

Advice on hosting an election husting in your parish

CARITAS DIOCESE OF SALFORD

☎ 0161-817 2250

✉ info@caritassalford.org.uk

Caritas 
Diocese of Salford

Registered number: 06594417

Charity number: 1125808

What is a husting?

A husting is a public panel discussion between political candidates in the run up to voting in an election. Candidates answer questions from a chairperson and the audience; debating policies and ideas. They provide an opportunity for voters to meet the candidates who will represent them in parliament and will help decide who is best to help your community and thus vote for.

Why should you host one?

“Politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, in as much as it seeks the common good. I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor”. Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Our churches are often at the centre of our communities - and are therefore best placed to host hustings to allow both parishioners and the wider public to engage in the political process.

Hustings ultimately raise awareness of the options people in your parish have when choosing who to represent them and helps address the disconnect many feel between politicians and voters.

As Caritas Director Patrick O’Dowd wrote prior to the local elections in 2023 “The Gospel imperative to put love into action includes helping those in need and playing an active part in securing justice and building up communities of compassion. Catholic Social Teaching also encourages us to be attentive to local matters at the local levels. It is here that the bonds of solidarity and inclusion are formed and transformed to a larger scale and the principle of subsidiarity encourages local forms of participation to be strengthened. Having a say (and an impact on) the future of our neighbourhoods is vital and no matter what our individual political allegiance, it’s imperative that we all try to come together for the common good.”

Considerations about voting begin with two of the foundations of Catholic Social Teaching - [human dignity](#) and the [common good](#). By hosting a husting you can help your parish and wider community reflect on which candidate will work to enhance the development of the common good, and who’s policies are rooted in respect for human dignity.

CARITAS DIOCESE OF SALFORD

☎ 0161-817 2250

✉ info@caritassalford.org.uk


Caritas
Diocese of Salford

Registered number: 06594417

Charity number: 1125808

Electoral Commission

Here is a link to the Electoral Commission advice regarding hustings - [Are you holding a hustings? | Electoral Commission](#)

Although a lot of the information within this guide covers what is detailed by the Electoral Commission, it is advised to read through the short guide.

Selective or non-selective?

As detailed in the Electoral Commission advice, there are two types of hustings:

Non-selective hustings - where all candidates are invited, and the aim of the hustings is not to influence voters to vote for a particular candidate. Any spending on non-selective hustings is not regulated by the Electoral Commission.

Selective hustings - these are intended to influence voters to choose a particular candidate. Spending can be regulated.

In the interests of transparency and independence, we strongly recommend that if you're considering hosting a hustings you choose a non-selective hustings. This ensures the breadth of ideas and proposals are heard. The remaining advice within this guide is in relation to such non-selective hustings.

When and where?

The next general election will be held no later than January 24th 2025, however an early election may be called beforehand. Hustings should be held within the six-week period before an election (the period known as 'purdah').

Ultimately the date of your hustings may be influenced by the availability of the candidates (in the next section it is detailed how to contact them). Check online and with other churches and community groups whether they are running hustings, so that you don't clash with theirs. If you choose a Sunday, the meeting could be held after a Mass, but you should make it clear that the meeting is open to all - parishioners or other members of the community.

Your parish hall is often the ideal place to host a hustings. You would need to speak with your parish priest and parish hall manager to ensure that you have permission and understand the risk assessment requirements.

You could also consider hosting the husting online though this may need a special subscription to a suitable hosting platform to ensure that it is safe and can be easily and fairly managed. It can be structured the same as an in-person husting, with a chairperson hosting (with the ability to mute people if needed), and the candidates 'pinned' so they remain in focus for everyone to see. The audience could submit questions via the chat or questions function available on most virtual meeting hosting websites.

Planning

Find and contact the candidates:

Once a venue has been confirmed, you need to reach out to the candidates. You have two options regarding who to invite; you may invite all candidates who are standing or choose to invite only the larger political parties (such as the Labour Party, Conservative Party, Green Party etc). If you choose to only invite some candidates, you must ensure that you inform the audience of who has not been invited and explain the impartial reason why.

You then need to find your local candidates. These will usually be listed on the political parties' websites:

Conservative Party - [The Conservative Party](#)

Green Party - [The Green Party](#)

Labour Party - [The Labour Party](#)

Liberal Democrats - [The Liberal Democrats](#)

Reform Party - [Reform UK](#)

To find the candidates of smaller parties, you can contact your local Returning Officer. To do this you will need to contact your local authority.

You can also find information on the following websites: [Who Can I Vote For?](#) and [Elections in your area | Electoral Commission](#)

Once you have the candidates' details, you should send them a formal invitation via email including the date, time, and venue. You may need to chase this up, especially if the election is fully underway as the candidate and staff will be busy. If a candidate does not wish to attend or cannot, then apologies should be given at the start of a meeting, and they should be offered the opportunity to have a statement read out as their opening statement.

Choose a chairperson:

You will need a chairperson who has experience of public speaking, will be able to maintain order throughout the husting, and will be able to treat each candidate fairly. They will be introducing event, taking and asking questions, and ensuring people stay on track time-wise.

Equipment:

You will ideally have a long table for candidates to sit at, a chair for each candidate, seating for audience, and sound system with microphones.

Volunteers:

You will need volunteer stewards on the day - these will greet guests and facilitate a roving microphone. It would also be useful to have a volunteer who understands the sound systems in case of any technical problems.

Questions:

There are several ways you can ask about the candidates' views and their parties plans.

- The questions can be decided by the organisers prior to the event and read by the chairperson.
- The audience are asked to submit questions prior to the event (create and provide an email address for the event) and when arriving, with volunteers then sorting and providing to the chairperson.
- Questions to be taken from the floor during the event.

You can combine these options, but whatever you decide you should explain this to the audience at the start of the event.

Accessibility

Accessibility is about ensuring that everyone can take part and contribute in the way, and to the extent, which suits them best. It is not a matter of convenience but a basic requirement to honour human dignity. No person should be restricted in their participation because of an unmet physical, mental or emotional health, learning or sensory need. It is important that you consider potential (or known) accessibility needs from the planning stage to reduce the need for adjustments. Often, the smallest change can make a world of difference to a person.



Caritas
Diocese of Salford

CARITAS DIOCESE OF SALFORD

☎ 0161-817 2250

✉ info@caritassalford.org.uk

Registered number: 06594417

Charity number: 1125808

It is important that you consider the accessibility of the event and venue. Here are some suggestions for what to consider:

- Publicise adjustments that are in place such as a hearing loop
- Ensure that there is an accessible entrance with accessible/Blue Badge parking close by
- Be aware that some people may attend with a service animal, these should have a working "coat" on to identify their role.
- Consider the need for BSL interpreters.
- Review that the lighting is sufficient
- Emergency evacuation - be mindful that additional plans may be needed for some individuals due to mobility aids or method of notification (e.g. how will a deaf person be notified?)
- Adequate comfort breaks, including for lip readers.
- Is the ventilation/heating sufficient for the number of people?
- Is there sufficient seating and do the seats have backs?

Dr. Minna Moffatt-Feldman (Caritas Accessibility Coordinator) is available for advice regarding accessibility and overcoming barriers (m.moffatt-feldman@caritassalford.org.uk).

Safeguarding and security

You should discuss the event with your Parish Safeguarding Rep, and see if there are any recommendations to feed into your planning. You should follow the safety guidance for the venue or if using a parish hall ensure that all suitable arrangements are in place (for example - fire alarms, evacuation procedures etc).

It is best to notify your local police that the event is taking place - Find a police force | Police.uk (www.police.uk)

Advertise

To make the husting as effective as possible, you need to publicise the event - try to do this as earlier as possible and in various forms. Contact other local churches to invite them, reach out to your local newspaper to let them know, and see if you can have it advertised in your parish newsletter and on social media. You could also create a simple poster to advertise the event on noticeboards in churches, libraries, and community centres.

When creating a poster ensure you include "who, what, where, and when".

Event structure

The following structure is an example and can be tweaked as you see fit.

- Welcome by the chairperson, and an explanation of the “house rules” (keeping questions short, how the questions will be asked etc) and, as appropriate a safety briefing about any planned fire alarms, access to toilets, etc. - 5 minutes
- Chairperson introduces each candidate by name and political party - 3 minutes
- A short statement by each candidate - 3 minutes each
- Questions from the floor/prepared from audience/chairperson's questions depending on prior planning. We suggest that whatever you are doing, having a few pre-prepared questions for the chairperson in case the audience are a bit shy! - 1 hour
- Closing statements by candidates - 3 minutes each
- Chairperson to thank all the candidates, the audience, and the organisers and venue host.

Remember to enjoy the event - it will play an important part in the democratic process, and will help your parish and wider community decide who is best placed to represent them.

Get in touch

If you have any questions, or are planning on hosting a hustling, please do get in touch. Contact our Parish and Communities Engagement Officer, Matthew Yates - m.yates@caritassalford.org.uk

CARITAS DIOCESE OF SALFORD

☎ 0161-817 2250

✉ info@caritassalford.org.uk

Caritas
Diocese of Salford



Registered number: 06594417
Charity number: 1125808

“Involvement in politics is an obligation for a Christian. We Christians cannot ‘play the role of Pilate’, washing our hands of it; we cannot. We must be involved in politics because politics is one of the highest forms of charity for it seeks the common good. And Christian lay people must work in politics. You will say to me: ‘But it isn’t easy!’. Nor is it easy to become a priest. Nothing is easy in life. It is not easy, politics has become too dirty: but I ask myself: Why has it become dirty? Why aren’t Christians involved in politics with an evangelical spirit? I leave you with a question. It is easy to say: ‘It is so and so’s fault’. But me, what do I do? It is a duty!”

Pope Francis - addressing students of the Jesuit schools of Italy (2013)

CARITAS DIOCESE OF SALFORD

☎ 0161-817 2250

✉ info@caritassalford.org.uk


Caritas
Diocese of Salford

Registered number: 06594417

Charity number: 1125808

CARITAS DIOCESE OF SALFORD

☎ 0161-817 2250

✉ info@caritassalford.org.uk

Follow us on social media now.

📘 @CaritasSalford 🐦 @CaritasSalford 📷 @Caritas_Salford



Registered number: 06594417
Charity number: 1125808