

# CITIZENS UK 2017 ELECTION – GUIDANCE FOR LEADERS



***Dear Citizens UK Leader,***

*Thanks for being willing to participate in Citizens UK's General Election Campaign 2017. Our aims this election are twofold (page 8 explains how these aims were agreed):*

- to get as many people registered to vote by 22<sup>nd</sup> May as possible;*
- to meet Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) before 8<sup>th</sup> June to build constructive, respectful and mutually-accountable relationships between civil society and those who seek to represent us.*

*This guide is designed to provide materials to register voters and help you engage your local parliamentary candidates effectively.*

*If you are acting in the name of Citizens UK in your local area then please remember that we are a charity and are bound by certain laws and could be fined if these are violated, even unintentionally. Please read section 1 of this document thoroughly so that your actions stay within the law, and seek advice if you are unsure.*

*If you need any advice or support please contact your local Citizens UK Community Organiser or [generalelection@citizensuk.org](mailto:generalelection@citizensuk.org) for help.*

*Thanks and good luck!*

***Tim Norwood and Sarah Holtam***

***Co-chairs of the Citizens UK Council – Election Cabinet***

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## 1. How to campaign as a charity and stay within the law

In recent years, the rules on charities and their activities around elections have been tightened up. Citizens UK is a charity, and we must abide by charity law. But as Vicky Browning, Chief Executive of the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations, wrote in a recent article:

*“...charities must take confidence from the fact that despite these new restrictions, there is no ban on the principle of charities campaigning politically. The Charity Commission’s guidance makes clear charities wishing to campaign can do so, provided it is in the furtherance of their charitable objectives, is permitted in their governing documents and is not party political.”<sup>1</sup>*

The good news is that Citizens UK’s first charitable object<sup>2</sup> clearly allows us to engage with Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) at election time, because we exist:

- *To develop the capacity and skills of the members of socially and economically disadvantaged communities in such a way that such members are better able to identify and help meet their needs and to participate more fully in society.*

Our governing documents permit us to engage in non-partisan campaigning, so we are free to engage PPCs ahead of the election in the name of Citizens UK so long as we abide by these rules<sup>3</sup>:

- **We must be (and appear to be) politically neutral:** Any campaigning in the name of Citizens UK must not involve party political activity, or be seen to endorse or oppose a particular candidate or party (regardless of our opinions or how the party/candidate engages with us). This means we must give fair time and treatment to all candidates. For example, at an assembly, the chair must not be affiliated to a political party.
- **We must be careful not to seek to influence the outcome of the election:** We must never tell people who, or who not, to vote for in the name of Citizens UK. Information about the candidates should not be spread publicly and the *content* of our meetings must remain confidential until after the election. Please be very careful to be even-handed in any publications or social media relating to the election (More information below on practical and media advice).
- **All press releases, media interviews or statements where you are representing Citizens UK must be cleared with the Citizens UK media team.** Your local Citizens UK Community Organiser can arrange this.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2017/apr/24/charities-campaigning-general-election-society-reform>

<sup>2</sup> Read all our Charitable Objects here: <http://beta.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-details/?regid=1107264&subid=0>.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/165961/intro-campaigning-charities-npc.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/165961/intro-campaigning-charities-npc.pdf)

- **We must engage constructively and respectfully with candidates:** Any communications with political candidates in the name of Citizens UK must remain respectful and non-partisan, even when we may feel passionately about an issue and candidates disagree.
- **We must focus on relationship and sharing issues:** Our campaigning as a charity is legitimate to the degree that we are building constructive relationships with candidates that enable our members to participate more fully in society, and raise the issues that have the support of our local chapters, alliances and associated groups.

### **There is a key legal distinction between public and private meetings.**

Most of our meetings will be *private* because they are for CUK members and committed supporters. These include roundtables and assemblies.

If you are considering holding a *public* meeting - i.e. one for more than CUK members/ committed supporters - then contact [matthew.bolton@citizens.org](mailto:matthew.bolton@citizens.org) for advice.

**If in doubt, please err on the side of caution and consult your local Citizens UK Community Organiser or [jonathan.cox@citizenswales.org.uk](mailto:jonathan.cox@citizenswales.org.uk) or [matthew.bolton@citizensuk.org](mailto:matthew.bolton@citizensuk.org) for advice.**

## **1.1 Social media and the press**

### **Please consider your social media persona**

If you're campaigning on behalf of Citizens UK then you need to remain politically neutral. You should consider if your twitter biography positions you politically. If it does then you need to change it, or refrain from tweeting about Citizens UK campaigns.

### **DO think about the content of your tweets**

Remember not to react to specific policies in the name of Citizens UK. We can't be seen to be taking sides. Don't tweet pictures of you meeting with just one candidate. If you are at an Assembly get a group image.

### **DON'T retweet without consideration**

If you are campaigning or working on behalf of Citizens UK then you must not retweet candidates tweets or tweets explicitly championing one party's position on an issue.

## DO use #

If you are tweeting please use the #CUKGE17 and #DemocracyinAction.

Example tweets below:

We're meeting with PPCs in xxxxxx to build relationships with civil society #CUKGE17 #DemocracyinAction

We want a just, inclusive, welcoming society. Meeting PPCs in xxxxxx to share ideas #CUKGE17 #DemocracyinAction

We support #refugeeswelcome and are telling PPCs in xxxx why #CUKGE17 #DemocracyinAction

## Journalists and the press

### **Please don't give interviews or speak to the press about Citizens UK**

There is a Citizens UK sign-off procedure for all press interviews and journalist enquiries. If you are approached, please direct enquiries to the [Citizens UK](#) or [Safe Passage](#) press team. The press team, working with Organisers will be sending out press releases from Citizens UK and Safe Passage about the general election work, including Assemblies.

### **Please share images with the press team**

Following the election we want to tell the story of our work and publicise the Great Get Together lunches and iftars we are hosting. Please forward any images of your General Election campaigning to the [Citizens UK](#) press team.

## **2. Building a relationship with Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs)**

The Citizens UK Council, which includes representatives from all our chapters across the UK, has set the strategy for the general election. In previous elections we have spent months listening and deliberating before producing a Citizens UK Manifesto to present to the leaders of the political parties at a National Accountability Assembly. We have also sought commitments from local candidates on those issues.

This general election was a surprise, and we have not had the time nor resources to develop a new manifesto. Given the historic changes that we are living through, and the major challenges the newly-elected parliament and UK government will face, we feel it is more important than ever to build constructive, respectful and mutually-accountable relationships between civil society and those who seek to represent us.

To that end, we are encouraging Citizens UK chapters, alliances and members to seek private meetings with the prospective parliamentary candidates ahead of the general election on June 8<sup>th</sup>. We ask that you try to meet with the incumbent and the nearest three challengers as a minimum,

and with other candidates if you have the time.

The quickest and most simple method to build that relationship is to seek a **private roundtable meeting** with the candidates (individually or together) and between 3 and 10 leaders from a range of diverse organisations who can speak with authority on behalf of the organisation and its local work.

More stringent rules apply if you intend to hold a public event, i.e. for more than CUK members or committed supporters. **If you intend to run a public event in the name of Citizens UK, please contact [matthew.bolton@citizensuk.org](mailto:matthew.bolton@citizensuk.org) to make sure we stay within the law.**

### Setting up a meeting:

Here is a draft email to adapt and send to each candidate (you can normally find their contact details on the internet – and we suggest you email them and follow up with a phone call):

*Dear [name of candidate],*

#### *[1. Intro to chapter/group]*

*We write from West London Citizens, a broad-based alliance of member communities from Westminster to Hounslow, founded in 2005. Members are faith, education, labour and third sector organisations who work together for the common good. We develop people and communities so they have the power to make change on issues that matter, such as welcoming refugees, jobs for young people, Living Wage and housing.*

#### *[2. List institutions in membership in relevant constituency]*

*The institutions in membership of West London Citizens within the constituency you are standing in include: St James', Piccadilly; London West Area Quaker Meeting; Holy Apostles, Pimlico; Sisters of Mercy, St John's Wood; IPPR; Methodist Church North West London; Farm Street Church; City of Westminster College; and Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church*

#### *[3. Request meeting]*

*We are nonpartisan and recognise any election as an exhilarating part of our democracy and will be encouraging our members to register to vote by the deadline of 22nd May.*

*We write to request a one hour meeting with 5-10 representatives of West London Citizens before 8th June? We can meet somewhere convenient to you, or can offer to host at [\*\*\*\*] which is in our membership. Please make arrangements with [\*\*\*\*] who will ensure the details are shared with our representatives.*

#### *[4. Hopeful common ground + Jo Cox lunch]*

*If elected, we look forward to finding common ground on which to work with you as our MP. For example, we would like to invite you to our Great Get Together Lunch, in memory of Jo Cox, being*

*held at 2pm, Sunday 9th July at Christ the Saviour Church, Ealing.*

*We look forward to hearing from you – please contact [details] to make arrangements to meet.*

*Yours,*

### **3. Top Tips for Meeting with your Local Candidates:**

- **Be prepared!** Meet as a team before you meet the candidates to decide what you are going to say. Starting with a ‘rounds’ is a great way to introduce who is there (and the institutions you represent) and hear the candidate’s story.
- **Agree beforehand what exactly you are asking of them.** Hopefully you will have a date for a Great Get Together meal to invite them to, the ‘Statement of Principles’ in front of you, and any local or specific campaign items decided before you go in.
- **Remember to take a few copies of the Citizens UK magazine** that showcases national action and explains what Citizens UK is – they might never have come across us before.
- **Explain why and how you are engaging candidates:** We are part of a registered charity with an obligation to be politically neutral, but also with a duty to engage in matters which relate to our charitable objects, so we would like to know your views on issues we are working on.
- **Get a photo!** We are not asking candidates to sign specific pledges this year, but we do want photos of every meeting that takes place. Make sure to offer the opportunity of a photo to all, and not just some, of the candidates you meet.

### **4. Sharing the ‘Statement of Principles’ & asking candidates to ‘Meet & Eat’**

The Citizens UK Council and its Election Cabinet has drafted a ‘Statement of Principles’ which we encourage you to share with the candidates, and discuss how it links to the work of Citizens UK locally (you can find it in the appendix). The first page of the statement is the same right across the UK, but the second page can be adapted to focus on local issues and examples.

The main asks we are requesting that everyone makes of the candidates focus primarily on relationship and working with us if they get elected, namely: are you willing, if elected, to:

- Meet with us within three months to discuss how we can work together to make Britain more Just, Inclusive & Welcoming?
- Eat with us at a local ‘Great Get Together’ meal, held in memory of Jo Cox MP?

## 5. The Great Get Together

The Citizens UK Council was recently addressed by Brendan Cox, husband of Jo Cox MP, who was killed last year. Brendan asked us to support The Great Get Together, and the Citizens UK Council agreed to do so and to include it in our work around the election. Key to this is to host or support Great Get Togethers in your local area, and to invite the candidates to attend.

Here is some more information about The Great Get Together:

*This summer, on 16 – 18 June, we're organising the biggest neighbourhood celebrations since the Jubilee street parties. It's called The Great Get Together and we'd love you to be a part of it.*

*We're inviting people to get together with their neighbours to share food and celebrate all that we hold in common. It could be a street party or a shared barbecue, a picnic or a bake off. What matters is that we have fun and bring communities closer together.*

*We believe there is a groundswell of people who reject divisive politics and simply want to bring our communities together and celebrate all that unites us. This is our chance.*

*As the prime minister said, when she remarked on Jo's death in her New Year's message: 2017 represents an opportunity to move forward and "bring this country together, as never before". Jo's family and friends came up with the initiative, and The Big Lunch have teamed up with us to move their annual celebration. More than one hundred organisations are now supporting us, see our partners page for the full list! This weekend is inspired by Jo Cox, but we expect people to take part for many different reasons.*

You can find more information here: [www.greatgettogether.org](http://www.greatgettogether.org).

The weekend falls during Ramadan, to be inclusive of Muslim colleagues some chapters are arranging evening Iftars, and others have decided to eat together over 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> July instead, so you can do whatever works for your chapter.

Don't forget to let us know what you are organising: [generalelection@citizens.org](mailto:generalelection@citizens.org)

## 6. Briefings on Citizens UK's key issues

We want our teams to focus primarily on the 'Meet & Eat' relationship-building strategy, however you may wish to raise issues on which you are acting locally and that the elected MP could support in parliament. We encourage you to showcase good work that you are doing locally that can help strengthen your relationship with the candidates, but we have also included some information on issues below on ways in which Citizens UK's campaigns could benefit from the support of local MPs.

- Refugee Resettlement
- Community Sponsorship of Refugees
- Safe Passage

Do not feel you need to raise all or any of these issues, but if you are working on an issue locally

then it makes sense to focus on that. It may be that there are other local issues that fit under the heading of 'Just, Inclusive & Welcoming' that you wish to raise (but please only do so if they have the democratic consent of your local Citizens UK chapter). Please remember to keep a record of any responses or commitments that your local candidates make, especially if they go on to get elected! Email your updates to [generalelection@citizens.org](mailto:generalelection@citizens.org) Remember not to communicate the content of your meeting prior to the election.

### **6.1 Refugee Welcome - resettlement briefing**

Citizens UK was at the forefront of the campaign to resettle Syrian refugees in the UK. This was a central ask in our 2015 Citizens UK Election Manifesto, and it has been wonderful to see our local campaigns grow into a national movement of Refugee Welcome teams and a commitment from the UK government to resettle 20,000 Syrian families<sup>4</sup> and 3,000 vulnerable children from the Middle East and North Africa<sup>5</sup>.

Citizens chapters and the Refugee Welcome teams we support have been instrumental in helping local authorities to welcome those resettled refugee families and children. We have found houses and school places, assisted with language learning, and befriended families once they have arrived.

To date, 5,706 people have been resettled to the UK under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS), and just a handful of children at risk. This leaves over 17,000 refugees still to be resettled. Offers of places from local authorities have now exceeded the target of 23,000.

The risk is that the commitments detailed above were made by the Cameron administration and were connected to the lifetime of the current Parliament (which was anticipated to run until 2020). Without a firm commitment from all major political parties to continue and extend the current refugee resettlement schemes, they may fall.

**As well as any local support you need for Refugee Welcome work, the suggested asks of your candidates are:**

1. Ensure that the UK government's commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian families under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) by 2020 is delivered, and extended by at least the same rate (4,000 per year) to the end of the new parliament in 2022.
2. Ensure that the UK government's commitment to resettle 3,000 vulnerable children and their families refugees from the Middle East and North Africa by 2020 is delivered, and extended by at least the same rate (750 per year) to the end of the new parliament in 2022.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/syria-refugees-and-counter-terrorism-prime-ministers-statement>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-scheme-launched-to-resettle-children-at-risk>

## 6.2 Community Sponsorship of Refugees

In July 2016, following extensive consultation with the National Refugee Welcome Board and Citizens UK, the government launched the first Community Sponsorship Scheme for Refugees.<sup>6</sup> The scheme gives community groups, including churches, synagogues and mosques, an opportunity to get involved in helping refugees through taking the lead responsibility for their resettlement and integration in a community.

Citizens UK is helping the first communities to apply to become sponsors for families and two have already been accepted, in Fishguard and Narberth. Currently families brought across through Community Sponsorship count towards the 20,000 resettlement spaces under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, however Citizens UK aims to make this commitment a permanent addition to the resettlement routes. As Citizens UK members have applied to become sponsors, a number of practical issues have become clear about the operation of the scheme, in particular procedural delays and the impact of Universal Credit.

**In addition to any local support you may need to help with Community Sponsorship, the suggested asks of your candidates are:**

1. Will you support Community Sponsorship being counted as additional to (rather than part of) Britain's existing refugee resettlement commitment?
2. Will you support the development of Community Sponsorship to become available to refugees from any nationality, and to enable specific refugees to be selected by sponsors, as is the case with the equivalent Canadian scheme?
3. Will you encourage the new government to work with Citizens UK to review procedural delays, the impact of Universal Credit and other factors that unnecessarily increase the cost of Community Sponsorship to local communities?

## 6.3 Safe Passage

Citizens UK's Safe Passage project evolved out of this work to open access to safe and legal routes for refugees through community organising, advocacy and strategic casework. To date we have helped over 1,000 unaccompanied child refugees and vulnerable adults find safe and legal routes to protection.

In May 2016 the government committed to help unaccompanied child refugees in Europe after a public campaign led by Lord Alf Dubs. Despite the campaign's calls for Britain to help some 3,000 children of the 90,000 who arrived in Europe, the government recently announced it would be closing the scheme after helping 350 children, a total now extended to 480 places. To date, 200 children have been helped by the scheme, none from Greece or Italy.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-full-community-sponsorship>

There are many hundreds more unaccompanied children across Europe with family in the UK but are unable to access the legal mechanisms agreed by Britain and Europe to reunite them (known as Dublin III). You can read more about this issue at [www.safepassage.org.uk](http://www.safepassage.org.uk).

**In addition to any local support you may need to support Safe Passage work you may be doing locally, the suggested asks of your candidates are:**

1. Will you ensure Britain is doing all it can to support child refugees to access safe and legal routes to reunite with family members here in the UK?
2. Will you join us on a visit to a refugee camp in Europe to see first-hand our efforts to assist the most vulnerable?