Doorstep guide: questions to ask your Prospective Parliamentary Candidates

Here are some suggested questions for you to ask your local candidates, along with some details to help you to do so. You could ask these questions at hustings, on the doorstep, or by writing to your candidates directly. Please find a guide for how to raise issues locally after the questions.

Do you support immediately legally recognising humanist marriages in England and Wales?

- The last Government stalled in giving legal recognition to humanist marriages, despite being given the power to do so by the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act 2013.
- 90% of responses to a consultation on the matter supported a change in the law.
- We ask MPs to give non-religious couples in England and Wales the same right to get married in line with their beliefs as religious couples, as they can in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Do you support fully inclusive school admissions with no discrimination based on religion?

- Prioritising children based on faith in school admissions discriminates against children of the 'wrong' or no faith, reduces the access of local parents to local schools, and leads to communities that are divided along lines of religion, race, and family income.
- We urge MPs to make admissions fair for all children and provide fully inclusive schools.

Do you support legislation to shut down unregistered religious schools?

- The education provided in many unregistered religious schools for at least 6,000 children is known to be narrow, predominantly scriptural in its content, deeply intolerant, and extreme while safeguarding risks remain rife.
- MPs should continue the work to set up home school registers and give powers to Ofsted to shut down unregistered schools.

Do you support changing the curriculum so that pupils learn about humanism alongside religions in RE?

- Many schools of no religious character teach about humanism alongside religions, and a series of court judgments have established that this should happen on an equal footing.
- But many don't, and national guidance from the UK Government on this point is lacking. The legislation is also unclear as it only refers to teaching about 'religions'.
- In the last few years the Welsh Government has changed the law to fix this problem, also renaming the subject to Religion, Values, and Ethics. RE in England should also become an

objective, fair, and balanced subject. It should sit on the national curriculum.

Do you support changing the law so school assemblies are fully inclusive of all pupils, rather than acts of 'collective worship'?

- The law requires 'broadly Christian' daily worship in schools which discriminates against non-Christian pupils, parents, and staff. Inclusive school assemblies would be a more effective way of building shared values, and forwarding the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of all pupils.
- We are asking MPs to act on this to make assemblies suitable for all children.

Will you stand up for humanist asylum seekers?

- There are 85 countries around the globe where the non-religious face severe discrimination because of their beliefs. 12 of which still maintain the death penalty for the crimes of apostasy and blasphemy.
- The UK is a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees. This entitles those who have a 'well-founded fear' of persecution on the grounds of religion (understood to include non-religious belief) to claim asylum in the UK.
- Non-religious asylum seekers are often overlooked or misunderstood and we are asking MPs to recognise their needs.

Do you support a compassionate assisted dying law for adults of sound mind who are terminally ill or incurably suffering?

- The Assisted Dying bills in Scotland and the Isle of Man will enter the first stage in 2024 and in Jersey, the States Assembly has already voted the policy through.
- Polls show that the majority of the British public believe that any adult of sound mind who is intolerably suffering from an incurable, physical condition and has a clear and settled wish to die should have the option of an assisted death.
- We ask MPs to support an Assisted Dying Bill for England and Wales.

Do you support decriminalising abortion?

- Women in vulnerable circumstances – such as those facing domestic violence – sometimes face prison for having unregulated abortions at home.
- Women should not be criminalised in this way but should get compassionate support. Abortion has already been decriminalised in Northern Ireland. England and Wales need to catch up.

Do you support removing the bishops in the House of Lords?

- The UK is the only democratic sovereign state that grants legislative seats to religious representatives by right, a discriminatory and undemocratic practice that unjustly privileges one denomination in an increasingly diverse and non-religious society.
- Any reform of the House of Lords needs to remove this right.

How to engage your candidates on humanist issues

During an election, candidates are keen to meet local people and groups. This offers several opportunities to lobby and engage them on humanist issues.

Ask your candidates where they stand on our top humanist priorities: We've prepared a draft email you can send to your prospective parliamentary candidates about the key humanist issues. This takes less than five minutes to complete.

Use our draft email to write to your candidates: https://humanists.uk/action/ge2024/

Visits: You can look up if candidates are planning any visits to local groups and centres in your area. Visits will usually be advertised on their websites and social media. Go along to these and put your questions to them. Candidates will also be knocking on doors to drum up support. This is also an opportunity to question them.

Attend local hustings: Often candidates will participate in local hustings. This is an opportunity to raise humanist concerns that would not normally make the agenda. Check local newspapers, community group publications, and your candidates' social media to see if hustings are being organised near you.

Local press: Candidates will be particularly sensitive to matters being raised in the local press (print, online, and broadcast) around election time. This presents a good opportunity to raise humanist issues by, for example, writing to your local paper.

Social media: Candidates use Twitter and Facebook to promote their campaigns. Raising humanist issues there will raise their profile in the local area and with the candidates. You can tweet at candidates to ask them to support humanist causes.

For more details, information, and evidence, contact campaigns@humanists.uk.