



General election Q&A: a chance to ask the candidates our questions



A step by step guide to organising your own local Hustings event

www.cytun.cymru/election2017

For the past 40 years churches across the country have joined together to run Election Hustings meetings: Public meetings where people can listen to and ask questions of the candidates who hope to represent them. Meetings sponsored by the churches provide opportunity for genuine political debate on neutral territory.

What is an election Q&A?

Often known as ‘hustings’, this is a meeting where election candidates or parties debate policies and answer questions from the audience. These meetings provide voters with an opportunity to hear the views of candidates or parties. A **local Q&A/hustings** is a meeting that involves the candidates standing in a particular constituency

This guidance offers information and advice on how to plan such a meeting locally. Our suggestions are based on the experiences of people who have organised hustings in the past.

If you are interested in holding an election Q&A meeting, please visit www.cytun.cymru/election2017 to register your interest.

In registering an event you need to confirm that it is organised by churches or church-based organisations (including in collaboration with others), and is a ‘non-selective hustings’ event, as described below.

The UK General Election is on Thursday June 8

The ‘official’ start of the Election campaign will be at the end of the current session of Parliament on May 3rd – but in reality the campaigning for the elections has already started. So start planning your event now!

First steps

These meetings work best when they are organised ecumenically, so the first thing to do is to consult your local Cytûn or Churches Together group, or – if that is not possible - with representatives from different churches in the area. Contact as many churches as possible in your constituency to see if you can work together. Consider whether you also want to invite members of other faith groups or civic organisations to take part in the process. Call a meeting as soon as possible – although given the tight timetable in 2017, much planning may need to be delegated to a small number of people with others being kept in touch by phone or email.

Liaising with others who want to organise a local election Q&A

The registration system on the Cytûn website enables you to view the contact details of other individuals and groups that are interested in organising a meeting, so that you can get in touch and plan to act together. Ideally there should be **one churches election meeting in each constituency**, but life is rarely that simple. Some ecumenical bodies may only cover part of a constituency, whilst others may straddle several. If you live in one of the very large constituencies it might in the end be more practical to organise two meetings at different ends of the constituency.

Alongside this guide to organising an Election Q&A meeting, Cytûn and its ecumenical partners will produce some briefing papers on key issues in the General Election. These will include suggested questions to use as discussion starters with candidates. Copies can be downloaded (along with other Election briefings from churches and church organisations) from the Cytûn election website at www.cytun.cymru/election2017

When should the meeting be held?

In the past, candidates have responded well to meetings held on a Sunday evening during the formal General Election period. If you choose a Sunday, the meeting could be held after an ecumenical evening service, but you should make it clear that the meeting is open to all - church attenders or otherwise.

However, the tight timetable for this election means that you will need to be flexible regarding timing. Don’t worry if you can’t hold the meeting on a Sunday evening. Consider possible dates and try to choose an earlier rather than a later date. The sooner you can confirm the date with the candidates the better!

Remember to update your entry on the website www.cytun.cymru/election2017 with your date, time and venue details as soon as you have them. You can email gethin@cytun.cymru with any queries.

Who should run the meeting?

Try to identify a respected and impartial person from your community to chair the meeting. This could be a church figure, a professional or community leader. It is vital that the Chair is not identified or connected with a political party. It is also important that s/he is able to conduct the meeting firmly, ensuring that a whole range of views are heard.

The Chair will need to be well-briefed. It might be useful to give them a copy of this guidance and other relevant material.

Organising a 'non-selective hustings'

The Electoral Commission, which regulates political activities particularly in relation to the Election has issued guidance on Hustings meetings. According to this guidance, there are two kinds of Hustings meetings:

- Non-selective Hustings, which are not regulated by electoral law
- Selective Hustings, which are classed as a 'regulated' activity under electoral law and have to abide by additional conditions, including limits on spending.

It is our strong recommendation that you should organize a non-selective hustings event.

A **non-selective hustings** is a hustings that would not reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters to vote for or against political parties or categories of candidates, including political parties or categories of candidates who support or oppose particular policies or issues. In the Electoral Commission's view, a hustings will be non-selective if the organiser has invited all the candidates known to be standing in the constituency or you have impartial reasons for not inviting certain candidates or parties.

If you are holding a public Q&A meeting, and you want to ensure that it is a non-selective hustings, the simplest way is to invite all the relevant candidates in the area or all political parties campaigning in the election, and allow all those attending an equal opportunity to participate. However, this may not always be practical. For example, there may be so many candidates or parties standing that a meeting would be hard to manage.

The organiser does not have to ensure that all candidates or parties attend the event. They just need to be invited.

If you decide not to invite all candidates, there are some good practice recommendations you should follow to ensure your meeting is genuinely not promoting particular candidates or parties more than others. These include:

- being able to give impartial reasons why you have not invited particular candidates or parties. You should be prepared to explain your reasons to candidates or parties you haven't invited.
- making sure that candidates or parties you invite represent a reasonable variety of view, from different parts of the political spectrum.
- allowing each candidate or party representative attending a fair chance to answer questions and, where appropriate, a reasonable opportunity to respond to points made against them by other candidates or party representative.
- informing the audience at the meeting of candidates or parties standing who haven't been invited.

Impartial reasons may emerge from the following considerations:

- local prominence of some parties or candidates over others.
- the number of elected representatives at the local or national level.
- recent election results in the area.
- resources and other practicalities constraining numbers of invitees.
- security concerns.

Impartial reasons do not include reasons such as your views on the policies of a candidate or party.

Organising a selective Hustings event

Some Churches in the past have made statements on the unacceptability of particular extremist and racist parties. You may wish to take these into account and not give such views a platform – but if you do so you **must** read the Electoral Commission guidance on organizing **selective hustings** meetings, available on page 10 at:

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/193075/Elections-May-2016-Hustings.pdf

We will NOT be able to register selective hustings events on the Cytûn website.

If you have any doubts about who to invite, you should discuss these with your local ecumenical group and contact your Constituency Returning Officer via your local authority, or the Electoral Commission for advice at

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

How do we find the candidates?

Nominations for the election will close on Thursday May 11, with 24 hours after that for any objections to be lodged. By then, details of candidates should be available on the major parties' websites.

Conservative Party

<http://www.welshconservatives.com>

Green Party

<https://wales.greenparty.org.uk/>

Labour Party

<http://www.welshlabour.org.uk/>

Liberal Democrat Party

<http://www.welshlibdems.wales/>

Plaid Cymru

<https://www.partyof.wales>

UKIP

<http://ukip.wales>

Shortly after May 11, newspapers and news websites will publish full lists of candidates. Names and contact details of candidates will be published also by the constituency Returning Officer – go to your local authority's website for the details.

Before then, you may contact the political parties' national offices to find out if a party has a local

organisation in your constituency which will be able to identify your local candidate. Many candidates will have their own website.

It is possible that some parties (such as UKIP and the Green Party) will choose not to contest every seat in 2017, and may possibly support another candidate. You will need to follow such developments through the local media.

As soon as you know the name and contact details of a candidate, contact him/her with an initial invitation, explaining the aims of the meeting and mentioning the provisional time and date. This should then be confirmed as soon as possible, with details of the other candidates who are being invited.

You can find out details of any other candidates from your local Returning Officer once nominations have closed on May 11 2017. Once nominations are closed, the candidates and their election agents are very busy, which is why it is better to do as much of the organising in advance as possible.

What if a candidate refuses to attend?

Once you know who you are inviting, contact the candidates, stating who else has been invited to the meeting.

If a candidate or party is invited and refuses or is unable to attend, you should give their apologies at the start of the meeting. They may wish to provide a short statement to be read out. It is up to the organizing group together with the chair to decide on this.

How should we publicise the meeting?

Try to get publicity for the meeting out to as many people and in as many ways as possible – and at the earliest practical opportunity.

Contact all the churches in the local area, asking them to put up posters and to put details of the meeting in their weekly notice sheet. If possible, get members of each denomination or church to take responsibility for publicising it within their own church. Do not confine yourself to those churches who are part of your Cytûn or organising group – reach out to all in your area.

Make a list of public places where details of the meeting could be advertised, e.g. public libraries, doctors' surgeries, post offices, community centres, shop windows, church members' windows. You can also ask the local media to advertise the event. Notify the candidates that you will be doing this, and send out a press release in advance. The press release can be very simple (stating What, When, Where, Who and Why) and should be sent to local newspapers, websites and radio stations. Remember to include contact telephone numbers and email addresses so they can find out further details, or send in questions if you are collecting these in advance. It is important to stress that these meetings are not campaigning events, although churches and Christian bodies may be actively campaigning on particular issues on other occasions.

Decide how to make good use of electronic media to help your publicity, e.g. blogs, social networking sites.

You may wish to inform the Police that a meeting is being held.

What about the venue?

You might decide to hold the meeting in a local church, or somewhere that is more convenient. The venue should be easy to find, accessible to people with disabilities including wheelchair users and, if at all possible, have a hearing loop.

Sound - It is important to have a public address system. Check this in advance, and then make someone responsible for it on the night. A 'floor' microphone (and someone to run around with it) will make it much easier to take questions or comments from the audience, which are a vital part of the process.

Translation – It is good practice to ensure that candidates and members of the public may speak in Welsh or English, and be understood by all. In some areas it may be worth considering simultaneous translation provided by a professional translator, or equipment can be hired and a competent volunteer asked to translate. In other areas, oral translation of occasional contributions in Welsh may be sufficient.

Stewards - Decide how many stewards you will need to welcome and assist people. Decide whether you will be serving tea and coffee, and if so arrange who will do that. Try to get volunteers from a range of churches.

Running the meeting...

It is up to the planning group to decide the timetable for the meeting.

We offer here two possible structures – a traditional hustings style Q&A and a Q&A based on the stories of individual constituents..

A hustings style Q&A

- Welcome by the Chair, who also describes the way in which the meeting is to be conducted.
- Brief introduction by the Chair of the candidates by name and party.
- Introduction to the churches or organisations who are sponsoring the event.
- Short statement by each candidate (a couple of minutes).
- Questions from the floor, allowing each candidate to respond.
- Final few sentences from each candidate.

Remember that you may have 6 or more candidates present. You will need to ensure that statements and answers are kept strictly to time. If your Chair does not want to control the meeting *and* keep an eye on their stopwatch, you could have someone at the back of the room holding up a card when the speaker is one minute from the end, and again when their time is up.

Resources available on the website www.cytun.cymru/election2017 include briefings on a range of election issues and questions which could be raised at the meeting. These could be used to stimulate discussion before the event, or could be summarised and made available to the audience on the evening.

It is always a good idea to have someone lined up to ask the first question; people may be slow in starting, but they will soon warm up! These meetings are run by – but not for – the churches, so people from all sections of the community should be encouraged to attend and to participate.

Decide how you want to handle questions:

- You may wish to collect questions in advance of the meeting, so that a good spread of issues is covered.
- Or do you want people from the audience to submit them in writing to the Chair at the start of the meeting or as it progresses? This will mean speedy sorting through the questions while the candidates are being introduced.
- Or are you happy to take questions from the floor? Whatever you decide, this should be made very clear to the audience at the start of the meeting.

There may be some issues where it is appropriate for a supplementary question to be asked – especially where a general question might be followed up by a more specific one. However, be aware that even if each of five candidates is given just two minutes to answer, each question will take ten minutes.

A Q&A based around constituents' stories

This format requires some careful preparation before the meeting, but can be very rewarding for both candidates and audience alike.

- Welcome by the Chair, who also describes the way in which the meeting is to be conducted.
- Brief introduction by the Chair of the candidates by name and party.
- Introduction to the churches or organisations who are sponsoring the event.
- Short statement by each candidate (a couple of minutes).
- An individual from the constituency, chosen in advance by the organising group, presents a story – either their own or the story of someone in their family or with whom they work professionally. This story raises issues over which Westminster politicians could have some influence (so it should not focus primarily on devolved matters such as

education, health or social care). The story must last **no more than 4 minutes** – so speakers must be well prepared in advance. Suitable stories could include – a family affected by the 'bedroom tax', benefit sanctions or changes to disability benefits; a refugee family, or a family who have had difficulty obtaining visas to reunite with family members overseas; a family of EU citizens who are worried about their future in Wales; a business person who is worried - or excited - about the prospects after the UK leaves the EU.

- Candidates should then be given 2 minutes each to explain how the policies of their party could help the individual and/or how they as an individual MP could assist.
- The Chair may, if time permits, then allow some more general discussion of the issues raised, and allow candidates to answer points raised by others.
- The story-teller should be given a *brief* opportunity to respond to what has been said.
- A second story – raising different issues - is told and responses invited, as above.
- A third story only if time permits.
- Final few sentences from each candidate

And finally...

Please let us know how you got on!
Any suggestions will be used by the churches for the next election campaign.

Thank you for your interest in organising an election Q&A meeting. We hope that it will be successful, and will provide a valuable opportunity for the political debate and reflection necessary for true democratic participation.

Further information and help can be found at www.cytun.cymru/election2017

And at the Electoral Commission <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/party-or-campaigner/non-party-campaigners>

Checklist

	Action to take now – or as soon as possible.	In the 2-3 weeks before the meeting
Website	Register your plans so far on www.cytun.cymru/election2017	Ensure your entry on the website is updated with the date, time and venue for your constituency meeting.
Planning Group	Contact the Cytûn/Churches Together Group/ other churches in your constituency. Form a planning group, and have at least one initial meeting. Draw up list of tasks.	Regular meetings/contact.
Date	Set a date for the meeting.	Confirm the date with candidates' offices by phone.
Candidates	Identify the candidates for the main parties and contact them to invite them to the election meeting.	Once nominations have closed, get hold of the final list of candidates. Invite any candidates you have not already been in contact with. Brief all candidates on the timetable (including strict time limits).
Venue	Identify and confirm a suitable venue.	Check out sound system, and identify someone to run it on the night. Decide where the candidates will sit and prepare name/party labels to go in front of them.
Chairing	Identify someone to chair and confirm date with them	Brief the Chair fully on timetable. Appoint a timekeeper with stopwatch and card if required.
Constituents' stories	If you are using the 'story-telling' format (page 5), canvas ideas from local churches and projects for two or three arresting stories	Make sure that the speakers each have a script which can be delivered well in 4 minutes or less. Be prepared to allow rehearsal time.
Constituents' questions	If you are arranging a 'traditional hustings style Q&A with questions submitted in advance, arrange an e-mail address and a public place for questions to be left securely (a local church which is regularly open, or a local library, for example).	Set a closing date for questions, and arrange for a small group to look through the questions and select a good range of different topics. Try to keep to topics for which Westminster politicians have responsibility (so avoid fully devolved matters such as education, health or social care; or local government matters, such as rubbish collections or repairs to local roads).
Stewards	Recruit stewards.	Brief stewards on welcoming/serving refreshments. Photocopy Cytûn policy briefings for audience if required.
Publicity	Plan your publicity. Contact other local churches. Distribute advance notices, newsletter articles, press release. Plan/produce posters.	Distribute posters/ information for display Send press release to local media Promote on social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc).

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