

## STEP 6

# RUNNING A COMMUNITY BALLOT

This guide summarises some of the key questions to consider in planning and administering a community ballot.



### WHY CONDUCT A COMMUNITY BALLOT?

There are two principal reasons for going through a community ballot process:

- **TO SHOW A FAIR AND TRANSPARENT RESULT FOR PROCEEDING, OR NOT, WITH A COMMUNITY ASSET ACQUISITION**
- **TO PROVIDE VALUABLE EVIDENCE OF LOCAL PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE PROJECT TO FUNDERS**

A ballot should take place after information has been collated and disseminated to the community so they can make an informed decision. This guide focuses on ballots of a voluntary nature as part of the acquisition process.

### WHO WILL ADMINISTER THE BALLOT?

You may decide to administer the ballot yourselves or there may be a local organisation that is prepared to administer the ballot on your behalf. Some councils will undertake this and you can contact the local Elections Office to discuss this with them. It is important to consider the amount of work involved for your group and to ensure the independence of the ballot as well as the cost. If you choose to use a third party, involve them in the process as early as possible so procedures and processes can be agreed.

### WHAT COSTS ARE INVOLVED IN ADMINISTERING YOUR COMMUNITY BALLOT?

Costs can vary depending on whether the ballot is administered by your group or by a third party. The size of the community will also affect the costs. A ballot can cost anywhere between £200 and £1,500 which can include advertising, postage, stationery and room hire for the count.

### HOW WILL YOU FUND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE BALLOT?

There are various options for funding towards these costs. Discuss with your local HIE development manager for further advice.

### WHAT BALLOT QUESTION DO YOU ASK?

In most cases, one simple Yes/No question. In some instances you might want to ask about preferred options. Whatever the question, it needs to be completely clear what you are asking the community to vote on.

### WHO WILL BE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE?

Eligible voters are those people on the electoral roll for your defined community. Some groups have extended the vote to 16 and 17 year olds. If you are carrying out a ballot under a specific process such as Community Right to Buy you should check specific guidance for voter eligibility.

### ARE YOU DISTRIBUTING ANY PROJECT INFORMATION WITH THE BALLOT PAPERS?

Ideally the ballot should be issued on its own. If you wish to share information prior to the ballot, this can be done in other ways such as a letter or event about the imminent ballot, encouraging people to vote. You could also provide copies of the executive summary of the feasibility study or any other information which will help inform peoples' views on the ballot question.

### WHAT BALLOT METHODS WILL YOU USE?

In the past, groups have used a range of ballot methods that best suit their community and encourage a high turnout. Many groups use a postal ballot, where ballot papers are sent by post to each named voter in the community with details of how it should be completed, how to return the ballot paper and the closing date. Other methods include running ballot buses throughout the area and situating ballot boxes in key locations such as post offices, council information points and libraries.

### WHAT DETAILS NEED TO BE RECORDED ON THE COUNT?

You should detail total turnout, yes and no votes and spoilt papers. These should be recorded as absolute numbers and as a percentage of eligible voters. You should also record yes and no votes as a percentage of total turnout.

### WHAT IS A POSITIVE VOTE?

A result of 50.1% of voters who turned out is classed as a positive vote.

### HOW WILL YOU DEMONSTRATE INDEPENDENCE?

This is a very important element with any community ballot. Having a third party administering the ballot is one way to demonstrate independence. A public count of the ballot papers where public and press can attend demonstrates openness.

### SUMMARY OF KEY STAGES:

1. Decide on the ballot question
2. Obtain electoral register
3. Publish notice of election
4. Issue ballot papers
5. Closing date for returned ballot papers
6. Hold an open and public count
7. Publish the ballot result

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE SEE**

[www.hie.co.uk/ten-steps](http://www.hie.co.uk/ten-steps)

or contact us on [community.assets@hient.co.uk](mailto:community.assets@hient.co.uk)

