MAY 2021 ELECTIONS IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES: FAQS

Which elections are taking place near me?

On 6 May 2021, a wide range of elections will be held across England, Scotland and Wales. These include:

Nation	Scheduled Elections
England	• Local council elections • Local and Combined Authority Mayoral elections • Mayor of London and London Assembly elections • Police and Crime Commissioner elections
Wales	• Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliamentary election • Police and Crime Commissioner elections
Scotland	• Scottish Parliamentary election

Which elections you can take part in will depend on where you live and where your food bank is located. You can find out which elections are scheduled near you on the Electoral Commission's website.

WHEN ARE THE ELECTIONS TAKING PLACE?

All elections across England, Scotland and Wales will be held on 6 May 2021.

WHY ARE THESE ELECTIONS IMPORTANT?

The 6 May 2021 has been dubbed "Super Thursday" with almost 40 million people across England, Scotland and Wales eligible to vote in at least one election, and in some cases as many as five. It will also be the first time voters have gone to the polls since the 2019 General Election.

These elections are an important opportunity to signal to all political parties that no one should be forced to a food bank because they don't have enough money for the essentials. But we cannot achieve this alone, we need our representatives to play their part too.

From their local community to their nation, each elected representative has the opportunity to use their power and influence to deliver the changes we need to work towards a hunger free future.

WHAT IS THE TRUSSELL TRUST CALLING FOR IN THESE ELECTIONS?

Across all parts of the UK, we're calling on candidates to commit to working to end the need for food banks, and for all levels of government to commit to developing a plan to end the need for food banks which:

- Ensures everyone is able to afford the basics
- Helps local services work together to ensure people get the right support at the right time
- Involves people with lived experience of poverty and local food banks

You can also read our nation-specific policy briefings for England, Scotland and Wales.

WHAT POWERS WILL MY CANDIDATES HAVE TO END THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS?

The UK Government devolves a range of powers, funding and responsibilities to directly elected representatives and institutions across the UK. These powers vary across the different levels of government, but they can be vital in providing people with the financial support to afford the essentials and address other needs experienced by people who have to use food banks.

	Key powers and responsibilities
Scottish Parliament	• To vary some taxes, such as income tax rates and thresholds • To deliver 15% of social security benefits including new social security benefits or other "top up" other benefits, for example, the Scottish Child Payment • To determine housing policy and local government financing
Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament)	• To raise some taxes, such as income tax • To determine housing policy and local government financing • Significant local discretion to administer or "top up" social security funding from UK Government, such as Discretionary Housing Payments, or to create schemes, such as Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) • To determine education policy, including free school meal provision
English regional Mayors	• To create and promote a strategy for regional economic growth with powers over housing, transport and skills although powers and budgets vary between regions
English local councils	• To set and collect council tax • To distribute grant funding, such as local welfare assistance schemes, from UK Government • To use local funding pots to support charitable organisations, such as food banks, and other services which serve those in hardship • To determine local housing policy, such as social housing • Powers and budgets vary between regions and 'upper tier' or 'lower tier' authorities.

WHY SHOULD MY FOOD BANK GET INVOLVED IN THESE ELECTIONS?

Whether you're a volunteer, a staff member, a trustee or supporter of your local Trussell Trust food bank, your voice and your vote matters in these elections.

Across the UK, food banks in the Trussell Trust network provide leadership to their communities so have an invaluable contribution to make to these elections. You can help your local candidates to understand the issues affecting your community, the reasons why so many people are forced to turn to a food bank each year and raise awareness of the changes needed to work towards a hunger free future.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED IN THE ELECTIONS?

We know food banks have had an extremely difficult year and it might feel challenging to get involved in your local elections. However, if you are able to, there are lots of different ways you can get involved.

Ways to get involved:

- Taking part in our campaign action, to contact your local candidates and urge them to pledge to end the need for food banks in your local community.
- Share our template social media posts and graphics which you can access here to raise awareness about the level of need at food banks in the Trussell Trust network.
- Invite your local candidates to a digital coffee morning at the food bank to hear more about your work and the issues affecting your community, possibly involving other local service providers too.
- If you get a response, we would love to hear about it so please email this to public.affairs@trusselltrust.org. You may want to consider showing appreciation for any candidates taking the pledge, such as replying to say thank you. To meet Lobbying Act guidance (see below) and ensure it doesn't look like you are endorsing a particular candidate, avoid naming individual candidates that take the pledge in public or on social media unless all candidates from the main national parties standing in your area have done so.

Don't forget your Area Manager is available to support you to engage with your local candidates, so do get in touch with them for further information and support.

WHAT ARE THE TIMINGS FOR THE TRUSSELL TRUST'S COMMUNICATION PLANS IN THE ELECTIONS?

Here's an overview of our planned communications around the elections:

25 March

- Food banks in Scotland and Wales receive initial resources to encourage them to start contacting candidates using their nation-specific action page.
- If your food bank is in England, the candidate lists are not yet available. If you know who is standing in your area, you can use a template letter and contact them yourself.

8 April

- All food banks across the UK receive a comprehensive package of resources (see below) to coincide with the Trussell Trust's public-facing communications to maximise our collective voice as a network to call on all candidates across all nations to pledge to our asks.
- The Trussell Trust's public-facing communications will involve:
    - Launching a campaign action for the general public in England, Scotland and Wales to get involved with by asking them to email their local candidates to use their voice for change.
      N.B. for the local elections in England, we will be directing people to download a template letter to send to candidates as opposed to a campaign action link.
    - Posting this link across the Trussell Trust's social media channels
    - Launching a webpage on the Trussell Trust's website where details of our election asks for each nation will be stored.

22 April

- End of year Statistics: Release of food bank figures for April 2020 to March 2021, providing a further opportunity to engage with candidates.

WHAT ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO FOOD BANKS?

We hope food banks will encourage their followers to engage with the elections online through the following:

- General social media graphics
- Additional nation-specific social media posts
- A link to a page on the Trussell Trust's website where details of our election asks for each nation will be stored
- A link to share with your followers to encourage them to email their own candidates in Wales and Scotland. In England, a link to email Mayoral candidates and a link to download a template letter from our landing page to send onto local council candidates.

ARE THERE ANY LEGAL REQUIREMENTS MY FOOD BANK NEEDS TO COMPLY WITH WHEN ENGAGING IN CAMPAIGNING ACTIVITY?

Yes, and **compliance with guidance and regulation is the responsibility of your trustees.** Food banks in England, Scotland and Wales should follow the Electoral Commission's Lobbying Act (non-party campaigning) guidance, which covers each type of election taking place across the three nations on 6 May 2021.

Food banks in England and Wales can also consult the Charity Commission's pre-election guidance, and food banks in Scotland should follow the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator's (OSCR) Charities and Campaigning on Political Issues FAQs.

WHAT CAN AND CAN'T MY FOOD BANK DO WHEN ENGAGING IN CAMPAIGNING ACTIVITY?

The key principle in any activity is **to be, and be seen to be, neutral in party political terms.** Charities must be particularly careful not to be seen to favour or support – or encourage others to favour or support – any one political party or candidate. Nonetheless, the rules **shouldn't stifle your campaigning voice,** nor stop your personal political participation.

If food banks keep to these guidelines, they should not have to worry about undertaking campaigning activity during the so-called 'purdah' pre-election period, when specific restrictions on communications activity are in place.

Things to remember **charities can do:**

- Continue campaigning, especially for policy changes you've talked about or seen for a while
- Engage with candidates and ask for their views – as long as this includes at least the main parties
- Have members of staff standing for election – as long as their employer is informed and trustees have considered the potential risks; please read on for further information.

What charities **shouldn't do** (through leaflets, posters, press releases, social media, interviews or other public election-related events, etc.):

- Express support for any individual political party or candidate – including allowing election campaign material to be displayed at the food bank
- Set out or compare the merits of policy positions taken by individual parties or candidates
- Include an explicit or implicit ask to vote for/against a particular party or candidate
- Donate funds or offer other support to any individual party or candidate
- If approached by a candidate/party, allow the charity to be cited in a manifesto or election/party political communication (note: this is different from being cited without your consent!).

WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA?

Whether you are you are posting or sharing content on your own personal social media channels or the food bank's:

- **Do not** post photos of a party or candidate (unless this covers at least the main parties)
- **Do not** endorse or criticise an individual party or candidate from an account that identifies the user as a Trussell Trust employee or that represents your food bank (see next point)
- On the personal account of any food bank staff or trustees, if you want to show support for a political party, **do not** mention the Trussell Trust, the food bank's parent organisation, or your food bank in your account details/bio.

MY FOOD BANK WANTS TO HOST AN ELECTION EVENT, DO I NEED TO INVITE ALL OF THE CANDIDATES?

Yes, you should invite all of the candidates of the main parties standing in your area, and make efforts – within reason – to encourage their attendance (e.g. providing some flexibility over dates/times). As a charity, it is vital you are not seen to favour or support – or encourage others to favour or support – any particular political party or candidate. By inviting all candidates of the main parties and treating them equally, you will help to avoid your food bank and the Trussell Trust from being seen as party political and, potentially, being taken to court.

CAN CANDIDATES VISIT FOOD BANKS DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN?

In light of the risks and challenges posed by Covid-19, we recommend food banks host virtual visits or meetings with their local candidates wherever possible. However, this will ultimately be for each food bank to decide. Should a food bank choose to proceed with a candidate visit, this must comply with national Covid-19 restrictions as well as election regulations.

If a candidate wishes to visit your food bank in person or virtually, you should bear in mind:

- Your Area Manager is on hand to support you to engage with your local candidates so please let them know if a candidate has been in touch or a visit is due to take place.
- Whether all candidates have been invited to visit the food bank or only one candidate. If it is only one candidate, the food bank could be viewed as favouring one candidate or political party, so we would recommend inviting candidates from each of the main parties.
- The purpose of a candidate's visit. Candidates should visit the food bank to learn more about your work and why people need to turn to food banks for support. It should not be a photo opportunity and they **must not** use the visit to launch their campaign or party policy.
- The practicality and safety of a candidate's visit. Visits to the warehouse or centre should take place at a quiet time so as not to disrupt the food bank's work. For safety reasons, food banks should not hold group visits, and where possible, should be limited to the candidate and one other person.

- Candidates should ideally spend at least an hour at the food bank and speak to volunteers and people referred if possible. This is to encourage candidates to meaningfully engage with your work and the issues affecting people who need to turn to food banks. It also discourages candidates from using the visit as a photo opportunity.
- Any photos or footage taken of the candidate with food bank staff or volunteers **should not** contain party political logos or materials alongside our/your logo.
  This includes rosettes, placards and leaflets.

CAN A CANDIDATE LAUNCH THEIR ELECTION CAMPAIGN FROM MY LOCAL FOOD BANK?

No, we cannot allow any candidate or political party to launch their campaign or party policy from a food bank. This is because we must not be seen to favour or support any particular candidate or political party.

If a candidate has contacted you and asked to visit the food bank to launch or discuss their campaign or party policy, you should be prepared to refuse a visit on these grounds. You can do so by explaining that as a food bank, you are a politically neutral charity and cannot be seen to favour, support or endorse a particular candidate or political party.

A candidate has turned up unannounced at the food bank, what should I do?

As a food bank, your first priority is to the people who have turned to your food bank for support. Speak with the candidate to find out what they are hoping to achieve from their visit. If the candidate intends to use the visit as an opportunity to speak to people as voters and publicise their election campaign, you can refuse the visit. If the timing is inconvenient, please apologise and explain that you would be happy to organise a visit that would be more beneficial to them and you.

If you do receive an unexpected visit from a candidate, please let your Area Manager know who visited, for how long and how it went.

WHAT IF A MEMBER OF THE FOOD BANK'S STAFF IS STANDING FOR ELECTION?

If a member of staff will be standing in the election, please inform the Trussell Trust. Once you've done so, some key principles to remember are:

- The staff member should no longer be a spokesperson in the food bank's public material (e.g. quoted in press releases, interviews).
- The staff member should not reference the Trussell Trust, the food bank's parent organisation, or your food bank by name in campaigning material.
- Trustees may want to recommend the staff member temporarily steps down during an election campaign.

I CAN'T FIND AN ANSWER TO MY QUESTION OR I NEED FURTHER INFORMATION, WHERE CAN I GET MORE HELP?

We appreciate there is a lot of information to digest, so please do let your Area Manager know if you need some additional support or have any questions. Should you need further assistance, contact the Policy and Public Affairs team via Public.Affairs@trusselltrust.org and one of the team will do to their very best to help.