring.



Opportunities to learn and improve

from this year's campaign to better our social work practice.



Empowerment and promoting voice and independence:

residents and providers shared an insight into the PTV campaign, where they felt involved and included as the voice of the community.



X Still having conversations about capacity: having a disability does not impact the right to participate in voting. Views of votes being 'false' and a 'waste', often mirror the fact that voting is not written into support and care plans. It is problematic to still be faced with such feedback, years on into the campaign. The challenge is still to overcome this perception, and to create a more open-minded conversation and approach around voting and voter rights.

X Still, there are some knowledge gaps around **voter rights**. Training and support sessions for provider staff could help build understanding around PTV.

X Still seeing a **lack of engagement from providers**, which can influence the response rate from residents.

Thank you to all the social workers and social work students who have taken part in Promote the Vote; and a special thank you to those of you whose input has helped us to write this guide.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Additional resources

<https://www.gov.uk/how-to-vote>

How social workers are supporting disabled people to exercise their right to vote at this election
- Community Care

Learning Disability England

Learning Disability England host a hub of accessible information and resources on voting:
[Voting Resources – 2024 – Learning Disability England](#)

Mencap – *My Vote My Voice* easy read resources <https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/elections/guides-voting>

How to vote : Overview - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

How to vote | Electoral Commission

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/registering-to-vote-easy-read-guide>

IER - Supporting applicants to register.docx (live.com)

My Vote My Voice

Quick guide to voting – My Vote My Voice

Local Government Association resource - useful for explaining the process at properties

Promote the vote - Social work with adults (blog.gov.uk)

Upholding Human Rights: A Call to Action to Promote the Vote | www.basw.co.uk

Upholding Human Rights: Promoting the vote for adults with learning disabilities | Local Government Association

Upholding Human Rights: Promoting the vote for adults with learning disabilities | Local Government Association

Voting and registering to vote: an easy read guide - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/resources/democratic-engagement-resources/voter-id-resources>

Details for your local electoral services team can be found on this link: [The electoral register and the 'open register': Get on the electoral register - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter displays the forms that you might need.

Appendix 2:

United Nations Article 29 – Participation in Political and Public Life

States parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others, and shall undertake:

- a) To ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected, *inter alia*, by:
 - i. Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use;
 - ii. Protecting the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums without intimidation, and to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate;
 - iii. Guaranteeing the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice;
- b) To promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in public affairs, including:
 - i. Participation in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country, and in the activities and administration of political parties;
 - ii. Forming and joining organizations of persons with disabilities to represent persons with disabilities at international, national, regional, and local levels.

Appendix 3: The voting passport – developed by Bradford People First



In partnership with






Insert Photo Here.
Optional.



This is my Voting Passport

For people with a learning disability and /or other disabilities who may need support at the polling station.

My name is:

I have a learning disability and/or other disability.

I need reasonable adjustments to support me to vote in this election.

The support I need is:

To stay with my support worker .

Someone to show me a large print ballot paper.

Someone to go into the polling booth with me.

Someone to read out the candidates on the ballot paper.



In partnership with







Someone to mark the ballot paper with my decision.

Someone to show me where to put my ballot paper.

I need things explained in a slow, clear way.

List any other support you need to help you vote:

I would like the above support from:

A member of the polling station staff .

My companion, whose name is:

My companion is eligible to vote in the UK.

My companion is not eligible to vote in the UK and will need to work with the Presiding Officer to support me.

Appendix 4: PTV audit form

Promote the Vote 2023: Audit Form

Please complete at first visit and return as soon as possible to: email@email

Social worker names:

Address:

Date of visit:

First visit data: Residents

Number of residents	Number Registered to vote	Number fully aware they can register	Number choosing to abstain from registering	Number whose support plan includes support to vote	Number who have voted before	Number who have accepted photo ID to vote

First visit data: Provider

Does the Provider have a policy on voting: Y/N	Are staff trained on voting: Y/N	Is voting included in support plans? Y/N	Do staff support people to access polling stations on election day? Y/N	Any other feedback:

Second visit: Data

Number who voted by....				If voted in Person...		
# voted in person	# voted by post	# voted by proxy	# voted for the first time	# no support needed	# assisted to travel to the polling station	# assisted to access the polling booth

Of those who did not vote...

# personal choice	# not registered to vote	# deemed to lack capacity	# planned support not available on the day	# unwell	# no photo ID	# no reason given

Any other feedback:

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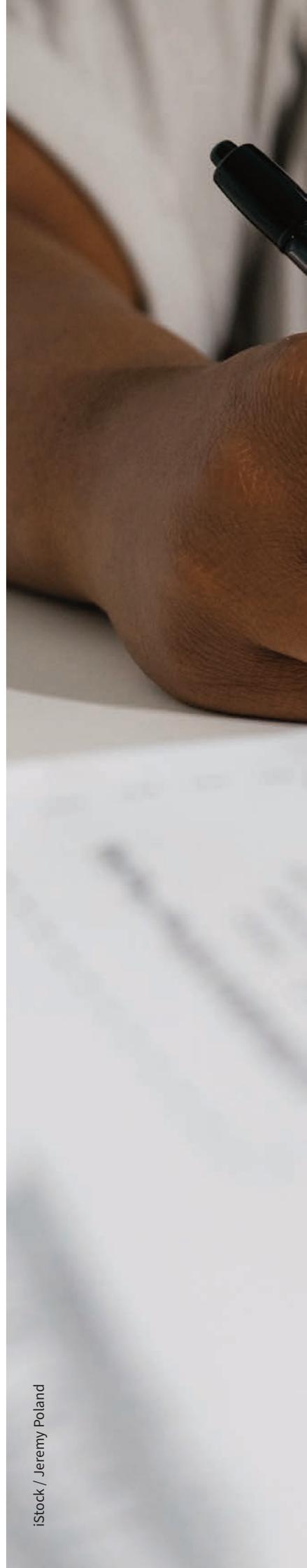
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