

Advice on hosting an election husting in your parish

CARITAS DIOCESE OF SALFORD

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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 has rightly been defined as 'the highest form of charity. Indeed, if we consider the service that political life renders to society and to the common good, it can truly be seen as an act of Christian love, which is never simply a theory, but always a concrete sign and witness of God’s constant concern for the good of our human family." *Pope Leo XIV speaking to the International Inter-Parliamentary Union, June 21st, 2025.*

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 any feelings of disconnection between politicians and voters.

As Caritas Director Patrick O’Dowd stated 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 whose policies are rooted in respect for human dignity.

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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, you are advised to read through the short Electoral Commission 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 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?

Hustings should be held within the six-week period before an election (the period previously known as 'purdah' - the time before an election or referendum when governments, ministers and civil servants must avoid making announcements or decisions that could influence the campaign).

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 Mass, but you should make it clear that the meeting is open to all - parishioners and other members of the community.

Your parish hall is often the ideal place to host a husting. 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, including any matters of safeguarding.

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 securely managed. It can be structured in the same way 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 can submit questions via the chat or the questions function available on most virtual meeting hosting websites.

Planning

Find and contact the candidates:

Once a venue has been confirmed, you the next step is 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 certain but not all candidates, you must ensure that you inform the audience of who has and has not been invited and explain the impartial reason why.

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

Choose a chairperson:

You will need to appoint a confident 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 the meeting keeps to time.

Equipment:

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

Volunteers:

You will need volunteer stewards on the day to greet guests and facilitate a roving microphone. It would also be useful to have a volunteer who understands the sound system in case of any technical problems. We would also recommend that one volunteer is a trained first aider.

Questions:

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

- The questions are decided by the organisers prior to the event and read out by the chairperson. Or,
- The audience are asked to submit questions prior to the event (if so, you will need to create and provide an email address for the event) or when arriving. The volunteers will then need to sort the questions and pass them to the chairperson. Or,
- Questions are taken from the floor during the event without any prior vetting.

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

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.

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?).
- Build in adequate time for comfort breaks, including for lip readers.
- Check that the ventilation/heating is sufficient for the number of people.
- Check there is sufficient seating and 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 to see if there are any recommendations to feed into your planning and risk assessment. 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. Police.uk (www.police.uk)

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Advertise

To make the husting as effective as possible, you need to publicise the event. Try to do this as early as possible and in various ways. Contact other local churches to invite them, reach out to your local newspaper to let them know, and advertise it in your parish newsletter and parish 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 statement 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 method you have chosen, you also pre-prepare several questions for the chairperson in case the audience are a little shy! 1 hour
- Closing statements by candidates. 3 minutes each
- Chairperson thanks all the candidates, the audience, the organisers, volunteers 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 husting, please do get in touch. Contact our Parish and Communities Engagement Officer, Matthew Yates - m.yates@caritassalford.org.uk

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