

Situations and procedures

# Hustings for elections being held in 2017

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This document is for non-party campaigners who want to know good practice for holding hustings and when hustings may be regulated.

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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)

## Terms and expressions we use

You will normally be doing enough to comply with the law if you follow this guidance.

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

## Our approach to enforcement

The Commission regulates political funding and spending. We are committed to providing those we regulate with a clear understanding of their regulatory obligations through our guidance documents and advice service.

Wherever possible, we use advice and guidance proactively in order to secure compliance. And we regulate in a way that is effective, proportionate and fair.

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)

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# Hustings

## This document explains:

The rules for non-party campaigners who want to hold a hustings. It explains when a hustings is regulated and the rules they need to follow.

## The document covers:

- an introduction to hustings
- what is a hustings
- non-selective hustings
- selective hustings

## Related documents:

- [Overview of non-party campaigns](#)
- [Registering as a non-party campaigner](#)
- [Overview of non-party regulated campaign activity](#)
- [Northern Ireland Assembly non-party campaigners 2017](#)
- [Local elections in England and Wales non-party campaigners 2017](#)

# Summary

Hustings provide a forum for members of the public to hear from candidates and political parties in the run up to elections.

In many cases, spending on hustings will not be regulated. Under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 or the Representation of the People Act 1983, **spending** on some hustings is regulated. We do **not** regulate the conduct or management of a hustings.

This document provides a guide to hustings, explains when spending on a hustings is regulated, and gives an overview of the rules you must follow.

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# Hustings

## What is a hustings?

A hustings is a meeting where election candidates or parties debate policies and answer questions from the audience. Hustings aim to provide voters with an opportunity to hear the views of candidates or parties, usually in the run up to an election.

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

## Two types of hustings

A hustings can be 'selective' or 'non-selective'. You can choose which type of hustings to hold.

A **non-selective hustings** is a hustings that would **not** reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters to vote for or against particular political parties or candidates. For example, where you have invited all the parties standing candidates in your electoral area or you have impartial reasons for not inviting some of the parties.

**Your spending on a non-selective hustings is not regulated and will not count towards any spending limits.**

A **selective hustings** is a hustings that **would** reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters to vote for or against particular political parties or candidates – for example, if you invite some candidates or parties to your hustings and do not have impartial reasons for excluding the others.

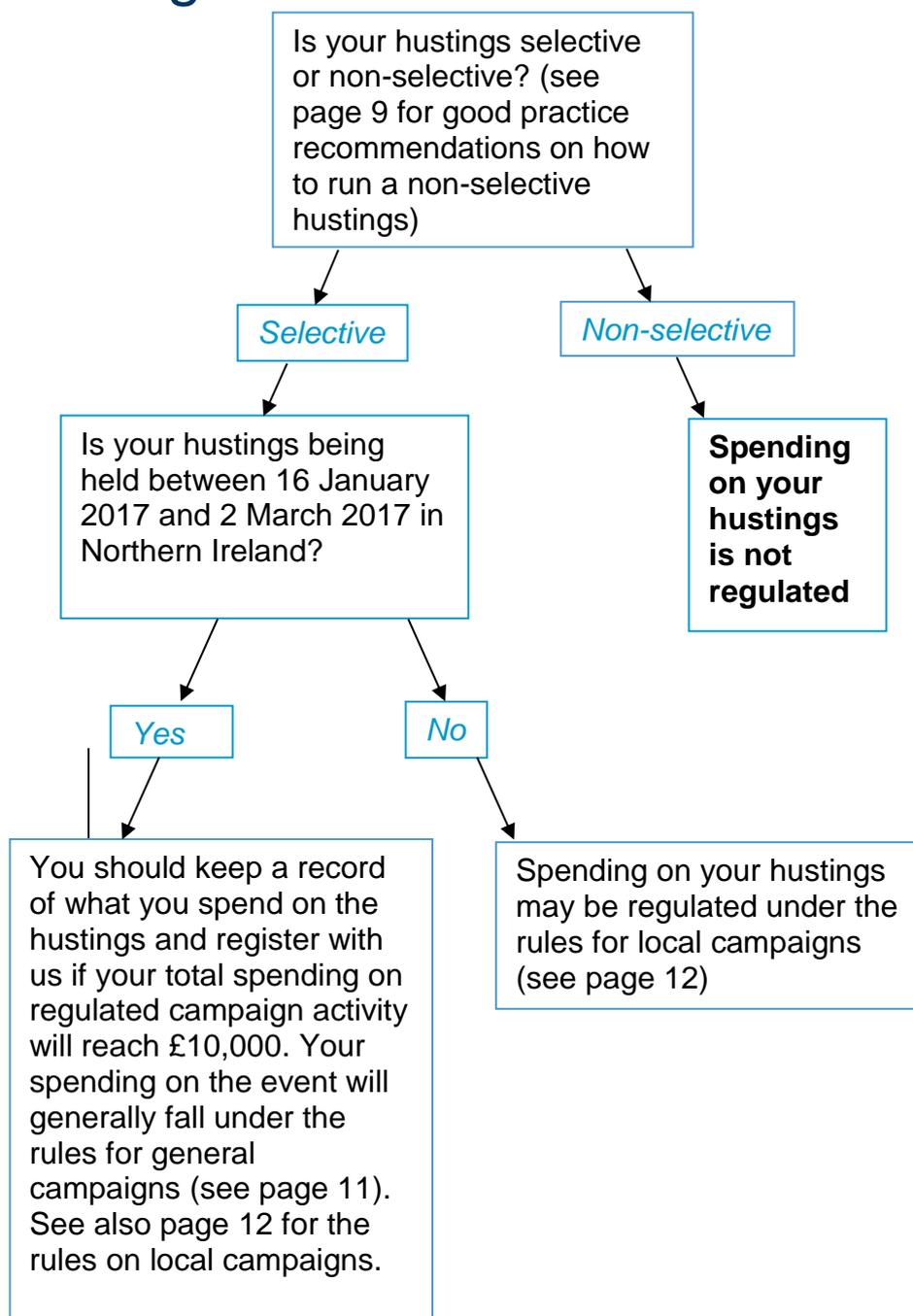
In some circumstances, spending on a selective hustings will be regulated and count towards your spending limit.

**Usually any spending on a hustings is low, and it is unlikely that spending on a selective hustings alone will require you to register or reach a spending limit.**

If you hold a selective hustings, you should keep a record of how much you spend, along with any other spending on regulated campaigning, and be aware of the registration thresholds and spending limits.

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# Is spending on your hustings regulated?



## Elections in 2017

The following elections are being held in 2017:

- Northern Ireland Assembly
- Local elections in England and Wales
- Council elections in Scotland
- Combined authority mayoral elections in England

There are two types of non-party campaigns. These are:

- **local campaigns:** non-party campaigns for or against one or more candidates in a particular constituency, ward or other electoral area. See page 12 for more details.
- **general campaigns:** non-party campaigns for or against a political party, or particular categories of candidate, including campaigns on policies or issues closely associated with a particular party or category of candidates (for example, candidates in a certain age group). See page 11 for more details.

Different rules apply to these two types of campaigns.

The rules on local campaigns can apply in **any** election in 2017. These rules start on the day after the person you are campaigning for or against becomes a candidate.

The rules on general campaigns apply to the election to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 2 March 2017, starting on 16 January 2017 and ending on polling day.

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## Non-selective hustings

A non-selective hustings is a hustings that would not reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters to vote for or against political parties or categories of candidates, including political parties or categories of candidates who support or oppose particular policies or issues.

**If you are holding a non-selective hustings, your spending will not be regulated by the non-party campaigning rules.**

A hustings will be non-selective if:

- you have invited all the candidates or parties known to be standing in the constituency, region or other electoral area, or
- you have impartial reasons for not inviting certain candidates or parties

If you are holding a public hustings, and you want to ensure that it is a non-selective hustings, the simplest way is to invite all the relevant candidates in the area or all political parties campaigning in the election, and allow all those attending an equal opportunity to participate.

However, this may not always be practical. For example, there may be so many candidates or parties standing 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 ensure your hustings is genuinely not promoting particular candidates or parties more than others.

The organiser does not have to ensure that all candidates or parties attend the event. They just need to be properly invited.

## Good practice recommendations

To show your hustings is non-selective you should:

- be able to give impartial reasons why you have not invited particular candidates or parties. You should be prepared to explain your reasons to candidates or parties you haven't invited
- make sure that candidates or parties you invite represent a reasonable variety of view, from different parts of the political spectrum
- allow each candidate or party representative attending a fair chance to answer questions and, where appropriate, a reasonable opportunity to respond to points made against them by other candidates or party representative
- inform the audience at the meeting of candidates or parties standing who haven't been invited.

If you are a charity, you should also follow the Charity Commission's guidance on campaigning.

Impartial reasons may emerge from the following considerations:

- local prominence of some parties or candidates over others
- the number of elected representatives at the local or national level
- recent election results in the area
- resources and other practicalities constraining numbers of invitees
- security concerns

Impartial reasons do not include reasons such as your views on the policies of a candidate or party. **If your hustings is non-selective then your spending on the event will not be regulated.**

We do not regulate the content or management of your hustings.

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## Selective hustings

If you selectively invite candidates or parties to your hustings and do not have impartial reasons for doing so, it may be a regulated event in which case spending on the hustings will count towards your spending limit.

There are different spending rules depending on which election the hustings is related to.

In many cases, the spending on a selective hustings will be well below the relevant registration thresholds and spending limits. If this is the case, then you should keep a record of your spending, along with any other spending on regulated campaigning, and be aware of the registration thresholds and spending limits.

## General campaign rules

There is a regulated period for non-party campaigners in Northern Ireland between 16 January 2017 and 2 March 2017. The general campaign rules apply during this period. If your selective hustings takes place in Northern Ireland during this period then the rules for general non-party campaigns will apply.

The rules cover how much non-party campaigners can spend on regulated campaign activity and when they must register with us. As an overview:

- if you spend, or plan to spend, £10,000 in Northern Ireland on regulated campaign activity during the regulated period, including on a selective hustings, you must register with us as a registered non-party campaigner
- if you do not register, or you are not eligible to register, you cannot spend more than £10,000 in Northern Ireland on regulated campaign activity during the regulated period
- if you register with us, you will have a higher spending limit and there are rules you must follow on donations, spending and reporting
- spending on activities which are only directed at your members does not count towards your regulated spending total

If your hustings is attended only by members of your organisation, then the spending on the hustings will generally not be regulated.

If you are spending on regulated campaign activity you can find further information about general campaigns at:

- [Overview of non-party campaigns](#)
- [Northern Ireland Assembly](#)

## Local campaign rules

Any selective hustings in 2017 may be regulated under the local campaign rules.

If you hold a selective hustings in Northern Ireland in 2017, the spending will generally be regulated under the general campaign rules.

Other elections in 2017 are:

- Local elections in England and Wales
- Council elections in Scotland
- Combined authority mayoral elections in England

Spending on any activity which promotes or disadvantages a candidate or group of candidates in a particular electoral area, including a selective hustings, will count towards your spending limit for that area. The spending limit is different for different elections.

You can find further information in our [non-party campaigner](#) guidance.

The spending limit applies from the day after the person you are campaigning for or against becomes a candidate.

Our [candidate and agent](#) guidance provides information on the dates that a person becomes a candidate.

If you hold a hustings with candidates or parties standing across more than one electoral area, then the spending on the hustings will not be regulated under the local campaign rules. You may still wish to follow the good practice recommendations for a non-selective hustings on page 8.

### Spending limits

The spending limit for these elections depends on how many electors there are in the relevant electoral area:

$$\text{£50} + 0.5\text{p per elector in the electoral area}$$

You should ask the relevant Electoral Registration Officer how many electors are on the electoral register in the relevant electoral area.

Election for:	Relevant electoral area
Councillor	Ward
Combined authority mayor	Combined authority area

#### Example 1

If your selective hustings is for candidates for a combined authority mayor with a combined authority electorate of 600,000, then your spending limit will be:

$$\text{£50} + (600,000 \times 0.5\text{p}) = \text{£50} + \text{£3,000} = \text{£3,050}$$

#### Example 2

If your selective hustings is for district councillor candidates in a ward of 2,500 people, then your limit will be:

$$\text{£50} + (2,500 \times 0.5\text{p}) = \text{£50} + \text{£12.50} = \text{£62.50}$$

## Candidate or party spending

In some cases the candidate or party will have to account for the spending incurred on a hustings. This may be the case for a hustings in any election.

- If a candidate or party pays a fee to attend the hustings (whether it is selective or non-selective), this will count as election spending and must be reported in the relevant return.
- In some hustings, the costs of putting on the event will count as election spending for a candidate or a party. This will be the case if the hustings is run with the intention of promoting that candidate or party.

If you think this may be the case, you should contact us before you hold the hustings.

## 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.

You can 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: 0333 103 1928  
[pef@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:pef@electoralcommission.org.uk)
- Scotland: 0333 103 1928  
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