

Guidelines on Campaign Finance for Candidates in Local Elections in England.

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Congratulations

- you are a candidate!

Standing for election is a hugely daunting prospect, and we need more women doing it. Thank you for making the decision to step forward to represent your community. You are doing something hugely important for our democracy and we respect and honour you in that. The team at Elect Her have got your back - we are here for you as you navigate this!

As well as planning your campaign, as a candidate you need to know about campaign financing rules and record keeping.

This guide will take you through information and paperwork relating to campaign finance, and provide you with the knowledge required to be an effective, and confident, political candidate in a local election in England.

This guidance offers practical advice for anyone who wants to stand as a candidate at a district, borough, county or unitary authority election in England. Last updated March 2024. For information for London Assembly Candidates, please refer to the Electoral Commission [here](#).

Campaign Financing

Once you have registered as a candidate, the next step in your political journey is to familiarize yourself with the duties and responsibilities required of you as a registered candidate. In a nutshell, these require you (and your election agent) to exercise good bookkeeping skills. Maintaining accurate records of all donations received and all forms of expenditure is really important in the run up to the election, as this information is needed in order to submit the Candidate Returns Form, which is a requirement for registered candidates.

The Electoral Commission has many guidance documents on campaign finance which you can find online on [their website](#). As a woman standing for election, we know that you haven't got all the time in the world. That's why we've worked with a research and legal team to create this document, summarising over 200 pages of guidance. Despite this, there are still areas that are ambiguous or open to interpretation. So if you find parts of this confusing - that's probably because it is! Know your obligations, and trust your judgment.

This guide will outline campaign financing under the following headings;

1. Candidate Return Form
2. Donations
3. Expenditure

1. Candidate Return Form

Managing money can be difficult. A large part of managing your campaign finances revolves around maintaining good money management habits and practices.

Here are a few simple tips you can follow;

- Separate any money received in connection with your role as candidate from your own personal finances
- Request receipts and invoices for all forms of expenditure
- Get a folder or file (physical and/or digital) specifically for keeping receipts and invoices
- Keep up to date on your recording
- Note dates, details, and sources as you go so as to prevent any omissions, or errors

You can use the Candidate Return Form to document and manage finances from the beginning, or keep a record in a Google Spreadsheet that you share with your agent- so that they can see your proposed expenditure and record that they approve it - and then copy the information into the Candidate Return Form.

What goes in a Candidate Return Form?

As a registered candidate you are required to report all donations and expenditure using a Candidate Return Form, [which can be accessed as a PDF here.](#) Or, [as an Excel spreadsheet here.](#)

The Candidate Return Form is a financing document that contains the following sections:

- Section 1 – Details of Candidate and Election
- Section 2 – Details of Election Agent
- Section 3 – Summary of Spending
- Section 4 – Statement of all Personal Expenses Incurred
- Section 5 – Donations
- Template Spreadsheets relating to;
 - A - Advertising
 - B – Unsolicited material to electors
 - C - Transport
 - D – Public Meetings
 - E – Accommodation and administration

- Other Authorized Spending
- Unpaid Claims
- Disputed Claims
- Personal Expenses
- Permissible Donations
- Impermissible Donations

2. Donations

What is a donation?

A ‘donation’ is any ‘good or service’ whether gifted, or loaned, received from any person other than the candidate or agent for the purpose of covering election expenses with a value of over £50.

Examples: “Gifts, sponsorships, any money spent on behalf of the candidate, and loans.”

Any “good or service” received, gifted or loaned in your personal capacity, and not intended for covering election expenses is not defined as a donation.

Examples: “A birthday gift, a bonus at work, etc.”

Any sum over £50 you receive to meet an election expense is considered a donation, even if you receive the donation before you are a candidate (pre-candidacy). Candidates associated with a party must report pre-candidacy donations along with their other donations. Independent candidates are exempt from this requirement to report pre-candidacy donations.

What are general and specific purpose donations?

Most donations are general donations, where a donor gives you funds for your campaign, and does not specify exactly what the donation is to be spent on. Throughout this guide, unless we specify otherwise, that is what we are referring to.

However, if you are given a donation for a particular expense, this is known as a specific purpose donation.

Examples: “A donation is given to you for leaflets and you pay for 1000 leaflets to be printed; a donation is given to you for a motorised wheelchair and you purchase the wheelchair.”

Specific purpose donations should be recorded with a note indicating what that purpose was, as shown on the following page. There is an exception to this: When the donation is for a specified personal expense, there is no requirement to record the donation or the expenditure.

I've received a donation, what do I do?

Once you have received a donation you must record the following information:

- Donor Name
- Address of Donor
- Company Number (if donor is a registered company)
- Type of Donor
- Date Received
- Date Accepted
- Nature (here you can add if it is a specific purpose donation)

Example of a Permissible Donations spreadsheet from the Candidate Returns Form;

For information about how to complete this return, read the explanatory notes available on our website			
Enter identification mark as on candidate's declaration <input type="text"/>			
Return of candidate election expenditure: Local government elections in England and Wales			
Section 1 – Details of candidate and election			
Electoral Area	<input type="text"/>		
Local Authority	<input type="text"/>		
Electorate	<input type="text"/>	Date you became a candidate	<input type="text"/>
Date of election	<input type="text"/>	Date election result declared	<input type="text"/>
Candidate name	<input type="text"/>		
Registered party (if applicable)	<input type="text"/>	Spending limit	<input type="text"/>
Section 2 – Details of election agent			
Agent's name	<input type="text"/>	Date election agent appointed	<input type="text"/>
Mark box as appropriate:			
I am the agent responsible for delivering this return of candidate election expenses under Part II of the Representation of the People Act 1983 <input type="checkbox"/>			

What are permissible and impermissible donors?

It is important that as a candidate, you understand who you are receiving donations from. Donors are categorized as permissible, and impermissible donors.

Permissible Donors

Permissible donors are donors who it is considered legal to receive donations from.

The following are permissible donors;

- An individual registered in an electoral register
- A registered company incorporated in the UK which carries on business in the UK
- A registered political party
- A trade union
- A building society
- A Limited Liability Partnership
- A registered friendly society
- Any incorporation of two or more people which carries on business in the UK

Impermissible Donors

Impermissible donors are those who it is illegal to receive a donation from.

The following are examples of impermissible donors;

- Any donor who is not listed as a permissible donor
- Any anonymous donor

If you have received a donation from an impermissible donor you will have to record the donation and return the donation as soon as possible the same way the donation was received.

3. Expenditure

What are campaign expenses?

Any spending during the regulated period for the purposes of the candidate's election are considered to be expenses.

The regulated period is defined as the day after you officially become a candidate and complete your registration paperwork (see our Guidelines on Registering as a Candidate in Local Elections in England), and ends on polling day. While you can begin campaigning earlier, the earliest date you can officially become a candidate is 25 days working days before election day.

There are two kinds of expenses:

- **Campaign Expenses**
- **Personal Expenses**

It is important that you understand the differences between the two forms of expenses as the rules relating to each differ.

Campaign Expenses

Campaign expenses are costs connected to your election campaign.

The following are considered campaign expenses:

- Advertising of any kind including posters, news paper adverts, adverts on social media or YouTube videos
- Unsolicited Material such as leaflets, emails or mass letters not related to specific queries
- Transport costs such as car hire, public transport or fuel
- Renting spaces for public meetings
- Staff costs such as an agent's salary, or anyone who may be employed by you as part of the campaign team
- Accommodation such as renting an office space
- Administrative costs such as stationary, phone bills, internet provider bills, photocopying or software

Campaign expenses are subject to a spending limit. For the 2024 May local elections, this is £960, plus 8p per local government elector.

Example: “If there are 7,500 electors in a ward, the spending limit is: £960 + (7,500 x 0.08) = £1,560”

Where a campaign expense is incurred, it is important that the candidate records the expense in the relevant section of the Candidate Return Form.

Example: “A candidate expense of £250 for advertising (Figure A), £100 for unsolicited material (Figure B) and £250 for transport costs (Figure C).”

Figure A: Advertising

A: Advertising										
Item No	Receipt/ Invoice (Y/N)	Item/ Service	Name and address of supplier (unless on invoice/receipt)	Name of person who made payment	Date expense incurred	Date receipt received	Date paid	Value £	Amount Paid (if different from value) £	Disputed/ Unpaid? (Y/N)
Sub-total										

Figure B: Unsolicited Materials

B: Unsolicited material to electors										
Item No	Receipt/ Invoice (Y/N)	Item/ Service	Name and address of supplier (unless on invoice/receipt)	Name of person who made payment	Date expense incurred	Date receipt received	Date paid	Value £	Amount Paid (if different from value) £	Disputed/ Unpaid? (Y/N)
Sub-total										

Figure C: Transport Costs

C: Transport										
Item No	Receipt/ Invoice (Y/N)	Item/ Service	Name and address of supplier (unless on invoice/receipt)	Name of person who made payment	Date expense incurred	Date receipt received	Date paid	Value £	Amount Paid (if different from value) £	Disputed/ Unpaid? (Y/N)
Sub-total										

Personal Expenses: What are personal expenses?

Personal expenses are any cost that arises as part of the election campaign but do not fall under the above categories of campaign expenses.

Personal expenses do not count towards your campaign expenses spending limit. There is therefore no spending limit in relation to personal expenses, however candidates are required to record all personal expenses in the Candidate Returns Form.

A candidate is permitted to spend donations on both campaign and personal expenses.

Personal expenses include reasonable travel expenses and reasonable accommodation expenses.

Examples: car hire, public transport, hotels.

What does reasonable mean?

The Electoral Commission take an approach of reasonableness, meaning that expenditure must be considered acceptable or logical by common sense, and candidates are to use their judgment on this.

Example: “A taxi hire would be considered a reasonable expense, buying a luxury car would not.”

What about personal expenses other than travel and accommodation?

The regulations do not set out what could be listed here, however candidates may wish to include other personal expenses required for the purpose of the election campaign. Childcare incurred in order to campaign could come under this section. Clothing, technology such as a laptop and other personal expenses for items that you will use in the campaign and beyond could also be considered personal expenses.

This might seem confusing but that’s because it is! There is not a definitive list of what could be included here, so use your judgment on this.

What if I am given something for free or discounted?

Where you receive a good or service which otherwise would be considered a “campaign expense” then;

- If you have received a good or services for free then you are required to record the full commercial value of the good or services as a campaign expense.

- If you have received a discounted good or service then you are required to record the amount paid as a campaign expense.

Example: “a printing shop offers to print your leaflets for free.”

Where no cost has been incurred you are not required to record the spending.

Example: “a friend lets you use a room in their house as an office, or loans you their computer.”

What about disability related expenditure?

Costs that are reasonably connected to a candidate’s disability will not be considered a campaign expense, and can be recorded as a personal expense (“reasonable living expense”). Candidates are therefore permitted to spend donations on these costs.

For example: “if a candidate requires a wheelchair/mobility aid in order to deliver leaflets, this would be a personal expense. However if a candidate pays postage to deliver the leaflets instead, this would be a campaign expense, as this is a typical campaign cost.”

What about expenses that I received Specific Purpose Donations for?

If you have been given a Specific Purpose Donation, and you spend it on the item specified,

- if it is a campaign expense then the donation and the spending needs to be recorded,
- if it is a personal expense, there is no requirement to record either donation or expense.

How do I know if my travel costs are a Campaign Expense or a Personal Expense?

Travel costs can arise under both the headings of expenses.

Where travel costs have been incurred by an agent, or campaigner and the candidate has reimbursed these costs then this would constitute a travel cost under the heading of campaign expenses.

Where a candidate has incurred a travel cost in their own capacity then this is considered a personal expense.

Example: “Putting petrol in a car to drive to go canvassing would be a campaign expense, as would reimbursing someone else for their travel costs.”

When and how do I report my campaign finances?

Candidates are required to submit their Candidate Return Form to their local Returns Officer 35 days after the election result is declared.

A candidate must return:

- A completed Candidate Return Form
- A signed Declaration
- The agent must also submit a declaration

The Candidate Declaration can be found [here](#).
Copy and paste the text into a document, edit and complete it then print it out, ready to submit.

What if I still have questions?

If you are part of a party, ask your agent or other experienced members who are familiar with this.

If you have further questions, [the Electoral Commission website](#) is a good place to start. Their guidance for candidates at local elections is [here](#). You can also email them on: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk

Ask Her is always there for you! Book a 20 minute slot with our Elect Her team who can help signpost you to other spaces of support and advice. Find upcoming dates listed [here](#).

What's next?

[Sign up for Equip Her - candidate campaign support](#). We provide resources, training and community for women who are candidates in upcoming elections.

Whatever happens on election day, we have support and community for you. [Find out our upcoming events and workshops.](#)

This guide was produced by [Elect Her](#) in partnership with Exeter University.

Elect Her is a non-partisan organisation working to motivate, support and equip women in all their diversity to stand for political office in Britain.



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