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.

Some of the matters discussed below are devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Nonetheless, it is informative to know the views of your candidates for the UK Parliament; and NI MPs can vote on such matters there too, for England/Wales.

Do you support abolishing NI's blasphemy laws?

- Blasphemy laws are a violation of the right to freedom of speech and expression. They are used around the world as a means of harassing, victimising and discriminating against religion and belief minorities.
- Blasphemy remains a criminal offence in Northern Ireland. Blasphemy laws were repealed in England and Wales in 2009 and Scotland in 2024.

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

- RE in Northern Ireland is exclusively Christian in nature and outlook – apart from one module in secondary school on 'world religions'. Humanism is shut out entirely.
- The situation in England is a bit better but still patchy. This is in spite of court decisions demanding equality. 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 should become an inclusive, impartial, objective, fair, balanced, and relevant subject allowing pupils to explore a variety of religions and humanism, sitting alongside other humanities subjects in the curriculum and with the same status as them. It should include the historical and social contexts of the emergence and development of religions and humanism.

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.

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 fully establishing abortion services in NI?

- In 2021, the Government laid new regulations which ordered the Northern Ireland Department of Health to commission abortion services.
- But these services still need to be fully delivered across the whole of NI to support women's rights to abortion services.

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.

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 info@nihumanists.org.