

# General election 2024

## a guide for Quakers

This guide is for individuals, groups and meetings interested in knowing more about the upcoming general election. It gives an overview of some key issues for Quakers in Britain, suggesting questions that Quakers may wish to ask their parliamentary candidates. It has advice about holding hustings and other ways to engage with the election.



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## The 2024 general election: a key opportunity

A general election is a great opportunity for us all to influence how our country is run. It's a chance to talk to people in our community about our values and the issues we care about. We can encourage our country's leaders to put those values into practice when they're making decisions that affect us all. With the urgent, interlinked crises of cost-of-living, climate and conflict, now is a crucial time to be part of the national debate.

“Remember your responsibility as citizens for the government of your town and country... Do not be content to accept things as they are, but keep an alert and questioning mind. Seek to discover the causes of social unrest, injustice and fear... Work for an order of society which will allow [people] to develop their capacities and will foster their desire to serve.”

*Quaker faith & practice 23.01*

## What exactly is a general election?

A general election is when people in every part of the UK choose their member of parliament (MP). That person will represent a local area (constituency) in the House of Commons for up to five years. There is a choice of several parliamentary candidates in each constituency. Most represent national political parties. The candidate who receives the most votes becomes the MP. The leader of the party with the most MPs is then invited to form a government.

# How Quakers can take part in the general election

## Register and vote

Many of you will have already registered to vote, but if not, you need to do this to have your say in the general election. You can do this when you turn 16 in England or 14 in Scotland and Wales. Remember to register at your new address if you have moved house. If you want to vote by post or by proxy (when someone else votes for you), you need to register for this type of vote. Visit [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote) to find out more and register.

Ahead of the election, you'll be sent your polling card. If you're voting in person, you'll need to bring the right kind of ID with you to the polling station. Find out more at [www.gov.uk/how-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/how-to-vote).

Local meetings can become 'voter champions' to help spread the word about registration and voting. Meetings can encourage other community organisations to become champions too. Find out more at [www.voterchampion.org.uk](http://www.voterchampion.org.uk).

## Explore the issues and campaign on the causes you care about

There are four key issues that Quakers in Britain are focusing on in the run-up to the election, based on our values and the priorities Quakers have set for our national work. We encourage you to campaign on these issues and bear them in mind when choosing who to vote for. We know that many Quakers across Britain will want to champion other issues too and we support them in this.

On pages 6-13 we outline the issues that Quakers have chosen to focus on during this election. We suggest topics for you to reflect on and discuss with friends, family, and people in your meeting. These might be useful for





conversations between older and younger members of your meeting, or between existing members and people who are new to Quakerism.

On page 17 we share some suggested questions to ask your local candidates when you come into contact with them. Pages 14-17 set out activities to enable your local meeting to explore the key issues and engage with candidates.

### **Engage with local candidates**

By building a relationship with your local parliamentary candidates you can encourage them to champion the issues you care about and maintain their integrity if they are elected. You can do this as a meeting and as an individual. See page 14 for more information on how to do this.

### **Be aware of the laws**

There are some laws that Quaker area meetings and other charities should be aware of if they are promoting certain issues or viewpoints during the election. We have summarised them here: [www.quaker.org.uk/documents/guidance-for-quakers-uk-general-election-2024](http://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/guidance-for-quakers-uk-general-election-2024).

# Key issues

## 1. Democracy

### Why it matters

Democracy puts our values of peace, equality, truth and sustainability into practice and enables them to thrive. At its best, democracy gives every person a voice in public life, and makes sure that everyone is equal before the law. It celebrates diversity and enables people to live alongside each other peacefully. It creates an environment where the government, civil society and individuals can tackle major issues such as climate breakdown in a constructive way.

Quakers in Britain are concerned that UK democracy is under threat. Laws such as the Policing Act 2022 and the Illegal Migration Act 2023 have undermined human rights. The words and behaviour of some politicians have weakened people's trust in the political system. People, and the groups who represent them, are often excluded from the decision-making process.

### What we're calling for

#### 1. Behaviour of politicians

We ask politicians and party leaders to communicate honestly and respectfully during and after the election, including not engaging in attacks on others or scapegoating any group. We encourage candidates to sign the Jo Cox Foundation's Civility Pledge: [tinyurl.com/JCF-civility-pledge](https://tinyurl.com/JCF-civility-pledge).

#### 2. Improving Westminster

The next government must take steps to strengthen the processes and culture in Westminster to promote truth, integrity and equity. This includes strengthening the codes





of conduct and the bodies that regulate them, and improving training for MPs, Peers and staff.

### 3. Human rights

We want the UK government and parliamentarians to protect and promote human rights and civil liberties at home and abroad. Recent legislation that undermines them, such as the Public Order Act 2023, must be repealed.

### Topics for reflection and discussion

- What would your ideal political system look like? How does it differ from our current system, and how can we help achieve our vision?
- How can we support our local parliamentary candidates to maintain their integrity during and after the election, especially if they become MPs?

For more suggestions on how to campaign on democracy during the election, please see the Quaker Truth and Integrity Group's leaflet: [tinyurl.com/QTIG-Leaflet](https://tinyurl.com/QTIG-Leaflet).

## 2. Climate justice

### Why it matters

Quakers are committed to equality and sustainability. We want to see a world in which all living beings can thrive. Quakers have long noted the need to put equality and justice at the heart of action on climate change.

“We have seen signs of hope, but we have work to do, to transform ourselves, our communities and our world.”

**Minute 33, Britain Yearly Meeting 2019**

The climate crisis is a grave situation affecting us all, but it does not affect us all equally. Most wealthy people and countries have so far escaped the worst impacts of climate breakdown, while the poorest, who have done the least to cause the crisis, are hardest hit.

By taking action on the climate crisis, we can address the cost-of-living crisis in the UK and help millions of people around the world.

### What we're calling for

#### Loss and damage finance

The impact that climate change is having on people right now is called 'loss and damage'. It includes fast events like people's homes being destroyed by wildfires, and slow events such as rising seas covering ancestral lands. At the UN climate talks in 2022 and 2023, countries including the UK agreed to set up a Loss and Damage Fund to help people rebuild. They pledged money to fill the fund. We now need the UK government to set out how it will raise new and additional money for this, rather than taking it out of existing aid budgets. The government must make UK-based fossil fuel giants contribute to the fund, because they have done the most to cause the loss and damage in the first place.



## Phasing out fossil fuels

The UK is still far too wedded to fossil fuels, which harms our security and cost of living. The UK government gives billions of pounds of taxpayers' money to fossil fuel companies in subsidies and continues to support oil and gas extraction in the UK.

## Commitment to and investment in a just transition

Justice must be at the heart of our transition away from fossil fuels. We need to redirect government funding to fair and sustainable solutions to the climate and cost-of-living crises. This includes home insulation and support for workers and communities dependent on high-carbon industries. Scotland has established a Just Transition Commission and a Just Transition Fund and the UK government could consider something similar.

## Topics for reflection and discussion

- What role has the UK played in causing the climate crisis and what does that mean for its responsibilities now?
- How is climate change affecting our lives and those of people around the world? What do we have in common and how can we show solidarity with each other?
- How can we engage with local and national decision-makers to help build understanding and agreement on tackling the climate and cost-of-living crises at the same time?



## 3. Peace

### Why it matters

Quakers believe that all life is precious. We have opposed war and promoted peace since the earliest days of our faith in the 1600s. Peace is a crucial issue for this election, with the UK under pressure to respond to conflicts in Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere.

We don't assume that we can escape from the realities of a world in which violence seems so deeply rooted. But we believe that responding with further violence and fuelling the military and the arms trade only makes us more insecure. Genuine human security comes from investing in all the things that make us feel secure, such as healthcare, a fair economy, the environment, peacebuilding and diplomacy.

We believe people need to be taught how to transform conflict and build peace from a young age. Peace education is helping children and young people across the country to build positive relationships at different levels, from inner contentment to worldwide peace.

### What we're calling for

#### Work towards a just and sustainable peace

The UK government must use diplomacy to seek an end to the devastating conflict in Ukraine, and to demand a ceasefire in Gaza. In the longer term, the government should work to bring about a just and sustainable peace that values the security needs of all people across those regions and ensures accountability for violations of international law.

#### Redirect military spending

Taxpayers' money that is currently spent on weapons and the military must be redirected to fund the foundations of a safer world. Climate breakdown is the biggest threat to our safety and must be tackled by funding a just transition to a zero-



carbon economy in the UK, but in **2023 UK military spending** was nine times that allocated to climate action. The UK must increase funding to enable people in the poorest parts of the world to rebuild after climate-related loss and damage – this will help to reduce poverty, conflict and forced migration.

### **Peace education**

The government must help create a culture of peace and nonviolence through the education system, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4.7. The UK government must explicitly recognise a duty to educate for peace, and provide funding for peace education, training and research. More information can be found in our report, ***Peace at the heart.***

### **Topics for reflection and discussion**

- What makes us feel safe and at peace?
- How can schools help to build peace?
- What can the next government do to make the UK more peaceful?
- How can the UK affect conflict around the world?

## 4. Migration

### Why it matters

Migration is one of the biggest political issues of our time. Factors such as climate change and conflict are causing people to move. Many states, including the UK, are responding with militarised borders and harsher conditions for people seeking safety. Many politicians and media outlets are blaming problems on migrants that are actually failings of government, such as lack of healthcare provision.

Quakers have long worked to offer sanctuary to people forced to flee their homes. We believe in tackling the root causes of forced migration rather than responding with violence. We also want to tackle the root causes of societal problems, rather than blaming them on migrants.

“Rooted in our belief that there is that of the sacred in everyone... we are heartbroken by migration policy that dehumanises some members of our human family on the basis of where they come from...”

We are committed to working for a world where dignity and rights are upheld regardless of migration status and not on the basis of citizenship or perceived deservedness. Our faith calls us to work alone and with others for migration justice.”

[Quaker statement on migration, 2020](#)

### What we're calling for

#### A humane, coordinated international response

People fleeing war and persecution must be treated with compassion, respect and dignity. The UK must do this not only because it's the right thing to do, but also because we are bound by international human rights and refugee laws that we have signed up to. The UK should work more constructively with other countries, especially in Europe, to assist refugees. This includes creating more safe and legal



routes, so people do not have to resort to taking dangerous journeys such as crossing the Channel in small boats.

### **Quick and fair processes**

The UK government must process people's asylum applications more quickly and fairly. It must allow people seeking asylum to work, stop charging them unaffordable fees, and provide them with adequate accommodation in the community. This means not holding migrants in detention centres, housing them in barges and barracks, or forcing them into destitution. Enabling these people to flourish will benefit the whole of our society and reduce the financial and emotional cost of our immigration system.

### **Repeal and replace recent laws**

The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and Illegal Migration Act 2023 have created a system that punishes people seeking sanctuary. The proposal to send refugees to Rwanda is inhumane, unworkable and expensive. These laws and policies must be replaced, to build a compassionate and effective system that will benefit us all.

For more suggestions on how to campaign on migration during the election, please see the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network's leaflet: [tinyurl.com/QARN-Leaflet](https://tinyurl.com/QARN-Leaflet).

### **Topics for reflection and discussion**

- How would you like to be treated if you were forced to migrate to another country?
- How does our community welcome migrants and how do migrants benefit our community?
- How can we tackle the root causes of forced migration and the UK's role in them?

# Activities for local meetings

## Being a F/friend to your candidates

By engaging with your local candidates, you can support them to maintain their integrity and become champions of the issues you care about. Being a parliamentary candidate can be incredibly hard – they usually experience abuse, a heavy workload, and high personal costs. If you acknowledge their humanity and offer them support, as well as trying to influence them, you can build a meaningful and long-lasting relationship that will benefit everyone involved.

As a meeting, you can send a letter, email or greetings card to your parliamentary candidates. You can usually find their office address and email address on the local political party websites. For example, in Watford this would include the Watford Conservative Association and the Watford Labour Party websites.

You can also email your local candidates as an individual using our template. As a meeting you may wish to organise an online or in-person session for Friends to write the letters/emails at the same time – like an Amnesty group. You can order greetings cards for your meeting and access our templates at [www.quaker.org.uk/vote](http://www.quaker.org.uk/vote).

If a candidate responds positively, you may wish to suggest a meeting to discuss how you can work with them and how they can advance an issue that you care about. You could invite them to a meeting for worship and/or a chat over tea and coffee at your local meeting house. When you meet them, make sure you ask them questions about their views and emphasise your desire to stay in touch with them and uphold their work for positive change.

As a Quaker meeting, you do not have to treat all candidates equally – for example, you can focus your engagement





on the two candidates who are most likely to win. However, you must be balanced in your engagement and not show party political bias by giving support to certain candidates or parties over others.

### **Organising a hustings**

During the period before a general election, some Quaker meetings organise election meetings (sometimes known as hustings), where members of the public can listen to and ask questions of the candidates in their constituency. This can support the democratic process and facilitate public debate. The opportunity for respectful discussion in a neutral space is often appreciated by candidates as well as voters. There are lots of factors to think about when considering holding a hustings. Quakers in Britain and other churches have produced joint ideas and advice, which can be found in the 'resources' section of this website: [www.churcheselection.org.uk](http://www.churcheselection.org.uk).

You may also wish to encourage Friends to attend hustings and report back to their local or area meeting about what the different candidates are saying about key Quaker issues.



## Fun 'hopes' activity

Here's an activity you can do within your local meeting to explore issues around the general election. You could do this as an activity with adults and children. You could also do it with other faith and community groups in your area. You'll need some paper and pens, and it will be more fun if you have other craft materials too. You can do the activity in person or online.

### 'Hopes' activity instructions

1. Draw around your hand on a piece of paper.
2. Label the thumb and fingers 'me', 'my family', 'my community', 'the UK' and 'the world'.
3. Discuss with others: 'I wonder if you could think of some ways you hope the outcome of the election could benefit you, your family, your community, the UK and the world'.
4. Draw or write your ideas on the paper hand and decorate it.
5. If you have a meeting house, display the paper hands and discuss them with people who visit. If you have social media, post a photo of your paper hand(s) and tag us at [@BritishQuakers](https://www.instagram.com/BritishQuakers).

If you don't already have connections with other faith and

community groups in your area and you'd like to do this activity with them, you can find them by searching online. For example, if you live in Watford you could search for 'Watford interfaith', 'Watford churches together' and 'Watford voluntary groups'.

## Questions to ask candidates

Here are some suggested questions for you to ask candidates from all parties when you encounter them. This might be at a hustings, when they knock on your door, or if you decide to email them or meet them.

- Will you consider making fossil fuel giants pay for the climate-related loss and damage they are causing?
- How will you uphold truth and integrity during the election and help improve standards in government and parliament once you are elected?
- How will you provide genuine peace and security by tackling the root causes of violence and conflict?
- How will you ensure the UK honours the sustainable development goals by promoting a culture of peace and nonviolence in UK schools?
- How will you improve interfaith relations within our community?
- How will you make our immigration and asylum system more humane, fair and efficient?



## Looking after yourself and others

The election period can be a difficult time for those of us who are passionate about how our country is run. The desire to stay informed, build relationships with candidates and discuss issues with people in our communities can mean we become very busy. Make sure you plan ways to rest, connect with others and celebrate steps forward.

It can also be difficult to see divisive and emotive issues being discussed on the news and within our communities. Consider how you can remain in friendship with those in your community you may disagree with, and whether the conversations you're in feel collaborative and positive.







“Remember your responsibility as citizens for the government of your town and country, and do not shirk the effort and time this may demand. Do not be content to accept things as they are, but keep an alert and questioning mind. Seek to discover the causes of social unrest, injustice and fear; try to discern the new growing-points in social and economic life. Work for an order of society which will allow men and women to develop their capacities and will foster their desire to serve.”

*Quaker faith & practice* 23.01

This guide forms part of the election resources produced by Quakers in Britain for the 2024 general election. Visit [www.quaker.org.uk/vote](http://www.quaker.org.uk/vote) to read detailed briefings, find out more about particular topics or get involved in events. You can also follow [@PoliticalQuaker](https://twitter.com/PoliticalQuaker) on X (formerly Twitter).

For advice and support on public affairs and advocacy, please contact Grace Da Costa, Public Affairs and Media Manager for Quakers in Britain, at [politics@quaker.org.uk](mailto:politics@quaker.org.uk) or on 020 7663 1138.

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