

GETTING POVERTY ON THE AGENDA

A guide to running hustings meetings for the Scottish Parliament Elections, May 2021

INTRODUCTION: TACKLING POVERTY IN THE NEXT SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

The Scottish Parliament election in May 2021 is one of the most important elections since devolution. With the pandemic hitting people on low incomes hardest, the decisions our politicians take in the next parliamentary term must help loosen the grip of poverty in Scotland.

With the stakes so high it is vital that poverty is one of the defining issues of the election campaign, and of the next Scottish Parliament. Whoever is elected to the Scottish Parliament must be committed to bringing about the solutions to poverty that we need.

This guide has been produced by the Poverty Alliance to help organisations and groups organise their own local discussions and hustings with Holyrood election candidates. Hustings are a great way to understand the views of candidates, make sure local voices are heard and ensure that important issues are raised.

Our guide will help you organise a husting meeting that focuses on poverty and social justice. The discussion should cover all those areas that are critical to addressing poverty: transport, health and social care, social security, jobs, equality, education, housing, the economy, and more.

What is a husting?

A husting is an event where parliamentary candidates from different political parties address voters in the constituency. Typically, hustings run as a 'Question Time' format. Candidates are each allowed to make an opening statement, followed by a series of questions which each candidate can answer in turn.

Organising a poverty-focused husting will mean focusing on questions that will highlight where candidates stand on key poverty and social justice issues.

How to organise a husting

It is advisable to arrange 'non-selective' hustings, where you invite all local candidates standing in your constituency or region (unless you have good impartial reasons not to invite all candidates, such as local prominence of some parties or candidates over others or recent election results in the area). The Electoral Commission have produced guidance on hosting non-selective hustings, that you can read [here](#).

With restrictions on the number of people that can meet, hustings meetings for this election will take place online. This guide will help you set up your online hustings meeting.

GETTING STARTED

1. Setting a date

The Scottish Parliament dissolved on the 25th of March 2021, and polling day is on 6th May. You will want to make sure the event is not too close to polling day. An ideal time would be mid-way through the election period, around the middle of April. Hustings usually take place on weekday, in the early evening.

Aim to find a date and time for your event that:

- Is accessible to the widest number of people possible.
- Allows as many candidates as possible to attend.
- Does not clash with any other hustings organised in your constituency.
- Does not exclude anyone based on religious commitments.
- Does not clash with any other local events.
- Does not clash with important dates in the election calendar.

2. Technical set up

Running a hustings this year is not as easy as just booking a local hall. However, even in these difficult times, running your hustings online should not be too challenging.

There are various platforms that will allow you to run online meetings. Popular ones include MS Teams and Zoom. If you don't have a full Zoom account, then MS Teams may be the best platform to run your meeting.

If you have questions about running your hustings meeting online the Poverty Alliance team can provide some advice. Your local CVS or Third Sector Interface may also be able to provide some advice.

Webinar format (Zoom) – where only the candidates and chair can be seen and heard. The chair can pose the questions to the candidates, and if you wish to open up to follow-up questions, you can ask attendees to put their questions in the chat function. This can be a good format if you expect large numbers to attend.

Meeting format (MS Teams) – where all attendees can be seen. This might be the better option if attendance is below 40 people.

3. Hustings Chairperson

You will need to identify someone who is politically impartial and who is a strong chair to make sure that the meeting runs to time, that questions are shared fairly, and no-one is allowed to speak for too long or to dominate. The Chair of the event should also contribute to setting the agenda for the meeting (see below).

SECURING CANDIDATE ATTENDANCE

You should decide whether you want to have a hustings meeting that focuses on a particular constituency or on one of the regional parliamentary constituencies. Please keep the Poverty Alliance informed about your plans. We can help to make sure that your event is coordinated with other poverty-focused events that may be taking place in your region.

To make organising the event as straight forward as possible for you, it is best **not** to organise the event around candidates' availability. Instead, tell them when the event will be held and that you hope they can make it.

- Send candidates a draft agenda so they know what to expect.
- Tell them why they should attend – hustings are a good way to build a candidate's profile and explain why they are running for election.
- Let them know that it is a non-selective husting where all candidates have been invited to attend, and that the event will go ahead even if they do not attend.
- You should be able to find out who your local parliamentary candidates are by following [this link](#).

ADVERTISING THE EVENT

When it comes to spreading the word about your hustings, social media is the best place to start.

- If your organisation has a newsletter or a contact list of local organisations, this can be a great and obvious way to let people know the event is happening.
- Getting others to use their networks to help you spread the word can be effective. Reach out to specific individuals (e.g., local faith leaders) and specific organisations (e.g. the local CVS, trade union branches, local charities) to promote the event on your behalf.

- Once you have secured your candidates' attendance, it will be useful if they advertise that they will be attending and answering questions from local constituents.

RUNNING THE HUSTINGS

Poverty can be an emotive subject, and it is easy for debates to get side-tracked and become unfocused. Having a clear idea of how you want the event to run, and sticking to it, is important for keeping on track.

The easiest way to run a hustings is to give each of the candidates a maximum of five minutes to say what their priorities are for addressing poverty in the next Scottish Parliament. After each candidate has made some opening remarks, the chair can then begin to take questions from the audience.

When taking questions the chair should:

- Ask participants to keep their questions short and focused on poverty and social justice issues.
- Remind candidates to also keep their answers as brief as possible.
- The chair can also raise questions if they are not coming from the audience.

We would recommend running the hustings meeting for one hour. At the end of the meeting the Chair should thank all of the candidates and remind everyone to vote.

RESOURCES

The Poverty Alliance's manifesto for the 2021 Holyrood elections has been written in conversation with our members, meaning the policies it calls for represent the lived experiences of those living in poverty, and the views of organisations delivering services on the front line. Using these policies to frame the questions asked of candidates is a good way to establish their anti-poverty credentials. You can read the manifesto [here](#).

Other relevant campaign manifestos that you may wish to read to inform the discussion are the [End Child Poverty coalition's manifesto](#), and the Scottish Campaign on Rights to Social Security's manifesto which can be read [here](#).

POVERTY ALLIANCE'S ROLE

What we can do to help:

- Share information about your event social media and in our newsletter.
- Provide a speaker to introduce the event (but not to Chair).
- Help you if you are having trouble securing a candidate's attendance.
- Provide resources such as graphics.

If you would like to speak to our Campaigns Officer about organising the hustings, email suzi.murning@povertyalliance.org.

