



State Returning Officer
for Lower Saxony

CERTIFIED TRANSLATION

Englisch

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE 2016 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

On 11 September 2016, the polling stations in Lower Saxony will be open from 8 am to 6 pm. During this time the people of Lower Saxony will elect their delegates of their local councils of the districts (*Landkreise*), boroughs (*Städte*), city wards (*Stadtbezirke*), municipalities (*Gemeinden*), municipal associations (*Samtgemeinden*) and parishes (*Ortschaften*). In some districts, boroughs, municipal associations and municipalities the voters will also directly elect their district chief administrative officers (*Landräte*) and mayors (*Bürgermeister*). Where this is the case, you will be informed by public announcements from the local returning officers.

If you are eligible to vote in several elections at the same time, e.g. in the elections to the district and first-tier municipal councils and for the chief administrative officer, you will receive a corresponding number of ballot papers. The names of the candidates standing for election will be shown on the ballot papers, and will also be published approximately four weeks prior to election day in the returning officers' announcements of the "election proposals" (*Wahlvorschläge*) admitted to the election. Such "election proposals" or nominations can be submitted by political parties, electoral associations or individual candidates.

Who is allowed to vote?

You are allowed to vote if you are a German citizen or a national of another member state of the European Union (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom), if you are not less than **16** years of age **on election day** and

- have been resident in the electoral area for which you wish to cast your vote (e.g. in the district for the election to the district council) for at least three months,
- have not been excluded from voting,
- are entered in an electoral register or have a polling card.

The electoral registers are maintained by the municipalities (boroughs or other first-tier municipalities) or the municipal associations. As a rule, your name will be entered in the electoral register automatically; but of course only if you have not forgotten to register as a resident of your municipality in good time!

Where can you cast your vote?

If your name is on the register of electors, you will automatically receive a notice of poll indicating which polling station you are entitled to vote at.

In exceptional cases you can also choose to vote by post, provided that you have applied for and received a polling card (see overleaf).

How are the votes cast?

You will receive **one ballot paper for each election** you are eligible to vote in (e.g. one for the election of the district council and one for your municipal council, and where applicable one ballot paper each for the election of a chief administrative officer).

Election of councils

In council elections, unlike Federal or State parliamentary elections, you may **place three crosses on each ballot paper!** You have **three** votes in each council election!

You may cast all three votes either for a single "election proposal" in its entirety ("whole list") or for one single candidate from an "election proposal". However, you may also split your votes between different lists of candidates and/or different individual candidates from the same "election proposal" or from different ones.

Election of the chief administrative officers

If these officers are to be elected directly in your electoral area, you will have **only one vote** in each election. You can give your vote to the direct candidate of your choice by placing a cross against his or her name on the ballot paper.

What should you keep in mind?

- ◆ If you have not received a notice of poll by 21 August 2016, your name has probably not been entered in the **register of electors**. You can check for yourself whether this is the case: the electoral registers will be available for inspection at the offices of your municipality or municipal association from 22-26 August 2016. If you are not registered, you may apply to have this corrected up until 26 August 2016. Please note that if you have addresses at several places in one electoral area, your name will be entered in the register of electors **only at the place of your main residence!**
- ◆ It is a good democratic tradition to go to the polling station in person on election day. However, if you are unable to go to the polling station to cast your vote, or should your name not have been entered in the register of electors through no fault of your own, you may apply for a **polling card** (*Wahlschein*) and make use of the postal voting procedure.
- ◆ You can obtain a polling card and the other documents required for **postal voting** from the offices of your municipality or municipal association on application in writing or on verbal application in person (not by telephone). You must as a rule have submitted your application by 1 pm on 9 September 2016 at the latest. You may also apply for and collect the documents on behalf of other persons, but only if you present a written authorisation to do so.
- ◆ If you do not collect your postal voting documents in person, they will be sent to your address. A person presenting written authorisation may collect the documents on behalf of up to four other persons who are registered electors.
- ◆ The postal vote must have been received by the returning officer for your municipality not later than 6 pm on 11 September 2016. It is the voter's responsibility to ensure that the postal vote is received in time.
- ◆ Should you have any further queries, please contact the returning officers or the electoral offices for your municipality, municipal association or district.