

HOSTING A HUSTINGS

Equipping
Christians for the
General Election



enga**GE24** 

#GetOutAndVote



What makes a good Chair or Host?

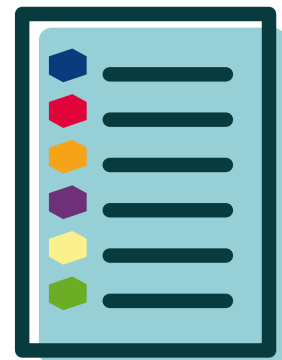
The chairperson of a hustings fulfils a crucial function for ensuring a successful event. Below are some key criteria you will want to consider:

- The host should have experience chairing meetings or discussions and be capable of calmly but firmly controlling both candidates and the audience where necessary
- A suitable host should be familiar with politics and be able to press candidates for full answers where necessary or ask pertinent follow-up questions to ensure clarity for the audience
- The host should be capable of being an independent arbiter of what may be a lively debate and it is therefore important that they are able to be politically impartial as well as not having ties to any of the candidates
- A suitable host may be a notable local figure, a church leader, magistrate or business executive

Preparing for the hustings

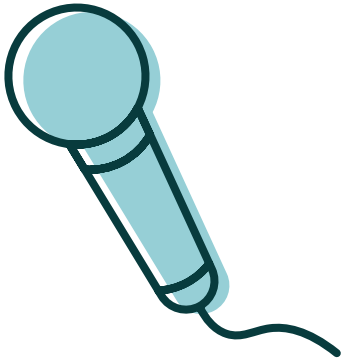
The chairperson's preparation should include:

- Reading informed summaries of the party manifestos



- Brief research on the candidates' recorded opinions (a simple Google search with the candidate's name and where they come from is a good place to start). If the sitting MP is standing again you can find plenty of information about their views on major issues, usually on their own website. You can find information about MP voting records at [theyworkforyou.com/mps/](https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mps/)
- Communicating with the invited candidates to explain the format of the evening. This may include an opening statement for each candidate (which we recommend limiting strictly to 90 seconds) – you may like to draw names from a hat and reverse the order for closing statements.

- More information on preparing for a hustings can be found in CARE's General Election Hustings Guide at engage24.org.uk/get-involved/hustings/



Choosing the questions

A series of topics should be decided upon by the organisers in advance to ensure a debate which is wide-ranging. These should cover both matters of party policy and topical matters (e.g. poverty, housing, immigration, NHS funding, environmental concerns), as well as 'conscience' issues (e.g. abortion law reform, assisted suicide) and perhaps issues specific to the constituency. Suggested questions on a range of topics CARE works on can be found in Appendix 2.

As this will be a hustings run by a church, it is appropriate for the questions to focus on issues held particularly dear by Christians. Churches holding hustings provide a forum for asking questions that if Christians ask, no one else will.

Questions can be submitted by the audience upon arrival and checked against the topics you wish to cover before the hustings begins. Any topics which aren't covered by audience-submitted questions can be added by the Chair from a pre-prepared list. See Appendix 1 for an example Question Card which could be used for sourcing audience questions before the hustings begins.

You will want to bear in mind the following:

- It is up to you whether all questions come from the Chair or whether a roving microphone is used. Use of a roving microphone may be better left for open questions from the floor towards the end of the hustings, as an opportunity for the audience to address issues not yet covered. In this way you ensure that there is wide-ranging debate as well as audience involvement. Questions from the audience towards the end of the evening should be on subjects which haven't already been covered
- It is important to try and vary the order in which candidates answer questions in the interests of fairness and to avoid any one candidate or party dominating
- A hustings is unique in allowing candidates to give their view in front of a sizeable crowd of voters. After listening to a candidate's response, the chairperson should be prepared, if necessary, to go back to them for a clarification for the audience's benefit (e.g. 'But it says in your party's manifesto...')

Running the hustings

1. OPEN THE EVENT

- Introduce yourself and welcome the audience
- Thank the church for its welcome and hospitality. You may also want to make a brief opening remark and include a prayer, but this should be very short indeed (less than 90 seconds!) – e.g.:
 - *“Why are we here this evening? To ask the candidates important questions so that their answers will help us when we come to vote on <insert date>. Tonight is about the electors of <constituency name> and our desire to find the best possible person to represent us in the House of Commons. We pray that more of the truth will be discovered this evening and that we will all return home wiser than we were beforehand.”*
- Outline the ground rules for the evening (e.g. the format, how questions will work, etiquette expected of the audience – and candidates!)

2. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS FROM THE CANDIDATES

- Ask the candidates to introduce themselves and the party they are representing. This is particularly helpful for people who may not be familiar with the candidates, especially those representing smaller parties or standing as independents
- Be sure to give each candidate exactly the same amount of time (use a timer) to make their introductory statement – 90 seconds should be sufficient
- In the interest of fairness, draw names from a hat to determine the order candidates speak in. You may draw again for the order of closing statements or simply reverse the order of the introductory statements

3. BEGIN THE QUESTIONS

- Ask the first question. Try and make it short and easy to understand.
 - *Say who the question is from, if necessary, and ask it as simply as possible (you may need to paraphrase or abridge questions which have been submitted by the audience beforehand if they are unclear or unfocused)*
 - *An alternative approach would be to have virtually all questions asked by audience members, having approved and selected from those submitted beforehand. See the Appendix for more information on this approach*

- Bear in mind the following tips to help the question and answer time to flow and run effectively:
 - *Ensure you vary party policy, conscience and constituency issues. Hustings must be broad and not single-issue in order to best serve the voters*
 - *Ask candidates to give their response and bear in mind what their party's policy is, in case you need to ask a follow-up question*
 - *Change the order in which candidates respond so they all get an opportunity to answer first*
 - *If an answer is too vague – ask a simple 'yes or no' follow-up question*
 - *If the candidate goes on too long – interrupt politely, but firmly (e.g. "we must move on now" or "I'll have to hurry you")*
 - *If all the main topics have been covered, you might ask for further questions from the floor. This may be the most demanding part of the evening as Chair. Stress that you want to cover new territory, not return to the areas already addressed. You might need to summarise their question if it is convoluted. Occasionally, if someone has an obscure 'hobby horse' question of little interest to anyone but themselves, you may need to rule it out, gently but firmly.*

4. CLOSING STATEMENTS FROM THE CANDIDATES

- Ten minutes from the end of the event, conclude the questions and ask each candidate in turn to give their final speech. You will need to have primed them ahead of time to expect this
- As with introductory statements, you will need to ensure candidates have an equal amount of time and should use a timer again, limiting remarks to 90 seconds or so. You may wish to reverse the order from the introductory statements or have drawn names to determine the order

5. CLOSE THE EVENT

- Conclude by thanking the candidates and their parties, your assistants, the hosting church and the audience for their questions and interest

Appendix 1

Example Running Order

7.15pm	Doors open, refreshments are served, audience given question cards or slips of paper to submit questions by assistants
7.45pm	Refreshments stop being served and candidates draw for order of introductory and closing speeches (with witnesses)
7.50pm	Question submissions now closed and Chair selects questions
8.00pm	Event starts with welcome and thanks to hosts
8.05pm	Introductory statements from candidates
8.15pm	Questions begin, primarily from the Chair
9.00pm	Questions opened up to the floor
9.20pm	Closing statements from candidates
9.30pm	Closing remarks from Chair

Appendix 2

Chair Checklist

- Check that candidates have been confirmed and know the format of the event, including that there will be 90-second introductory and closing statements from each candidate
- Read summaries of the party manifestos
- Determine the list of topics to be covered during the hustings in advance, preparing at least one question per topic if possible
- Appoint assistants/volunteers and ensure roving microphones are available
- Remember to bring a timer
- Have placards with candidates' names on in large writing to place in front of them, both to ensure candidates know where to sit and that the audience knows at a glance who is who
- Ensure a sufficient number of question cards (and pens) are available on the door for the audience to submit questions and that assistants/volunteers are well-briefed on their use

Appendix 3

How To: Question Time Style

Some of the best hustings work on the 'Question Time' model based on the weekly BBC topical debate programme. Rather than the Chair reading out all questions from the front, individuals are invited by the Chair to ask their questions.

As people arrive at the hustings, give out a pen and piece of paper or card. Ask them to write out their full name and a question they would like to ask – both their name and their question should be written out twice. Once they have done so, the card should be torn in two, with one copy being kept by the questioner and the other copy going to assistants and then to the Chair.

Shortly before the event begins, the Chair should then select which questions should be put to candidates. Hopefully, you will have a range of questions which complements the topics you have identified beforehand as needing to be covered during your hustings. If there are gaps these can be filled with questions prepared by the Chair beforehand.

When it comes to question time, the Chair simply says: "Our next question comes from Jane Smith", at which point Jane Smith should stand, be handed a roving microphone by an assistant/volunteer and ask her question exactly as it appears on the card.

This structure helps to encourage engagement between the audience, the Chair and the candidates whilst retaining some control of the structure and direction of the evening.

Example Question Card

Question Card

Full Name: Jane Smith

Question: Do you support the current levels of protection which are in place to stop children stumbling across harmful content online? If so, why? If not, why not and what further measures would you support and work for if elected?

Please hand this half to a steward

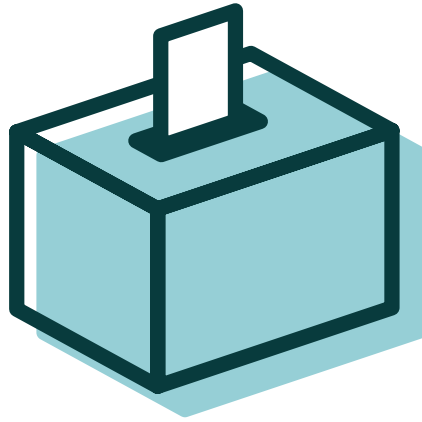
Question Card

Full Name: Jane Smith

Question: Do you support the current levels of protection which are in place to stop children stumbling across harmful content online? If so, why? If not, why not and what further measures would you support and work for if elected?

If your name is called by the Chair, please be prepared to stand and clearly ask your question exactly as written on this card.

Please keep this half for yourself



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