

GENERAL ELECTION

2017

**A VOICE FOR
SOCIAL CARE CLIENTS**

JEWISH CARE

A VOICE FOR SOCIAL CARE CLIENTS

Over 400,000 elderly and disabled people live in residential care in England and nearly 372,000 people received community-based care and support at home in 2013/14. These individuals have a lifetime of experiences and a wealth of acquired knowledge. They have shaped the world we live in today. They have ensured we have a fair democratic process for all. Their voice and right to engage in democracy shouldn't be lost just because they require care and support.

An impressive 76% of over 65 year olds voted in the 2010 general election, but this figure reduces dramatically when it comes to older people living in residential care – a group described as “one of the most significant under-registered sections of our community” by research carried out in the Midlands.

Jewish Care is a social care provider touching the lives of 10,000 people every week. Our care homes are home to over 600 people. Our home care team support hundreds of people who live, often alone, in their own homes and thousands visit our day and community centres each year.

We believe that our clients remain a vibrant and important part of the community - and that it is our duty to engage and support anyone who can, and wants to, have their say in the democratic process.

Whilst there are numerous campaigns focused on engaging and supporting younger people to vote there is little documented about work to support people living in residential care or other social care clients to have their say.

We first produced this short guide to support our staff and volunteers for the 2015 general election and have recently updated it for the forthcoming 8th June 2017 general election. The guide is based on a successful engagement programme run in Rubens House, one of our residential care homes, and looks at practical, impartial ways that staff and volunteers can stimulate interest in political debate and support people who wish to vote.

Whilst this document focuses on supporting residents in care homes, given their marked under-representation in voting figures, the ideas outlined here can also be used to support other vulnerable and isolated people.

Home care and day centre staff and volunteers can also, for example, play pivotal roles in helping other older or vulnerable people have their say, where they may struggle without support.

Many older people have a lifetime of experience in political engagement. They have helped shape their communities, their country and sometimes world affairs, through their work and their political interests. We believe that, by sharing some of their inspirational stories, they can also engage future generations, encouraging them to have their say and play a role in shaping our future.

We have shared a few inspirational stories in this guide. We will share more of these inspirational stories through our social media channels in the build up to the election.

TOP TIPS FOR SOCIAL CARE STAFF

If you support several clients the first step is to identify those who may want to vote.

EVERY CLIENT IS AN INDIVIDUAL

- You know your clients. Think about their life histories. If you don't know enough about them, use this as an opportunity to find out more. Ask them about their interest in politics, past voting records and speak to them about their interest in voting in a forthcoming election.
- It is likely that some people you support may not have the capacity to make a decision to vote. It is important that staff or volunteers do not make assumptions about an individual's capacity to register, vote or to apply a "one size fits all" approach to clients. If a client has not appointed a proxy and can't make the declaration of truth by signing or marking their usual mark on the form or confirm the information on an online registration is correct they will not meet the criteria required to cast their vote. If you are in any doubt about a client's capacity to vote you could contact the client's GP or seek advice from the local electoral officer.

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE

Just because a person is living in a care home or requires care in their own home it doesn't mean that he or she no longer has an interest in politics. A general election can be a great opportunity to engage clients and create lively debate about both current affairs and past issues of interest to them. They have a lifetime of experience and stories to share:

- Invite first time voters from your local school or college to share their views with the residents in a care home or meet members at a day centre.
- Set up mock general elections – or a Prime Minister's Question Time – which often prove to be popular with residents.
- Invite your sitting MP and other prospective parliamentary candidates into social care settings so that residents or members can ask them questions on issues that matter to them.



It's around 80 years ago that I first got involved with politics – when the fascist blackshirts started marching through Jewish areas of the East End – and I was at the famous Cable Street riot where they got their comeuppance!

Beattie Orwell, member of Jewish Care's
Brenner Centre at Stepney Community Centre



SUPPORTING VOTER REGISTRATION

Everyone who wishes to vote in the forthcoming UK general election needs to have registered on the electoral register by **Monday 22 May 2017**. You can do this by going to www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

People who are already registered to vote at their current address and do not want to change their voting preferences do not need to register again.

You will need to register clients to:

- update name, address or other details on the electoral register
- change their voting preferences, for example to vote by post or a proxy vote instead of going to the polling station

If you are supporting someone in their own home and have no access to the internet you can call the local election office to register to vote.

To make the registration system more secure applicants must now provide identifying information (date of birth and national insurance number) as part of their application, so you may need to make extra effort to obtain this information. For example, where this information is not immediately available you may need to speak to a relative to obtain it. Where this identifying information cannot be provided, applicants must give the reasons why they cannot provide the information. They will then be contacted and required to provide documentary evidence of their identity.

The application requires a person who is applying to vote to declare that the information provided is true. Alternatively, a person who has an appropriate power of attorney may make the declaration on behalf of the elector.

If you are in a care home setting and have residents staying with you for respite you should check with them if they would like to vote. Find out if they have made arrangements to register to vote at their home address.

If in doubt you can always contact the local electoral office. You can find details of your local office at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk



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Simon Morris, Chief Executive, Jewish Care



MY LIFE: MY POLITICS: MARY PARKIN* **HOLDING HANDS WITH NELSON MANDELA**

The sheer injustice of the racist apartheid system in South Africa first sparked Mary Parkin's passion for politics as a young woman in South Africa in the 1970s and 80s.

Working as a nursing lecturer in Cape Town, she recalls how black people were barred from walking on local streets after dark and faced prison, or worse, if they broke the regime's curfew.

"How can you simply stand by and see people treated so inhumanely," she says. "It made me want to get involved with the anti-Apartheid movement through my work at the university and try to change the system."

Her work in mental health nursing gave her the opportunity to visit Nelson Mandela when imprisoned on Robben Island with a forensic psychiatrist checking on his health.

"He was an amazing man," recalls Mary, "He didn't appear bitter at all, despite the injustices he had experienced all of his life. I must admit my lasting memory of the great man is him holding my hand as we walked around the prison complex; just how, amazingly, he held out his hand to his enemies when finally released."

Mary is reluctant to speak too much, even now, about her secret work for the African National Congress – to the point of using a false name – but is happy to relate her exceptional story if it helps her fellow residents at Jewish Care's Ruben's House in Finchley understand that participating in the democratic process can help to fight injustice and change lives.

**Mary's name has been changed as she wanted to protect her identity*

ONCE YOU HAVE REGISTERED

Once you are registered you can choose how you want to vote. There are three ways to vote:

1. In person at the polling station on 8th June 2017
2. Postal vote
3. Vote by proxy

Proxy voting means that if someone isn't able to cast their vote in person, they can have someone they can trust to cast their vote.

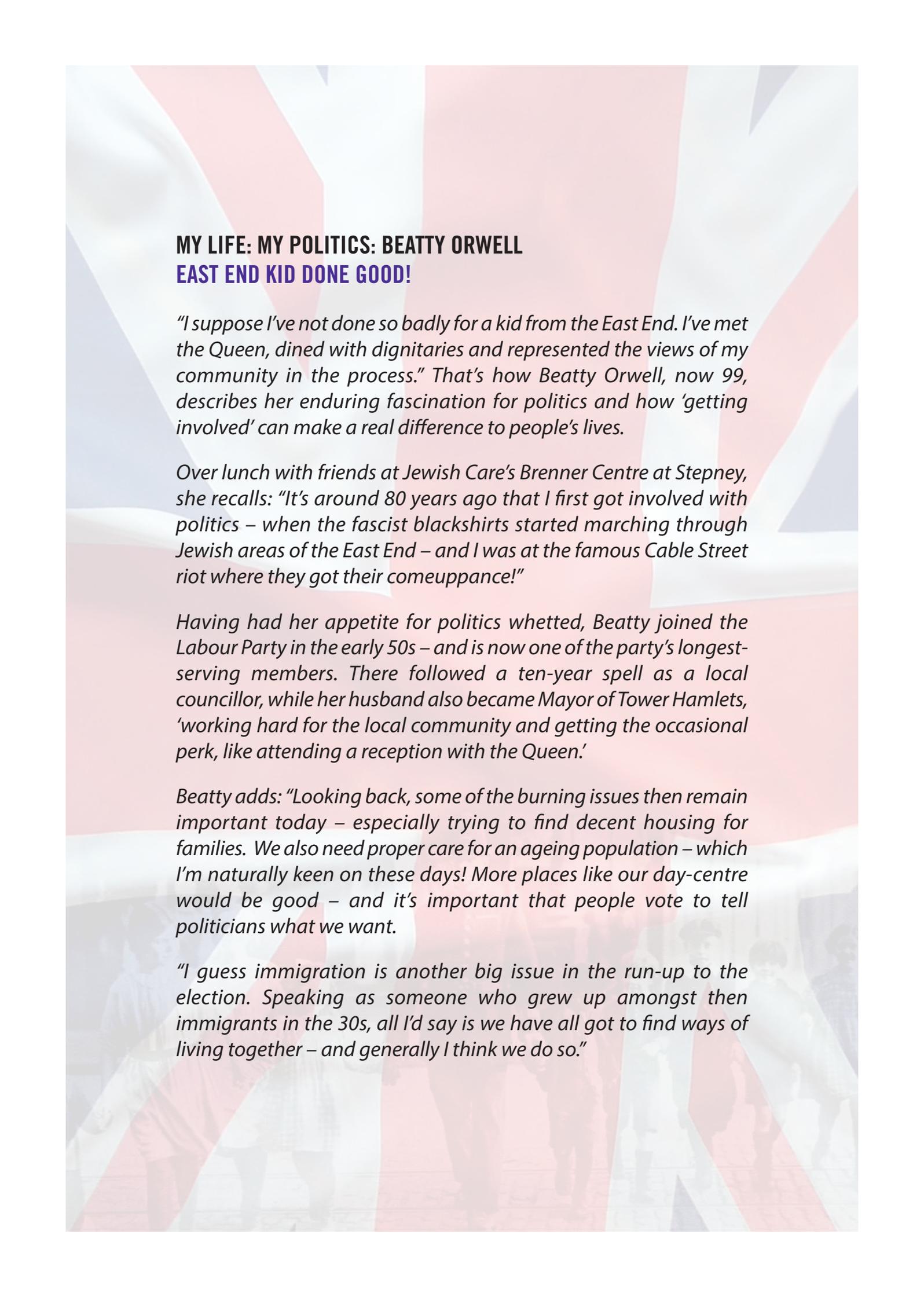
Ask each client how they would prefer to vote. Some people like visiting the polling station for the sense of occasion, while others may prefer a postal vote.

Supporting registration, and co-ordinating voting, can be time-consuming for staff. Consider recruiting a volunteer to support you with this work. Maybe a young person from a nearby school or college would be interested in helping-out.

Engage family members, maybe children or grandchildren who would like to help their relatives vote. Perhaps they'd like help filling out registration forms – and advice on the different ways of voting, whether in person at a polling station, a postal or vote by proxy.

Before election day – speak to the electoral office about accessibility at the polling station and plan transportation and support for clients who wish to go to the polling station.

For clients who have chosen to vote by post you can ensure that they have privacy while they are marking the ballot paper. It is important that they mark the paper themselves. The postal ballot paper will come with a postal vote statement where the client must provide their signature and date of birth. You can help clients with this but the client must sign the postal statement themselves (unless they have been granted a waiver).



MY LIFE: MY POLITICS: BEATTY ORWELL

EAST END KID DONE GOOD!

"I suppose I've not done so badly for a kid from the East End. I've met the Queen, dined with dignitaries and represented the views of my community in the process." That's how Beatty Orwell, now 99, describes her enduring fascination for politics and how 'getting involved' can make a real difference to people's lives.

Over lunch with friends at Jewish Care's Brenner Centre at Stepney, she recalls: "It's around 80 years ago that I first got involved with politics – when the fascist blackshirts started marching through Jewish areas of the East End – and I was at the famous Cable Street riot where they got their comeuppance!"

Having had her appetite for politics whetted, Beatty joined the Labour Party in the early 50s – and is now one of the party's longest-serving members. There followed a ten-year spell as a local councillor, while her husband also became Mayor of Tower Hamlets, 'working hard for the local community and getting the occasional perk, like attending a reception with the Queen.'

Beatty adds: "Looking back, some of the burning issues then remain important today – especially trying to find decent housing for families. We also need proper care for an ageing population – which I'm naturally keen on these days! More places like our day-centre would be good – and it's important that people vote to tell politicians what we want.

"I guess immigration is another big issue in the run-up to the election. Speaking as someone who grew up amongst then immigrants in the 30s, all I'd say is we have all got to find ways of living together – and generally I think we do so."

HOW OTHER STAFF AND COLLEAGUES CAN HELP

- Assess the resources required to launch a successful programme based on the ideas here – a programme which will involve residents in the democratic process, including voting at elections. Then discuss what’s needed with your line manager
- Raise the subject at relevant staff meetings, so as to involve colleagues in the programme, and get their ideas on generating interest among residents
- Choose a couple of key people to help you co-ordinate the programme with residents and volunteers, making sure you choose people who won’t attempt to impose their own views on residents
- Ask activity facilitators to organise activities around the election – things like reminiscence sessions, quizzes and word games

PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

The right to vote is an important part of being a citizen. It’s a legally-protected human right, and a diagnosis of dementia makes no difference to that.

People living with dementia retain the right to vote. What matters is being able to clearly express a vote choice and having the right support to do this.

While people living with dementia may not be able to clearly express how they want to vote the role of the social care sector is to ensure help is available for the actual voting process. People living with dementia can ask for the requirement for a signature on the postal form to be waived if it causes them difficulty. If they want to vote at the polling station, they can ask for help to mark the ballot paper. Or they can appoint a proxy – somebody to vote on their behalf.



Just because you live in a residential home, doesn't mean you lose interest in the big issues of the day, because they still affect you. That's why it's important to have a say in what our politicians do and voting is a big part of that.

Mary Parkin – Rubens House resident



PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

Polling stations are required to make 'reasonable' physical adjustments to their premises to make them accessible for people with disabilities. If you are planning to take clients with disabilities to a polling station it would be a good idea to check with your local electoral office about the accessibility of the polling station before you go.

If an individual needs help on polling day they can apply to the presiding officer asking them to mark your ballot paper for them, alternatively, they will allow those who need support to vote with a companion's help; this could be a carer, friend or family member.

All polling stations must provide a tactile voting device and at least one large print display version of the ballot paper. This makes it easier for people who are blind or visually impaired to vote without another person's help.

Some people with disabilities may find it difficult to go to vote at a polling station. They can register to vote by post or by proxy

POWER OF ATTORNEY AND VOTING

A power of attorney does not extend to the electoral process. An attorney has no powers to vote on behalf of another person, unless they have been appointed proxy on a form signed by the person.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

Much of the information in this guide has been provided by Christina Nimako, Activities Coordinator at Jewish Care's Rubens House who together with her colleague have spearheaded a series of successful voting programmes in the home. If you have any questions for Christina about her past experiences email her at cnimako@jcare.org

For practical information about voting go to:

www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

www.gov.uk/get-on-electoral-register

www.gov.uk/voting-in-the-uk/overview

SOME USEFUL BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT UK GENERAL ELECTIONS

If you think that general election talk is confusing you, you're not alone. Below is some information that you may find helpful along with some links for further reading.

■ What is a general election?

A general election enables all eligible and registered UK citizens to vote for a politician to represent their local area, or 'constituency'. Each local area has one seat in the House of Commons and each seat will be contested by different political parties or independents. Whoever gets the most votes wins.

There are 650 constituencies across the UK and a political party requires a majority to form a government.

■ How many seats make an overall majority?

To form a majority, a political party must get at least 50 percent of the seats in the House of Commons.

■ How does the voting work in the UK system?

UK elections run on a 'first past the post' voting system, the candidate with the most votes in a constituency wins and all other votes count for nothing. The advantage of this is that it creates strong, decisive governments.

■ What is a safe seat and what is a marginal seat?

Safe seats are constituencies where support for one party is so strong that rivals barely stand a chance of winning.

The other type are marginal seats – an area where the winner is harder to predict from the outset. A marginal seat often becomes a focus of political campaigning.

■ When is the General Election?

Election day Thursday 8th June 2017. Polling stations open at 7am and close at 10pm.

■ What's a hung parliament?

When a party doesn't win an overall majority, the previous government may remain in position while negotiations are done. Parties may look to form a coalition government with a smaller party, as the Conservatives did with the Liberal Democrats in 2010.

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