



GENERAL SYNOD HUSTINGS POLICY

Summary

Several queries have been made in recent elections regarding the use and structure of hustings for General Synod elections. In order to standardise and codify where, when and how these are conducted, we propose the below brief guidance.

It should be noted that there is no requirement in law for any hustings to be held at all, and some dioceses rely only upon the circulation of candidates' written statements. The national election guidance makes clear that hustings should only be held if they can be managed fairly, and expressly provides that every question from the floor must be asked of every candidate. The task for diocesan officers and the presiding officer is to ensure that elections are carried out fairly, with equal treatment afforded to all candidates.

The Diocese of Southwark, and the Diocesan Registrar (the Presiding Officer), do consider hustings to be a useful tool to allow voters to get to know the candidates. This is especially the case for full General Synod elections which occur quinquennially.

Quinquennial elections

It is the intention of the Diocesan Registrar, where possible, to undertake in-person hustings for clergy and lay elections to the General Synod, supplemented by online hustings where appropriate and at the discretion of the Presiding Officer. It is intended that in-person hustings would include standard questions asked by the audience to be answered by each candidate in turn.

Hustings, whether in person or online, must be seen to be fair and must be practicable. In instances where there is an overwhelming number of candidates, the Presiding Officer might consider it impossible to ask individual questions of each of the candidates in a fair way and in a reasonable timeframe. A very long meeting risks significantly disadvantaging those candidates who (by random selection) were placed towards the end as some attendees will leave. In such instances, and at the discretion of the Presiding Officer, candidates can be asked to tailor a presentation with a specified time to speak to answer a range of topics sought from the electorate ahead of the meeting. Topics would be independently grouped by volume to enable the widest possible amount of engagement and advised to the candidates prior to the hustings. Decisions about whether and how to operate hustings will be taken on a case-by-case basis by the Presiding Officer in response to the number of candidates in order to ensure fairness.

It is useful for the electorate to know that candidates cannot be forced to answer questions and there is no requirement for them to attend hustings. The Diocese and the Presiding Officer are independent and will not and cannot provide information on church tradition, doctrinal beliefs or any other area. Those standing for elected office may, of course, choose how they wish to describe themselves in their communications to their electors.

Future decisions about the structure and format of hustings will also take account of any updated or reissued national guidance from time to time.

Casual vacancy elections

It is the intention that, as at present, casual vacancies do not have in person or online hustings, and that election addresses would solely be used to inform voters. Organising hustings for casual vacancies would involve a disproportionate use of Diocesan resources.

Recommended by the Diocesan Registrar and the President & co-chairs of Diocesan Synod.

20 May 2024