

How to organise election hustings

“Some of the liveliest debates that I take part in at election time are organised by the local churches. It is important for Christians to get informed and get involved at election time, and this is an excellent way for churches to reach out to people in their local area at the same time.”

~ Steve Webb MP, Northavon ~

Summary

If you are thinking about holding a hustings event you will need to follow some rules. We've provided some key information which aims to help you understand these rules and provide helpful information to plan a hustings. [You can read the Electoral Commission's full hustings guide here.](#)

What is a hustings?

A hustings is an open meeting usually held in the run up to an election. It's a chance for voters to meet the candidates who want to represent them in local or national politics such as parliament. The candidates generally answer a series of questions which give people the chance to hear their views on a range of issues that will affect them and their community.

Why should churches hold hustings?

Often at the heart of the community, churches are in a prime position to host a hustings. Candidates are grateful for the opportunity to address their would-be constituents. And voters are keen to hear directly from their candidates.

Holding a hustings enables churches to help voters in their community engage effectively with their political representatives and address the sense of disconnect many voters feel with the political process.

Promoting the hustings

Hustings are a great opportunity to demonstrate church unity, so we would encourage you to organise your event in conjunction with other local churches. If your constituency covers a large geographical area it might be a good idea to collaborate with churches in other areas to organise a few hustings.

- **Send a press release** to your local papers, TV and radio stations to tell them about your event. Only do this once the details are finalised.
- Make use of community notice boards, church websites and social media.
- **After the event send a follow up press release** (even if local media don't attend) along with key quotes from the candidates and photos.

For **media advice** please contact our press office – 020 7520 3830

Preparing for the hustings

The formal part of the election campaign is fairly short, running from 30 March until election day on 7 May, and the final list of candidates standing may not be known until 9 April.

Send a formal invitation to the candidates including date, time, and venue, even if the final list is not confirm you are likely to know who many of them will be.

Venue

- Choose a location that is central to the constituency and easy to find.
- Make sure it's big enough to comfortably accommodate your expected audience, but doesn't look uninviting if sparsely filled.
- Confirm that it has disability access.

Set-up

- Seat the candidates and the host on a raised platform if possible.
- Make sure the room is well lit and appropriately heated.
- Supply microphones for each candidate as well as a couple of roving microphones for questions from the audience.

Host

- Choose someone familiar with key political issues so they can push for clarification and challenge the answers given if they think they are inaccurate or dishonest.
- An ideal host would have experience chairing discussions, ability to think on their feet and control a lively crowd and treat audience members and candidates firmly but fairly. A local TV presenter or similar notable local figure might be willing to chair.

Volunteers

- A few stewards to greet guests and direct them to their seats, serve refreshments and hand out roving microphones.
- An operator for the sound system.

Security

- Sometimes specific groups may try to disrupt the meeting to make their voice heard. Therefore you may choose to have some extra stewards for security.
- Notify your local police station ahead of your hustings.

Running the hustings

The format of the evening is entirely up to you. The hustings needs to be long enough to cover a range of topics, but short enough to ensure that the audience's attention is maintained. Between 1 ½ and 2 hours would be a suitable length.

Before the event

- Create a running order for the event so you know roughly how much time each section will take so that you don't run over time.
- Let the candidates know the format of the evening, for example whether or not they will need an opening statement as well as who will be hosting the event.
- Have the organiser or local church leader welcome the audience, open in prayer, briefly reflect on the importance of voting and introduce the host. They can also thank the host and candidates at the end and close in prayer.
 - You may like to show the [Show Up](#) video which is a great resource showcasing the importance of voting and getting involved in politics.
- Have the host explain the format of the evening and the rules for asking questions.

Introductory statements by the candidates

- This can be helpful for people who aren't familiar with the candidates. They can take up quite a lot of time so if you decide to include this make sure candidates are given a tight time frame.

Questions and answers

- The questions could be determined before the event, perhaps by the church leaders who are organising.
- Audience members could write down questions and submit them at the start of the event.
- Questions could be asked from the floor.

We would recommend having people submit questions when they arrive so that at the beginning of the event a basic structure can be given around the issues people want covered. Supplementary questions can then either be taken from audience members raising their hands or through further written questions selected and passed to the chair.

After the event

- Write to the candidates thanking them for taking part in the hustings.
- Send a press release with photos to your local media
- Publicise how the event went on websites, social media, and in church newsletters for example.
- After the election be proactive in developing and maintaining a relationship with your local MP.

Legal information

Most churches are charities and have to follow the law set out in the Charities Act 2011. During the election period this means they are subject to rules about spending. [You can find out more about the rules you must following during the election period here. This is to provide something introductory information for you get started and does not constitute legal advice.](#)

NOTE: Charities must not support or oppose a specific political party. This doesn't prevent them from supporting or opposing specific policies.

The simplest way to make sure your hustings isn't affected by the rules on election spending is to invite all the relevant candidates. However, this may not always be possible. For example, if there are too many candidates. If you decide not to invite all candidates, you will need to be able to show you aren't promoting or opposing a particular candidate more than others.

Good practice recommendations:

- Give objective reasons why you haven't invited particular candidates. Be prepared to explain your reasons to candidates who you haven't invited.
 - Objective reasons may include local prominence, the number of elected representatives at local level or recent election results in the area.
 - They do not include subjective reasons such as your views of the policies of a candidate or their party.
- Make sure the candidates you invite represent a reasonable variety of views, from different parts of the political spectrum.
- Be transparent in your publicity for the meeting, about who is arranging and funding the event and the reasons you are holding it.
- Allow each candidate attending a fair chance to answer questions, and where appropriate, a reasonable opportunity to respond to points made against them by other candidates.
- Inform the audience at the hustings of candidates standing who haven't been invited.

[You can view the full hustings guide from the Electoral Commission here.](#)

More information

Visit the Evangelical Alliance's Election 2015 website for further election resources as well as information about hustings being held across the UK.

www.election2015.eauk.org

For further enquiries please contact our public policy officer Amelia Abplanalp – a.abplanalp@eauk.org or 020 7520 3854

For media advice please contact our press office – 020 7520 3830