

ELECTING WITHOUT PREJUDICE

Free speech
Hard facts
Real debate

Britain's social fabric rests on a strong bedrock of democratic political discussion. The freedom to debate and argue the issues of the day, great and small, gives lasting strength to our elected institutions.

That bedrock is threatened by those who abuse open debate and stir up prejudice and fear. Such activities make individuals the targets of violence and abuse. They obscure the real issues at stake, sowing mistrust and misunderstanding instead of open, public debate in which all can take part. Such activities, and those who pursue them, should be rejected by all.

Every voter wants to know that an election campaign was a fair one, however hard and passionately it may have been fought. Every voter has the right to the facts upon which to base their decision on the rival solutions offered by different candidates. Every candidate has the right to have their proposals considered objectively. Everyone working for the public has the right to have their efforts judged on the basis of information that is as objective as possible, not on supposition.

All of us have a role to play in seeing that an election campaign gets to the heart of the issues. Candidates, political parties, local councils and other public bodies, voluntary, community, charitable and trade union organisations, can all contribute to an election campaign that gets to the heart of the issues and is conducted in a responsible manner.

Racism, racial hatred, prejudice and misunderstanding are serious dangers in Britain today. We call on all who have a role to play in ensuring that our elections are fair and truly free, to join us in supporting this call for an election campaign rid of the exploitation of prejudice.

To achieve

- **vigorous debate** during the coming election campaigns around the issues facing Britain today;
- **full participation** by all involved - candidates, electors and the wider public; and
- a **secure and open** atmosphere during election campaigns so that all electors feel able take part in debating the issues, challenging candidates and gaining a proper understanding of their different approaches and proposed solutions;

We call upon those

- putting themselves forward for election
- seeking to take part in election debates, and
- public authorities responsible for ensuring that the rights of electors, of candidates and of the public in general are properly fulfilled;

To support the following principles:

Candidates standing for election should

- Work for a welcoming Britain which values all its people, celebrates its diversity and provides equality of opportunity for all.
- Commit that, if elected, they will seek to represent everyone, and not pitch one group against another for short-term political or personal gain.
- Ensure they do not take actions or use words likely to generate prejudice or hostility between different groups.

Leaders of political parties involved in an election should

- Guarantee that their party, its candidates and campaigners abide by the above principles and that where complaints are made of activities that may be likely to stir up prejudice, these will be properly investigated, with appropriate action taken and publicised, if the complaint is upheld.

Those responsible for electoral arrangements should

- Join in actively encouraging the participation of electors in the electoral process.

Those responsible for public safety and security during election campaigns should

- Ensure that all electors and candidates can take part in the campaign, and proceed to cast their votes, free of intimidation and fear.

Public bodies serving our communities should

- Prepare for the controversies that surround elections and consider in advance how to challenge misperceptions in the local community relevant to that authority's particular responsibilities, its own work or the impact of that work on people locally.
- Refute any false or misleading information circulating in the area relevant to their responsibilities that could lead to racial hatred or damage relations between people from different racial groups. They should act on the basis of the objective information available to the authority. (See attached Explanatory Note for local authorities).

Voluntary, community, trade union and other interested bodies should

- Enable voters to have access to objective information on issues that concern the organisation and those it serves. Voters have a right to be able to learn from the diverse experiences of different bodies, their members and those they serve, who in some cases may be the best, if not the only, source of such information.

Further advice on the law, elections and political campaigning

Detailed advice on different aspects of electoral law as it affects candidates, campaigners, interested bodies and public authorities can be obtained from the Electoral Commission at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

The Charity Commission for England and Wales provides specific advice for registered charities.

www.charitycommission.gov.uk/detailed-guidance/managing-your-charity/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/charities-and-elections/.

The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator does not offer guidance of its own. The advice is designed for registered charities but is applicable to other voluntary and related bodies.

