



# General Election Guide

How to put the Irish community on the agenda

## REPORT SUMMARY

The General Election will take place on **Thursday May 7**. The parties are out to get your vote. This guide provides members with some advice on how to engage with their prospective candidates to raise issues facing local Irish people.

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## DATE

April 2015

**With a General Election fast approaching, now is a great time for the Irish community to grab the attention of politicians in Britain. Prospective MPs will vary in their levels of awareness of Irish needs and the equalities agenda. Some will have no awareness at all, this presents an opportunity to surprise them with information and points of view they have never heard before.**

You can search for candidates from the parties standing in your area by googling google “Who is the candidate from X party in my area”. For example, you can find candidates from the three main parties at the following websites:

<http://www.labour.org.uk/people/filter/c/candidate>

<https://www.conservatives.com/ourteam.aspx>

<http://www.libdems.org.uk/candidates>

Clicking on names will take you to a page with information about the candidates and their contact details. If you are pressed for time you should focus your attention on the one or two candidates most likely to win. Unsuccessful candidates may become MPs in the future and are almost certain to be involved in local politics so it is not a waste of time to plant seeds in them. If you suspect a candidate from outside the three main parties may win the seat, it is also worthwhile making contact with them.

#### **What you can do:**

- **Write letters and emails to candidates;** write again if the response you receive is unsatisfactory. Writing as a voter rather than an activist will carry more weight, they hear from activists all the time but rarely regular voters. Doing the same to local newspapers is another potentially effective way to make yourself heard.
- **Raise issues on your doorstep;** if you have a candidate or canvassers knock on your door they will probably be happy to answer an informed question.
- **Phone radio phone-ins;** they need questions and you need answers.
- **Attend hustings:** these are public meetings often held at churches and community centres which give candidates a chance to address constituents. At them you can raise concerns and question candidates on their intentions and views. You can find the time and place of hustings in local papers, libraries and on church notice boards.
- **Hold a hustings:** Irish in Britain member organisations could think of organising a hustings. If you can get the three main candidates for your area together in your Irish club or community centre and bring your service users or members to meet the candidates this is a fantastic opportunity to put your club and the needs of the local Irish community onto the candidates radar. A guide on how to run your own hustings is attached.

- You can also arrange individual meetings with candidates; this is quite a big undertaking so prepare well and be armed with interesting questions.

It is good to hold MPs to account after elections; keep a record of all relevant things said to you or to the community before Election Day.

**Example question:**

There is a need for increased provision for people in the Middle-aged, Inactive, Sick and Isolated (MISIs). These people fall through cracks in policy and can face severe problems. This is particularly noticeable among the vulnerable, such as Irish people who are markedly over-represented in this group and more likely to be single, lack supportive networks and not built up benefit entitlements. What is your party's policy regarding the needs of these people within our community?

To find out more please contact us:

[info@irishinbritain.org](mailto:info@irishinbritain.org)

[JMcShannon@irishinbritain.org](mailto:JMcShannon@irishinbritain.org)

If you are thinking of holding a hustings make sure you let the local papers know about it or send them a press release afterwards to tell them about the discussion.

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Sample press release to local newspaper:

## Prospective Halifax MPs to meet with Irish community

28<sup>th</sup> April 2015

On Sunday March 21<sup>st</sup>, **Halifax MP XXX** will meet with the city's Irish Community, along with the **Conservative and Liberal Democrat candidates** for the area.

With a general election just weeks away, the Irish community within Halifax have welcomed the politicians' decision to meet. This hustings is just one in a large number of events taking place across the UK, organised by various Irish communities.

XXXXX, Chair of the Halifax Irish Society said:

"We welcome the meeting and look forward to a positive outcome for all. We are keen to hear how local candidates will respond to the issues facing us all locally ..... etc "

Jennie McShannon, Chief Executive Irish in Britain supported the Halifax Irish Society decision to hold the hustings. She said:

"This election will be an important moment in British politics. It affords new and existing MPs the opportunity to engage with the Irish community, whose long-standing contribution to **Halifax** is sometimes overlooked. It is also important for prospective parliamentarians to not only be aware of the contribution of second-generation Irish people to this area, but also their needs and aspirations."

**ENDS**

For more information please call Chair, Halifax Irish Community .....(Insert local Irish community Official) on ..... (Insert mobile number).

### Notes to editors

- (1) Halifax Irish Society was established in XXX, it's mission is to ... and it supports the local Irish community by.....
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Irish in Britain is a national umbrella organisation established in 1973, which draws together Irish clubs and societies in Britain. It promotes the interests of Irish people through community care, education, culture and arts, youth and sports activities and information provision. Irish in Britain is non-politically aligned and non-sectarian

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