**Churches and the General Election:**

**involving children and young people in the election period**

We know children and young people’s voices, perspectives, and experiences are important, and so churches can be looking for ways to include them in the election period. Whilst many of them will not yet be old enough to vote, they can engage with this democratic process now, and are, of course, future voters. Some may even go on to become political or civic leaders.

Here are some ways churches can enable children and young people to engage with the election period:

1. **Hustings** – if your church is hosting a hustings, or another church or group is running one in your constituency, consider…
	1. Gathering a group of children and young people to attend the hustings event together. It would be helpful to brief them before the event so they understand the purpose of the hustings, and who the candidates present might be. Perhaps a debrief may also be needed.
	2. Listening to a group of children and young people to hear their questions and asks for parliamentary candidates. For some children and young people it would be helpful to support them in the writing of their question. You may also want to ask if any of them wish to raise their question at a hustings or help them email it to their constituency candidates. If they don’t wish to ask the questions themselves, perhaps you could raise them at a hustings on their behalf.
2. **Voter Registration Champions** – some young people will be old enough to vote, but young people are less likely to vote. If they are young, a non-UK national, live in rented accommodation, have moved recently, live in an economically-disadvantaged community, or are from an ethnic minority, they are even less likely to vote. [Accredit as a Voter Registration Champion](http://www.voterchampion.org.uk/faith-and-community-group-accreditation/) with Citizens UK for support and resources.

For those of voting age, you can encourage them to…

* 1. Register to Vote – encourage young people who are able to register to vote. Although you can’t vote until you are 18, you can still register to vote at your current address from the age of 16.
	2. Voter ID – remind young people that they need to take ID when they go to vote and point them to information about what ID they can use, and how to get a free ‘Voter Authority Certificate’ ID if they need.
	3. Voter Turnout – remind young people of the polling date, and encourage them to vote so their voices are part of deciding who makes decisions on their behalf.
	4. Can I Vote? - Even if people aren't British Citizens, they may still be eligible to vote (eg if they're from Commonwealth countries), so encourage young people to check using the [Can I Vote? search tool](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fcanivote.org.uk%2F&data=05%7C02%7Channah.ling%40oxford.anglican.org%7Cc701747d0c344b5c8ee108dc6903fd3b%7C89fc0848423a41d790a1784e916fbcc4%7C0%7C0%7C638500713090782019%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=CWWOoLSg%2FoqKG%2BZ6tPx0%2B9fxuaqT5CSzfhE4Cg%2FguJI%3D&reserved=0).
	5. Consider running a Voter Registration event as part of or straight after an existing event where you meet with young people, to highlight the above and encourage conversation on the election.
1. **Consider faith and the public life** – help children and young people to consider how their faith and politics interacts.
	1. Run sessions on issues of poverty and inequality or the environment helping children. Have a look at the pages on the diocesan website for information and resources.
	2. You may want to consider adapting some of the Influence Course from Christians in Politics, an interactive 6-week course (with some video content) to explore the biblical basis of our call to public life, and how to be actively involved not armchair commentators.
2. **Run a mock election –** help young people engage with their local candidates in a mock election. One way to do this could be through asking candidates to send a video answering three questions in topics of interest to your group of young people. These can be shown at a youth group gathering, with the young people invited to a mock polling station to place their vote.

**Remember…** during an election period, churches must remain impartial and therefore not advocate for a particular party or candidate.

It is important to bear in mind that churches are accountable to charity law (even if not registered with the Charity Commission) which prevents some aspects of lobbying during an election cycle. This doesn’t prevent all engagement, but it is important to understand what is and isn’t allowed during this time. Don’t let this put you off – your church can be involved in elections as long as it is within the boundaries of charity law.

A charity must stress its independence and impartiality and ensure involvement with political parties is balanced; they cannot support a political party but can support specific policies if it helps them achieve their charitable purpose. [You should read the Charity Commission guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities), with section 4.4 focused on the specificities once an election has been called. More in-depth information on [elections and referendums for charities is available here.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/charities-elections-and-referendums)

During election periods campaigning activities are also covered by the Electoral Commission - read their information on [why the Lobby Act shouldn’t stop charities from campaigning.](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/blog/new-electoral-commission-guidance-charities-lobbying-act-shouldnt-stop-you-campaigning)

**After the election –** political engagement doesn’t end once the General Elections are over, so consider how you’d like to continue engaging young people and children on issues of poverty, inequality, and the environment. If you’re in the location of a Citizens UK alliance ([Thames Valley Citizens](https://www.citizensuk.org/chapters/thames-valley/) alliances are in Reading, Oxford, Milton Keynes), consider your church getting involved with local campaigns, often with opportunities for children and young people to be part of these.