



General Election Local Hustings 2015

At our January meeting, the Revd Dr Alan Gadd of *Faiths Together in Lambeth* shared FTiL's experience of running local hustings. Here are a few tips and some further information from the Electoral Commission.

A hustings is a meeting where election candidates or parties debate policies and answer questions from the audience. Hustings provide voters with an opportunity to hear the views of candidates or parties.

The date of the General Election is Thursday 7 May 2015.

In order to vote at the General Election, your name must be on the Electoral Register. You can register to vote at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote. The deadline for registering is **Monday 20 April 2015**.

1. Legal guidelines

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. Roughly, if your hustings is open to the public, you need to invite all the candidates (or have impartial reasons for not inviting them all) and give each candidate a fair chance to answer questions and respond to points made. *Please see the guidance from the Electoral Commission at the end of this guide.*

A SELECTIVE HUSTINGS could reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters to vote for or against political parties or categories of candidates and are counted as campaigning activities. These are regulated by law & are not covered in this information sheet.

Details of both are provided by the Electoral Commission and can be found on www.electoralcommission.org.uk and *UK Parliamentary general election 2015: Hustings*.

2. Venue

Choose a community hall or a place where people from all traditions will feel included. If you use a religious building, make any necessary adjustments to ensure everyone feels welcome.

3. Date & time

Choose a date and time which does not prevent certain communities from attending, avoiding times of religious observance. Weekday evenings (except Fridays) often work best. Ninety minutes to two hours is a good length of time.

LONDON BOROUGHES FAITHS NETWORK

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4. Invite candidates

Invite all the candidates standing in the constituency where the hustings will take place or ensure you have impartial reasons for not inviting all the candidates. You do not have to ensure that all candidates attend the event; they just need to be invited. Prospective candidates for the main parties are likely to be chosen by now, and all the candidates should be announced by 10 April. You may need to negotiate times and dates with candidates from the major parliamentary parties to ensure they are able to attend. Give the candidates some information about the hosting organisation, the likely audience and how the meeting will be run.

5. Appoint a chair

Choose someone with experience of chairing meetings in an equitable fashion and who is prepared to be strict on timing and with keeping order if controversial topics arise.

6. Send out invitations

Invite members of your faith forum, multifaith network or religious & belief organisations. Give the names and parties of the candidates who have agreed to participate. Ask for questions to the candidates to be submitted in advance. These can be grouped together by topic to avoid repetition and to get a feel of the main issues that people are interested in. This will help in planning the event.

BEFORE THE HUSTINGS

7. Plan format and timings

Depending on how many candidates will be attending and how many groups of questions you have, work out how long to allow for each part of the hustings:

- gathering and refreshments
- welcome
- opening statements
- questions (& supplementary questions if desired)
- responses to what has been said
- final round-up
- vote of thanks

Be realistic about timings:

eg if there are five candidates, their 3-4 minute opening statements and 2-3 minute answers (and no more than 5 minutes of supplementary comment after each question), means that only 5-7 questions can be put to the candidates in a 2 hour meeting.

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ON THE DAY OF THE HUSTINGS

8. Venue layout

A long table across the top of the meeting room for candidates and rows or semicircles of chairs for those attending often works well. Large name cards on the table enable people to identify the candidates. Microphones, including a roving mic, may be necessary, depending on the venue.

9. Refreshments

Tea/coffee and light refreshments are appreciated by the candidates and those who have come straight from work or other meetings.

10. Introductions

At the start of the hustings, the chair should welcome everybody and explain the format of the meeting. The questions will have been submitted in advance. If you choose, you can request last-minute questions to be submitted to the chair in writing.

11. Opening statements

Allow each candidate to speak for 3-4 minutes (depending on the number of candidates) in turn.

12. Questions to the candidates

Questions, grouped by topic, can be either read out (naming the questioner) or the questioner can be invited to put their question from the floor. Each candidate should be allowed to answer each question in turn, with the same time limit of two or three minutes. Egg timers or smart phones are useful for keeping to time. Let candidates take turns to answer first in rotation. In accordance with legal guidelines, allow candidates a fair chance of responding to what is said by other candidates. If you allow supplementary questions, take care that they do not turn into speeches and/or take up too much time.

13. Final round-up

Invite the candidates to offer a one- or two-minute roundup at the end of the hustings.

14. Vote of thanks

Thank the candidates and everyone who attended.

With thanks to Revd Dr Alan Gadd (Faiths Together in Lambeth) and Bessie White (Hounslow Friends of Faith) for sharing their experience and expertise on local hustings.

If you have further tips and suggestions for running hustings, please let the Convener know.

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Extracts from the Electoral Commission's **UK Parliamentary general election 2015: Hustings**.

NON-SELECTIVE HUSTINGS

In our view, a hustings will be non-selective if:

- *the organiser of a local hustings has invited all the candidates known to be standing in the constituency*
- *the organiser of a national hustings has invited all the parties campaigning in the election*
- *you have impartial reasons for not inviting certain candidates or parties or*
- *the event will only be open to members of the organisation holding the event and it is not made available to the public*

If you are holding a public hustings, 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.

If you decide not to invite all candidates, there are some good practice recommendations you should follow to ensure your hustings is genuinely not promoting particular candidates or parties more than others. The organiser does not have to ensure that all candidates or parties attend the event. They just need to be invited.

Good practice recommendations

To show your hustings is non-selective you should:

- *be 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*
- *make sure that candidates or parties you invite represent a reasonable variety of view, from different parts of the political spectrum*
- *allow 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*
- *inform 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.

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