

Situations and procedures

# Hustings events

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This document gives a good practice guide for hustings events and explains the basic rules you may need to follow.

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## Terms and expressions we use

We use '**must**' when we refer to a specific legal or regulatory requirement. We use '**should**' for items we consider to be minimum good practice, but which are not legal requirements.

You do not have to follow this guidance, but if you do, you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law.

## Our approach to enforcement

If you do not comply with legal or regulatory requirements you or your organisation may be subject to civil or criminal sanctions. You can find more information about the Commission's approach to enforcement at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement).

# Hustings events

## Who this document is for:

Hustings organisers and candidates and parties involved in hustings events.

## The document covers:

- An introduction to hustings events
- What is a hustings event
- Who holds hustings events
- What rules apply
- Holding hustings events
- Candidates involved in hustings events

## Related guidance:

- [Guidance for non-party campaigners](#)
- [Guidance for candidates and agents](#)
- [Party campaign spending guidance for political parties](#)

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## Summary

If you are thinking about holding or attending a hustings event, you will need to follow some rules.

This document explains hustings events, provides a good practice guide and gives the basic rules you will need to follow.

If you'd like help or advice at any point, please call us. We're here to help you.

## Introduction

Elections should be carried out in a way that promotes public confidence. And an election's success relies on the active participation of campaigners. Political parties and campaigners are vital to a healthy democracy and we encourage participation.

Hustings events should be open and transparent and provide voters with an opportunity to hear the views of candidates or parties.

If you are thinking about holding a hustings event or are a candidate attending a hustings event, you may need to follow some rules.

This guidance explains hustings events, provides a good practice guide and gives the basic rules you may need to follow.

## What is a hustings event?

A hustings event is a meeting where election candidates or parties debate policies and answer questions from the audience.

## Who holds hustings events?

Hustings events are usually held by organisations, such as community groups or campaigners, so that voters can ask candidates about issues that are important to them.

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## Why are there rules about hustings events?

It may seem strange that hustings events could count as candidate or party spending.

Many hustings events will not be affected by these rules, and this guidance explains what you can do to make sure your event is not affected.

However, it is possible for hustings events to be run in a way that promotes a particular candidate or party, or disadvantages others. For example, if you invite candidates because they hold or don't hold particular views.

To make sure that election funding and spending is fair and transparent, it is important that such events are treated in the right way.

## What rules may apply?

A party's or candidate's spending limit on campaigning includes spending on public events which:

- the candidate or party attends or authorises; and
- promote their electoral success

The spending limits apply for different periods at different elections. You can find when these periods begin each year in our guidance for parties and candidates. You can find this guidance at

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate).

### Important

'Promotes' includes doing so by criticising other candidates or parties.

## What does it mean if a hustings event is affected by the rules?

If a hustings event counts towards spending by one or more candidates or parties, then:

- the candidates or parties concerned will have to count a share of the event's costs against their spending limit, and
- if the cost is above a certain level (£50 for candidates) and is not reimbursed to the event organiser, it will have to be reported as a donation from the organiser

## When aren't hustings events affected by the rules?

In our view, hustings events will **not** be affected by the spending rules if:

- The organiser of a local hustings event has invited all the candidates known to be standing in the constituency;
- The organiser of a national hustings event has invited all the parties campaigning in the election; or
- The event will only be open to members of the organisation holding the event.

The organiser does not have to ensure that **all** candidates or parties attend the event.

They just need to be invited.

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## Holding a local hustings event with candidates

If you are holding a public hustings event in your constituency, and you want to make sure that your event is not affected by the rules on election spending, the simplest way is to invite all the relevant candidates in the area.

However, this may not always be practical. For example, there may be so many candidates standing in a constituency 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 show your hustings event is genuinely not promoting particular candidates more than others.

### Good practice recommendations

To show your local hustings event is genuinely non-promotional you should:

- Be able to give objective reasons why you have not invited particular candidates. And you should be prepared to explain your reasons to candidates who you haven't invited.
- Make sure that candidates you invite represent a reasonable variety of views, from different parts of the political spectrum.
- Be transparent in your publicity for the meeting, about who is arranging and funding the event and the reasons you are holding it.
- Allow each candidate attending a fair chance to answer questions, and where appropriate, a reasonable opportunity to respond to points made against them by other candidates.
- Inform the audience at the meeting of candidates standing who haven't been invited.

Objective reasons may include local prominence, the number of elected representatives at local level or recent election results in the area.

They do not include subjective reasons such as your views of the policies of a candidate.

If your event does not follow our recommendations, it may be promoting one or more candidates. You should let the candidates or their agents know in advance. You should also supply them with details of the likely cost of the event.

If the cost per candidate is more than **£50**, each candidate that attends should count their share of the cost towards their spending limit.

The organiser will also be treated as making a donation to each of those candidates. The donations must be reported by the candidates in their spending returns after the election.

If your organisation is a charity, you must follow the Charity Commission's guidance on election activity. It is usually a breach of charity law to make a political donation.

Rules may also apply to organisations that receive public funds.

## Holding a national hustings event with parties

If you are holding a national hustings event (where you will be inviting parties rather than candidates) it may not be practical to invite all the parties that are contesting the election.

There are some good practice recommendations you should follow to show your hustings event is genuinely not promoting particular parties more than others.

### Good practice recommendations

To show your national hustings event is genuinely non-promotional you should:

- Be able to give objective reasons why you have not invited particular parties. And you should be prepared to explain your reasons to parties you haven't invited.
- Make sure that parties you invite represent a reasonable variety of views, from different parts of the political spectrum.
- Be transparent in your publicity for the meeting, about who is arranging and funding the event and the reasons for holding it.
- Allow each party attending a fair chance to answer questions, and where appropriate, a reasonable opportunity to respond to points made against them by other parties.

Objective reasons may include national prominence, the number of elected representatives or recent election results.

They do not include subjective reasons such as your views of the policies of a party.

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If your event does not follow our recommendations, it may be promoting one or more parties. You should let the parties know in advance. You should also supply them with details of the likely cost of the event.

If the cost per party is more than **£200**, each party that attends should count their share of the cost towards their spending limit,

If the cost per party is more than **£500**, the organiser is making a donation to the party.

If your organisation is a charity, you must follow the Charity Commission's guidance on election activity. It is usually a breach of charity law to make a political donation.

Rules may also apply to organisations that receive public funds.

## Candidates involved in hustings events

If you are a candidate involved in, or attending a hustings event, you may need to declare the costs in your campaign spending and donations report.

If you think that a hustings may have been organised in a way that does not follow our good practice recommendations, you should ask the organiser for more information so that you can decide if the event **is** actually promoting your candidacy.

If it is, then an appropriate proportion of the costs of the event will count towards your election expenses, and as a donation from the organiser.

For more information see the guidance page for:

- [Candidates and agents](#)

## How we can help

You can find more information in the guidance documents we have suggested in this document, or you can view our full range of guidance and up-to-date resources on our website.

If it's easier, you can also contact us on one of the phone numbers or email addresses below. We are here to help, so please get in touch.

Call us on:

- **England:** 020 7271 0616  
[pef@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:pef@electoralcommission.org.uk)
- **Scotland:** 0131 225 0200  
[infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk)
- **Wales:** 029 2034 6800  
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Visit us at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

We welcome feedback on our guidance – just email us at:  
[pef@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:pef@electoralcommission.org.uk)

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## Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Electoral Commission:

Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: [publications@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:publications@electoralcommission.org.uk)