

#EveryoneInForGood

How to Organise a Hustings

About and Acknowledgements

This document is a guide to organise a virtual hustings meeting on housing and homelessness in the local elections of 2021. This advice is largely based on a publication from Friends of the Earth's [Take Climate Action UK](#) and we would like to thank them for making the advice available.

Why organise a hustings?

A hustings is a panel discussion in the run-up to an election where candidates debate policies and answer questions from the audience. It's also a great way to secure commitments from candidates, while building relationships with your potential elected representatives. They usually feature candidates from all major parties, are most frequently organised by local organisations, such as community or faith groups, and held in the area where the candidates are standing for election. However, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, hustings will need to be held online.

You aren't restricted to a particular format. For example, you could host a "Question Time" style debate where, in addition to local candidates on the panel, you might also have a speaker with expertise on the topics covered.

While some hustings will focus on a range of issues, we suggest you organise a hustings focused on Housing and Homelessness, and you can mention the election pledge in your materials. Focusing the hustings around the issue will allow you to focus in on the detail and ensure questions remain relevant.

If you're keen to show candidates that a broad level of support exists for action on homelessness, we recommend organising the hustings together with other local allies or groups. This could include a local housing partnership, charities, housing associations, residents groups, health groups, faith groups etc. Co-organising the online event may also boost the number of people you have in the room and help spread the workload.

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link, Minorities House, 2-5 Minorities, London EC3N 1BJ | 020 7840 4430
www.homeless.org.uk | Twitter: @Homelesslink | Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink

Homeless Link complies with all electoral law and regulations, and we are committed to conducting our activity in a way that is politically impartial. During elections, groups can't endorse or campaign for any party or candidate in their constituency, but they can comment on manifesto pledges and promises by the candidates.

Before the hustings

Decide the basic details

While there is no perfect day or time to hold a hustings, do try and avoid clashing with other local events. You might want to consider holding it in the evening or on weekends when more people can join.

As you can imagine, candidates will have a packed schedule during the election period, so you may need to arrange a date around their collective availability. Get your request in early and be as flexible as possible ([use our template letter to invite your candidates](#)).

You don't have to invite every candidate standing in your area, as that could become unmanageable. However, you should ensure you invite representatives from all the main parties. If you do exclude some candidates you should be open and tell people why they have been excluded ([see electoral commission guidance](#))

If your elections are for more than one seat (for example all the seats in a City or Borough) then you can ask each party to send a representative. Ideally you should approach the leader of each political group and they will pass the invitation on. If it is a Mayoral election then make it clear that the Mayor can send a representative who knows about Housing if they wish.

Set up the event online

In order to ensure your safety and the safety of wider society, we strongly recommend that you only hold a hustings if you can do so online. Zoom is a great tool for this and you can set up your own account easily at [Zoom.us](https://zoom.us).

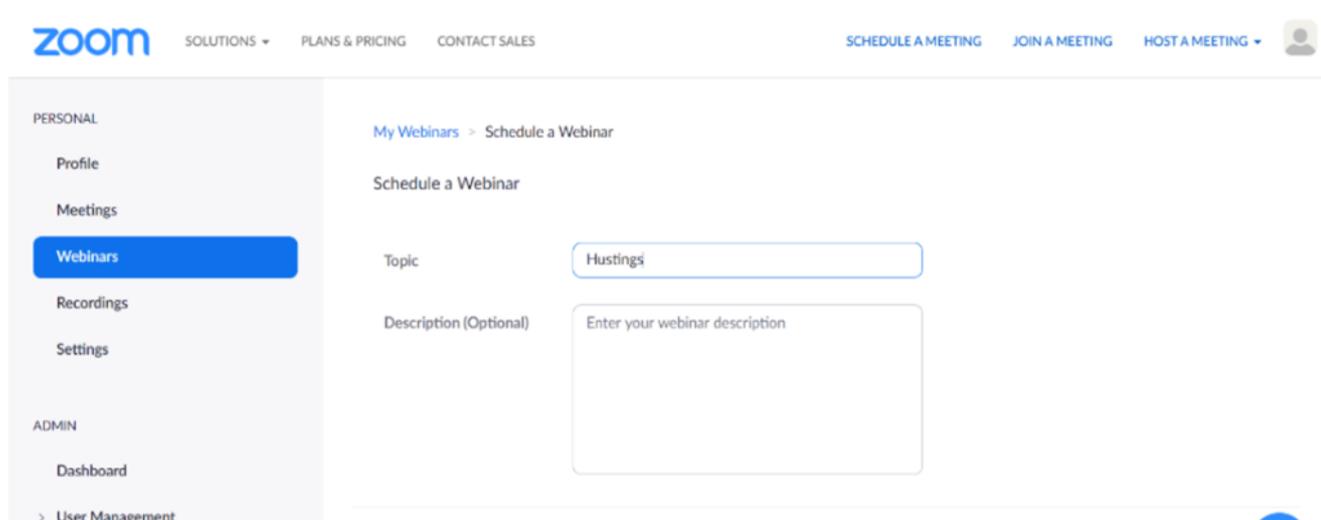
It's worth noting that calls are limited to just 40 minutes on free Zoom accounts, so you may want to set up a paid account for your group. Alternatively, contact Homeless Link and we might be able to help you. Send an email to rob.cartridge@homelesslink.org.uk to see if we've got a slot available.

The main benefit of Zoom is it's easy and accessible – anyone with a meeting link can join your call without needing an account. The only person that needs an account is the person setting up and running the meeting: the "host".

The Zoom webinar function will allow you to set up your event so that only the panellists and the host will be able to have their cameras on and unmute their microphones. Audience members will be able to submit questions via the Q&A feature, but won't be able to interrupt or talk over panellists.

Homeless Link

To set up your webinar, login to your account and click on "Webinars" in the left hand menu. Select "Schedule a webinar" and fill out the details of your event. Make sure you've enabled Q&A and only select "Automatically record webinar" if you have permission from all the panellists to record the hustings.



If you need a little extra help with setting up your hustings online contact us and we can help.

Get the word out

Candidates want all the local press they can get during the election period, so make sure you invite local press to your hustings. (see model press release). When inviting candidates, be sure to let them know that press have been invited or will be attending.

Get promoting. With the election fast approaching, promoting your event on social media is your best option. Tap into your local network including friends, family and related community groups to help spread the word. If you're able to make a leaflet quickly, you can distribute them outside local stations or stick them up in local restaurants and cafes for maximum impact.

We can help too! Just send details of your event to rob.cartridge@homelesslink.org.uk and we can email supporters in your area.

Pick a chairperson

Make sure you pick someone to chair the hustings who isn't publicly affiliated with a political party. They can be a member of your group, a local journalist or even a local celeb. You need to ensure they are familiar with the key issues, and therefore able to push candidates for clarification.

There's a risk with hustings that candidates may go back and forth with one another so pick a chairperson who is also able to maintain order.

Structure

Below is an outline on how to structure your hustings. This is only a template to help your planning, so adapt it and make it work for you. Our one key tip is to leave ample time for audience questions, as hustings are a rare opportunity for your community to ask direct questions of their potential future representatives.

Hustings last roughly 90 minutes, or a maximum of 2 hours. It might be worth setting the Zoom webinar up to start 5 minutes before the public start time, so candidates can get settled and fix any connection problems. In the event a candidate can't join, don't panic! Ask if their campaign manager can stand in their place. And if worst comes to worst, you could ask them to provide a written statement to be read out.

- Welcome from the chairperson, including a brief introduction on Zoom guidelines (10 mins).
- Introductory remarks from candidates (15 mins). This can be useful for attendees who aren't familiar with candidates. You can frame this around an introductory question, such as "what are you going to do about homelessness if elected?" to ensure they stay on topic.
- Questions from the chairperson to candidates (25 mins).
- Audience Q&A (20 mins). You may want to think through how you want to structure the Q&A. For example, you could ask attendees to submit questions at the beginning of the event via the Q&A feature.
- Closing remarks from candidates (10 mins).
- Chairperson closes hustings (5 mins).

At some point during your hustings make sure you ask candidates if they would agree to sign the Homeless Link pledges and ask if they're okay for this information to be public. If candidates agree, take a photo with them holding a printed version of the pledge and post it on social media.

Don't forget to post photos along with key quotes from candidates on social media during your event using #EveryoneInForGood. This will allow people who were unable to join your event to follow along. Using the hashtag means the entire network can connect with the event too.

Example questions

Good questions are a crucial part of any hustings, as they allow you to probe candidates' positions and even secure commitments that you can use to hold candidates to account.

Below are a set of questions about a Homelessness which you may want to ask candidates. Make sure to tailor the questions as much as possible to your local context.

Local council model questions

Q1: What would you do to end homelessness in our area

Q2: If elected, how would you help people who are currently sleeping rough in our area to secure long term accommodation.

Q3: If elected would you prioritise support for x,y,z local housing and homelessness services?
(mention various charitable/community groups)

Q4: Do you think we can end homelessness?

Q5: What would be your approach to people who are homeless who have no recourse to public funds?

Q6: What will you do about housing and planning policies to encourage the creation of more affordable and appropriate housing?

After the event

You'll probably want to do follow-up posts on social media and in the press after your hustings. Whatever you post or say, remember to remain impartial. The best way to do that is to avoid comparing the performance of different candidates or parties, or saying who had the most support or "won" – leave that up to the people who attended to decide!

If you're sharing quotes on social media or in a press release, be sure to share an even spread of quotes from different candidates and avoid endorsing any candidate positions.

If anyone promised to sign the pledge, make sure that you follow up with them.



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

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Homeless Link
Minories House, 2-5 Minories
London EC3N 1BJ

020 7840 4430

www.homeless.org.uk

Twitter: @Homelesslink

Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink

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