



United Kingdom
& Ireland Territory

Election Guidance for Corps, Staff and Volunteers

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Contents

1. Introduction
2. Jargon Buster
3. Election rules and regulations: things to be aware of
4. General Elections
5. Making the best use of elections
6. Building Relationships with Candidates
7. Further Support and Resources
8. Frequently Asked Questions
9. Potential scenarios and how to navigate them

1. Introduction

The Salvation Army plays an important role in communities across the UK and Ireland, providing frontline support and pastoral care for some of our countries most marginalised people.

As a church and charity, we are committed to seeking justice and reconciliation, so that all our communities can flourish. This mission gives us many opportunities to hear directly from some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in the country.

We are non-party political but have a privileged position to speak on the behalf of those we help and, even more importantly, enable their voices to be heard. It is vital that our elected representatives hear these voices and their stories.

Elections are an opportunity to share this voice. Staff, officers, members and volunteers can do this by engaging with their local candidates and sharing their insights, experiences and local knowledge. Having said that, there are some specific rules that apply to people working for registered charities during an election campaign.

This document has been developed by the Public Affairs Unit (PAU) to provide guidance on best practice for corps, staff and volunteers during an election.

2. Jargon Buster

By-election: By-elections are held to fill vacancies which arise before the end of the legislative term.

Candidate: the individual running for an elected role.

Councillor: a (generally) elected member of a local authority.

Constituencies: the area that your elected MP represents. There are 650 constituencies in the UK.

Election: an event where members of the public vote to elect a representative to a legislative body i.e. a council, parliament, assembly etc.

Election Agent: The individual legally responsible for a candidates' election campaign.

First Past the Post: the electoral system used to elect MPs and Councillors in much of the UK. The party or group which wins the most wards, division or constituencies makes up the government or administration.

General Election: A UK-wide vote for MPs to sit in the House of Commons.

House of Commons: The Commons is the primary legislative body in the UK, it is made up of 650 MPs elected to represent constituencies.

House of Lords: The House of Lords acts as a legislative and advisory body made up of life and hereditary peers and Bishops of the Church of England. It has the similar powers and functions to the Commons but can be overruled by the Commons.

Hustings: A form of interview or debate for candidates. Members of the public can ask candidates questions.

Manifesto: A document outlining the aims of the candidate, including policies and goals if elected.

Mayor: the head of a local authority. In the UK, these may be ceremonial or directly elected with various responsibilities.

Member of Parliament (MP): Each of the 650 UK constituencies has an MP who represents his or her area's interests in the House of Commons.

Minister: A minister is either a peer or MP who holds a government post and is responsible for a particular department or aspect of its work.

Party: a group that has common political goals.

Parliament: is where new laws get debated and agreed. Parliament is made up of two 'houses' - the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The third separate but linked 'house' is the monarchy, under whose authority laws are made.

Peer: In the context of the House of Lords, peers are titled members generally styled either Lord or Baroness depending on their gender. Most peers hold life peerages meaning they cannot pass on their title. There are 92 members of the Lords who hold hereditary peerages and 26 Church of England Bishops. Peers are generally grouped and vote in parties (Labour, Conservative etc), though there are a number of non-aligned and Crossbenchers.

Polling: voting for a candidate.

Postal Vote: a vote sent in by post rather than cast in person.

Prospective Parliamentary Candidate: a candidate standing for election to the House of Commons.

Purdah (also known as the pre-election period): the time between an election being announced and the date the election is held. There are restrictions on government organisations and others to prevent interference with the vote.

Returning Officer: The individual responsible for ensuring fairness in the elections.

3. Election rules and regulations: things to be aware of

While people representing The Salvation Army must be careful to avoid being seen as biased or favouring a party, this doesn't mean that we can't raise issues and meet with candidates - what's important is that we provide the same opportunities or ask the same questions to every candidate.

Charity Law

This law governs how charities operate; the key points for us are:

- It needs to be based upon our experience and in line with the charity's founding objects.
- Any claims must be credible and backed up.
- It can be political but not party political - i.e it must not endorse one political party.

You can find out more for England and Wales [here](#), Scotland [here](#) and Northern Ireland [here](#)

Election Law

This law governs what organisations can say during an election:

- You can encourage people to vote but not tell them who to vote for.
- You can organise visits and hustings, however you should extend invites to all candidates to ensure fairness.
- You can campaign on issues which are important to you and reflect the charitable objects and mission priorities of the Army, but again you should not tell people who they should vote for.
- Anyone who works for or is part of The Salvation Army should not suggest on social media or in any other public way that The Salvation Army endorses any political party or candidate.
- Should you have any concerns whatsoever with the above or how to put them into practise then please contact PAU.

You can find out more [here](#).

The Salvation Army, political parties and elections

The Salvation Army is non-party political and as such we do not take a stance on the outcome of an election nor support any political party.

Staff, volunteers, members and officers are free to join a political party, but this must be in a personal capacity. Officers in particular must ensure that their membership is not taken to be an endorsement by The Salvation Army.

Finally, staff, members and volunteers may stand for election in a personal capacity though they should alert their line manager or corps officer that they are planning to do so. Officers cannot stand for election unless they are retired.

Salvation Army Policy Positions

In public statements on key policy areas, staff, officers, members and volunteers are asked to follow The Salvation Army's policy positions. An overview of The Salvation Army's positions can be found [here](#). If you're not sure, then it's always best to ask. Please contact public.affairs@salvationarmy.org.uk.

You are obviously free to speak and potentially campaign on other areas, so long as they are in keeping with The Salvation Army's values and are non-party political. Do consider whether it is best for another organisation to champion a cause which may be more in keeping with what they do and therefore more 'authentic'.

If you receive a complaint from a candidate or elected official, please contact the PAU. For more information you can read our 'How to handle complaints and build relationships' guide, which can be found on [here](#).

You can find more information on campaigning on social justice issues in our Campaigners Guide [here](#).

4. General Elections

The Electoral Commission makes clear that it is important for charities and organisations like The Salvation Army to participate general elections. There is a need however to pay particular attention to comply with requirements in the run up and during a General Election period.

Guidance is available from the Electoral Commission which includes case studies of real campaigns and the considerations made as to determine any limits on your planned activities or whether there are any reporting requirements for your plan.

Many Salvation Army buildings are used as Polling Stations. This is encouraged as it brings many people into our buildings who would otherwise not do so.

If you would like to discuss any activities you would like to undertake in the run-up to a General Election, please contact the Public Affairs Unit who can best advise you.

You can find the Electoral Commission guidance [here](#)

5. Making the best use of elections

There are a number of things that you can do during an election to support the work of The Salvation Army or build relationships with your local political candidates. Please do remember though that when representing The Salvation Army, we must all remain non-party political.

Visits to Corps and Centres

All requests for visits by candidates and elected members are great opportunities for The Salvation Army to advance our mission. It is advised that you speak to the Public Affairs Unit who we can offer support, keep a record of political contact and better co-ordinate our relationships with government.

It will make your event even more of a success if you involve us at the earliest possible opportunity. We can help with:

1. Advice on how to approach the meeting or visit.
2. Policy briefings and key points to note on the subjects that you want to raise.
3. Help co-ordinate information amongst relevant people within the SA.

Contact with Politicians, Local Government and Government Departments

There is a wealth of policy knowledge within The Salvation Army. The PAU can only work with what is shared with them. Please do get involved with local consultations that may be relevant to your area of expertise. It is amazing how much influence can be gained and how much local authorities appreciate such contact.

However please don't keep your contacts to yourself. Even simply for the purpose of avoiding duplication and to keep the PAU records up to date, it would be helpful if all contact with Government departments and officials could be logged and passed on to us.

We should be careful to avoid being used as a convenient backdrop to a political cause or event. Please do contact the PAU (public.affairs@salvationarmy.org.uk), if you're unsure.

Raising local issues or national campaigns

Raising issues or supporting national campaigns can be done at any given time, not just at elections. You can find more information on campaigning on social justice issues in our Campaigners Guide [here](#).

During an election, you can write or contact all the candidates to ask them to support a particular issue or campaign. The Salvation Army will nationally campaign on a range of important policy issues and these are agreed following internal discussions and reflection. PAU will provide a range of information leading up to a campaign which you are able to share. It is important however to contact all candidates to ensure that we are, and are seen to be, impartial.

6. Building Relationships with Candidates

While we must maintain political impartiality, any interaction or communication with a candidate is an opportunity to build a relationship. As they could be your next elected representative this could be beneficial for a number of reasons:

- For support for your work locally or The Salvation Army's work nationally.
- To raise awareness of issues.
- To amplify the experiences and voice of the people we serve.
- To influence the local or national government.

If approaching a candidate, it's best practice to do some research into their interests and issues they are campaigning on. Candidates will usually be interested in what's happening in their area and will make time to speak to one of their potential voters. PAU can help you to identify the candidates standing in your area and how best to contact them.

Remember to follow up with thanks and try to update the candidate again in the future about the issue or topic you mentioned. Inviting them to visit your corps or centre, for example, can be a great opportunity to give them insight into your work but do consider extending such invites to all candidates to ensure fairness.

You can find more information on campaigning and engaging on social justice issues in our Campaigners Guide [here](#).

7. Further Support and Resources

For a useful overview of PAU's work and campaigns, visit www.salvationarmy.org.uk/campaigning-and-policy

For resources and other templates, you can visit PAU's Our Hub page <https://ourhub.salvationarmy.org.uk/PublicAffairs/Pages/default.aspx>

You can also stay up to date by following PAU's blogs <https://www.salvationist.org.uk/>

For other questions or queries, please contact public.affairs@salvationarmy.org.uk

8. Frequently Asked Questions

If you are unsure or have any questions, then please do email us as at public.affairs@salvationarmy.org.uk

Can The Salvation Army carry out campaigning and political activity?

Yes - any charity can become involved in campaigning and in political activity which further or support its charitable purposes. The activities it undertakes must be a legitimate and reasonable, and must never align itself with one political party. Please remember there are specific rules during an election campaign.

Do I have to engage in political activity or campaigning?

No - staff, officers and volunteers are encouraged to participate as a means of contributing to The Salvation Army's wider mission, however you are under no obligation to get involved.

Can I support a particular candidate or party?

Staff, members and volunteers are free to support and campaign for candidates in a personal capacity. Though should consider their social media if used for work.

During an election, officers should particularly avoid campaigning for a specific candidate or party as this could be taken as an endorsement by The Salvation Army.

A candidate has asked to visit our corps ahead of a forthcoming election - is that allowed?

Candidates will often seek to engage with organisations and groups in the area they are looking to represent. It is a great opportunity to engage with a potential elected member in order to tell them the issues that matter to you and that you are seeing locally, however it is important to ensure other candidates are given the same opportunity.

We would urge you to extend an invite to other candidates to ensure impartiality and that there is no bias towards any one candidate or party.

Can stand I stand for elected office?

A number of Salvation Army staff, members and volunteers have gone on or hold elected office. If you are intending to stand for election, please do alert your line manager or corps officer. As a candidate, it is important avoid associating your candidacy with your work or ministry for The Salvation Army. For example, do not refer to your role in the Army in any election literature.

Officers cannot stand for an election for a political party. The exception to this is retired officers.

Can I join a political party?

Staff, members and volunteers are free to join political parties in a personal capacity.

Officers can be members of political parties, but they do so in a personal capacity, not as representatives of The Salvation Army. If attending an event, meeting etc, you should not wear your Salvation Army uniform or give the impression that you are representing The Salvation Army.

Can I take part in a party-affiliated event?

Many political parties have affiliated groups representing different areas of interest - this may be unions, Christian fellowships, policy groups etc.

Staff and volunteers are free to attend these in a personal capacity. Officers may also attend in a personal capacity. If you are attending in an official capacity, it would be prudent to also attend events hosted by other party-affiliated groups i.e. Christians on the Left (Labour) and Conservative Christian Fellowship (Conservatives).

9. Potential scenarios and how to navigate them

Example 1

During a local election campaign, a candidate asks to visit your corps to learn about your work locally.

Following Army's guidance, you extend the offer to the other candidates, though only one other accepts.

Following the election, the first candidate is elected and given responsibility for local services.

Example 2

You are a corps officer in an area with local elections. You discover that a picture of yourself and one of the candidates is being used on an election leaflet.

You did not give permission for this image to be used, nor would you, given the need to remain impartial.

After contacting PAU, who get in get contact with the candidate's agent to raise this issue, you receive a formal apology from the candidate.

Example 3

You work for The Salvation Army and are a member of a political party.

While campaigning for a candidate, it is mentioned that you work for The Salvation Army and you are asked if others in The Salvation Army will be voting in the same way as you.

It is important in this instance to make clear that you are there in a personal capacity and that you are not representing The Salvation Army.

Example 4

You are an officer or soldier and wish to attend a husting to ask the candidates standing for election what they will do on an issue you care about, but you are unsure if you can go in uniform or should attend at all.

As an officer or soldier, there is nothing to stop you from attending a husting in uniform or from asking a question to the candidates. It is important however that any question you pose is put to each candidate so that they all have the opportunity to address your concerns.

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