

A Home for Everyone

**General Election Campaigning
Toolkit for Homelessness Services**



Homeless Link

Table of Contents

Introduction: A Home for Everyone	3
Our vision to end homelessness together	4
Campaigning in the lead up to a general election	5
When might an election be called?	6
Why campaign in the lead up to an election?	6
What are the polls saying?	6
When might an election be called?	6
Election campaigning rules for charities.....	6
Engaging local candidates.....	7
Identifying local candidates.....	7
Contacting local candidates	8
Meeting local candidates	8
Keeping the relationship going.....	9
Appendix	11
Example MP letter	11
Template MP letter	12
Example candidate letter	13
Template candidate letter	14

Introduction: A Home for Everyone

Having a safe place to live and support when you need it should be the foundation of any healthy society. But homelessness is rising, with hundreds of thousands of people in the UK forced to live with its insecurity and trauma, deeply impacting both their health and wellbeing and that of local communities.

The next government can act to change this.

Ahead of the looming general election, Homeless Link's campaign is calling on all political parties to commit to building a society with **A Home for Everyone**, giving people the foundation they need to thrive.

But this can only happen if the homelessness sector comes together and makes itself heard. If our campaign is successful, it will be driven by our members up and down the country, making sure current and prospective MPs and policymakers understand the issue and the solutions needed.

The lead up to a general election is a great opportunity for homelessness organisations to engage with parliamentarians and candidates for election. At Homeless Link we would like to see as many homelessness organisations write to and meet with the candidates in their local areas, making the case for the policies needed to end homelessness for good.

We know that services are extremely busy, so this toolkit should provide you with the tools you need to make the most of this opportunity.

Of course, if you have any questions, or would like any further support in this area then please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Nye Jones
Campaigns Manager
(nye.jones@homelesslink.org.uk)

Our vision to end homelessness together

The ambitions we have set out in our [Manifesto to End Homelessness](#) build on work with our members, engagement with specialists and experts and on the rich body of evidence on what works to end homelessness.

1. Everyone has a safe, secure, suitable home in which to thrive

Safe and suitable housing is essential to ensure everyone can live happy, healthy, stable lives. **The next Government should commit funding to building 90,000 social homes per year for the next 10 years and immediately unfreeze Local Housing Allowance.**

2. Every arm of Government working together and playing their part

Preventing and ending homelessness cannot be the responsibility of just one government department. **The next Government should adopt a cross government strategy to end homelessness.**

3. A homelessness system that works for all

The next Government must ensure there is a diverse network of services available and that sustainable housing options are accessible for every person who experiences homelessness. As a minimum standard, these services should embed person-centred, trauma-informed care.

4. Sustained investment to prevent and end homelessness for good

The next Government should commit to reviewing all current spending across government linked to homelessness and replacing the existing piecemeal and short term funding structures with a single, long-term ring-fenced homelessness support fund, designed to flexibly adapt to local and individual needs.

For more detail on our policy asks, read our [Manifesto to End Homelessness](#).

Campaigning in the lead up to a general election

When might an election be called?

In the UK, general elections must take place at least once every five years. However, sometimes they take place more frequently due to the political situation. The current Government have been in power since December 2019. Therefore, the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak must call an election to be held in January 2025 at the latest. **However, it's expected that an election will be called earlier, likely either in the summer or autumn of 2024.**

Why campaign in the run up to an election?

The year before an election can be a fantastic opportunity for charities to engage with political parties, candidates, the media and general public to raise awareness of their concerns and drive their mission forward. MPs are in listening mode as they're keen to show they care about local issues in a bid to keep their seats, while prospective parliamentary candidates want to make themselves known within local communities. **Using the run up to an election to forge relationships with key stakeholders can mean charities can continue to influence effectively in the years to come.**

Election campaigning rules for charities

When campaigning in the run-up to a general election, there are certain rules that charities need to be aware of. **However, this should not put you off campaigning. The vast majority of charities only need to be concerned with the normal rules that govern charity campaigning.**

For more information on election campaigning rules for charity's, take a look at the [Government website](#) and this [handy guide](#) by the Sheila McKechnie Foundation

Charities can never engage in what's dubbed 'party political activity' at any time, but they should be particularly aware of this in the year before a general election. 'Party political activity' would include direct support of a party, politician or candidate. For example, sharing a social media post encouraging people to vote for a particular candidate or heavily criticising a candidate. Charities can however engage in 'political activity', which are activities aiming to bring about or prevent a change in the law, policies or decisions of politicians and public bodies. For example, campaigning for political parties to commit to longer-term investment in homelessness.

However, it's important to note that it's not necessary to name a party or type of candidate in your campaign materials for it to be considered 'party political

activity'. **Advocacy material could be seen to be 'party political' if it is positive or negative about a policy that is closely connected with a particular political party, close to the election, for example, in such a way that a reasonable person might think you are calling for the public to vote for or against that party.**

Therefore, you should be extra careful about any content you create in the lead up to a general election.

There is also a myth that charities must register with the Electoral Commission to campaign in the run up to a general election. The Electoral Commission's Guidance states: "If you are a charity and abide by charity law and guidance from the relevant charity regulator, in most circumstances your campaign activity is unlikely to meet the purpose test." This means that, **as long as you don't engage in 'party political activity' there is no need to register with the Electoral Commission.**

Engaging local candidates

Identifying local candidates

The first step in starting your campaigning work is to identify the candidates standing for election in the area(s) in which you work. These will be the sitting MP (if they are standing for re-election) and the parliamentary candidates from the other political parties.

Constituency boundary changes

One important thing to note is, ahead of the next election, the 2023 Boundary Review is reorganising UK parliamentary constituencies to reflect population change. **This means that the current constituency's which you work in may change in both size and name.** You can check whether this is the case via the [House of Commons website](#).

Finding your current MP

If you don't know who your MP is, you can find out by putting in the postcode(s) of your service(s) into the [TheyWorkForYou](#) website. **However, a number of MPs have already announced they will be standing down before the next election.** The House of Commons Library keeps a [tracker of MPs standing down on its website](#), so double check your current MP is standing again.

Identifying prospective parliamentary candidates

Political parties have now announced candidates for most parliamentary seats. **The easiest way to find out the candidates in the area(s) in which you work is to google the constituency name, the political party and 'parliamentary candidate'.** For example; 'Hazel Grove Liberal Democrats parliamentary candidate.' From this, you should find the candidates website and contact details.

Understanding the political context

It's important to understand the political context with your area. In most constituencies, only a select few candidates will have a chance of winning. Therefore, if you have limited resources, targeting them towards those most likely to win power makes sense.

Additionally, if your organisation works across multiple political constituencies and doesn't have capacity to engage with candidates in all of them, **you may decide to target your activity to one area.** One way to decide this might be because you have a particularly influential sitting MP in one area (e.g. a minister or shadow minister), or you can target the area where a potential change of party in power is possible as this means political parties will devote more time to campaigning

here. The website [Election Polling](#) has a list of the key 'marginal battleground seats', although one thing to note is that the constituency names have not been updated with the new constituencies.

Contacting local candidates

Once you have identified the candidates standing in the area(s) you work. The next step is to get in touch with them. You will find example and template letters to send to sitting MPs and candidates in the appendix of this toolkit, **however it's important to personalise these as much as possible.**

Sitting MPs

Doing some internet research around your MPs interests can help personalise your approach. **Looking up things like whether they're part of an All Party Parliamentary Group and/or whether they sit on a Select Committee, as well as what have they said in the past about homelessness can be very helpful.** Useful websites include [TheyWorkForYou](#), which records what MPs say in the commons and how they vote and UK Parliament, which has details of membership of APPG's and Select Committees.

Every MP has a public facing email address, which you can find on their profile page on the UK Parliament website. However, these inboxes can receive a huge amount of correspondence, meaning it can be slow for MPs to respond. MPs will also have an email for internal use so if you have this for your MP then send it to this address too, as well as copying in any of the MP's staff if you have their details. You can either send the letter as an email or attach it as a Word document or PDF. You may also want to post your letter to your MPs constituency office, with many organisations finding this 'old school' method more effective in soliciting a response.

Prospective parliamentary candidates

Candidates for election normally have a website dedicated to their campaign with an email address to get in touch with them, which you can find using the guidance in the previous section. In a similar way to sitting MPs, **try to personalise your communications with them by doing a bit of research. Most will not have been MPs before, so looking into their career path and understanding their interests can help mould your messaging.**

Joint letters

If you work closely with other organisations within your local area, sending a joint letter signed by multiple organisations can be a great way to show that the issues services are facing are not confined to one organisation. **Homeless Link are also**

happy to write jointly to MPs if organisations wish, so please get in touch with Campaigns Manager Nye Jones if this is of interest.

Meeting with candidates

While there are a few different ways to engage with local candidates, the most effective is for them to visit one of your services.

This helps them understand the work you do and the problems you face. In the lead up to an election, sitting MPs and potential candidates are keen to show they're engaged with the local community and care about local issues, therefore, visiting a homelessness service is likely to be very appealing to them. Before a candidate for election does visit your service, there are a few things to think through.

Homeless Link is happy to help organise visits and send a member of staff to support on the day.

Put together an agenda

Having a pre-agreed structure to the visit helps minimise disruption to your service whilst achieving maximum impact. It's good to put in time for the candidate to see how the service runs and supports people as well as sometime one or two members of staff to discuss the issues they face with the candidate. Additionally, politicians often cite the personal stories they hear as drivers for their work in Westminster. Therefore, if possible, organising for the candidate to talk to someone with lived experience of homelessness, it could be someone currently accessing our services or who has done in the past, can be very effective.

Communications

Candidates will be keen to let local stakeholders and the general public know that they have visited your service. Agreeing in advance whether photos can be taken and, if yes, scheduling time to take them during the visit is a good idea to share with your supporters and on your social media channels. You also might want to think about inviting a local journalist along to cover the visit.

Please let us know if you have written to or scheduled a meeting/visit with an MP or candidate

Print and share our Manifesto

Our Manifesto to End Homelessness sets out the policies and approach we want to see from the next Government. Printing it out and giving to MPs/candidates will help them see the big picture.

Options that aren't a service visit

Of course, if you can't for any reason arrange a service visit, **meeting with candidates face to face or online is also fine**. Make sure you still consider the points you want to raise before hand. **Another effective way to engage is to invite candidates to any local events you are involved in/running**. Candidates will be keen to speak to local people so this can be a great option to build a relationship.

Keeping the relationship going

Many organisations organise a meeting with a politician and think their job is done. **Ideally, the first meeting should be the first step to a longer relationship with that person, so it's good to think about how and why you are going to follow up with them**. Send the MP/candidate you met with our [Manifesto](#) and then try to keep in contact with updates on issues they were interested in such as new research or statistics from your service. However, remember they are likely to be very busy so don't only get in touch when you have relevant information to share.

You can also ask politicians to take actions on your behalf, with some potential options below:

- Table a Parliamentary Question on a particular subject (sitting MPs only).
- Convene a Westminster Hall debate (sitting MPs only).
- Write to their party leader urging them to prioritise homelessness ahead of the election.
- Take action on a localised issue affecting your service.
- Post a photo taken on their visit on their social media channels.
- Ask for a follow up meeting to discuss an issue in more detail.

Appendix

Example MP letter

Dear Mr Richard Pugh MP,

I am writing to you from Homelessness Rothermead to invite you to visit our homelessness accommodation service here in Rothermead in the near future.

Homelessness Rothermead work across the Rothermead area in three locations, providing accommodation and support to people experiencing homelessness. On average, we support over 500 people each year, providing accommodation to around 60 people at any one time, while helping them find independent accommodation and reintegrate into the local community.

We provide a vital service to people within the community who have often experienced significant trauma and need extra support to stabilise their life. But the cost of living crisis has led to a huge increase in demand for our services, while the impact of inflation coupled with years of real-terms funding decreases have stretched our budgets to the limit.

Rough sleeping rose by 26% nationally in 2022, the biggest year on year percentage rise since 2015. Meanwhile, Rothermead saw an even larger 44% rise. This situation cannot continue. I believe that the looming general election provides the perfect opportunity for political parties to commit to providing adequate and sustainable funding that doesn't leave homelessness services and the people they support vulnerable to short term funding cycles and an ever-changing economic climate. Services like ours need stability and certainty to embed the kind of consistent, person-centred support that we know is most effective in helping people leave homelessness behind.

I know that as a member of the APPG for Ending Homelessness, you care deeply about our shared goal of ending homelessness in England. Therefore, I would very much like to invite you to visit our accommodation service in Rothermead to better understand the work we do and the importance of homelessness services in general. You will have the opportunity to speak with both frontline staff and people with lived experience of homelessness.

Many thanks for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Doe, CEO at Homelessness Rothermead

Template MP letter

Dear ***insert MP name***,

I am writing to you from ***insert service name*** to invite you to visit our homelessness accommodation service here in ***insert area*** in the near future.

Insert service name work across ***insert area*** in ***insert summary of services offered***.

We provide a vital service to people within the community who have often experienced significant trauma and need extra support to stabilise their life. But the cost of living crisis has led to a huge increase in demand for our services, while the impact of inflation coupled with years of real-terms funding decreases have stretched our budgets to the limit.

Rough sleeping rose by 26% nationally in 2022, the biggest year on year percentage rise since 2015. Meanwhile, ***insert local statistics***. This situation cannot continue. I believe that the looming general election provides the perfect opportunity for political parties to commit to providing adequate and sustainable funding that doesn't leave homelessness services and the people they support vulnerable to short term funding cycles and an ever-changing economic climate. Services like ours need stability and certainty to embed the kind of consistent, person-centred support that we know is most effective in helping people leave homelessness behind.

Insert MPs demonstrated interest in homelessness, you care deeply about our shared goal of ending homelessness in England. Therefore, I would very much like to invite you to visit our accommodation service in ***insert area*** to better understand the work we do and the importance of homelessness services in general. You will have the opportunity to speak with both frontline staff and people with lived experience of homelessness.

Many thanks for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Insert name and job title

Example candidate letter

Dear Sarah Smith,

I am writing to you from Homelessness Rothermead to invite you to visit our homelessness accommodation service here in Rothermead in the near future.

Homelessness Rothermead work across the Rothermead area in three locations, providing accommodation and support to people experiencing homelessness. On average, we support over 500 people each year, providing accommodation to around 60 people at any one time, while helping them find independent accommodation and reintegrate into the local community.

We provide a vital service to people within the community who have often experienced significant trauma and need extra support to stabilise their life. But the cost of living crisis has led to a huge increase in demand for our services, while the impact of inflation coupled with years of real-terms funding decreases have stretched our budgets to the limit.

Rough sleeping rose by 26% nationally in 2022, the biggest year on year percentage rise since 2015. Meanwhile, Rothermead saw an even larger 44% rise. This situation cannot continue. I believe that the looming general election provides the perfect opportunity for political parties to commit to providing adequate and sustainable funding that doesn't leave homelessness services and the people they support vulnerable to short term funding cycles and an ever-changing economic climate. Services like ours need stability and certainty to embed the kind of consistent, person-centred support that we know is most effective in helping people leave homelessness behind.

I know that as a long-term local resident and councillor, you care deeply about our local community. Therefore, I would very much like to invite you to visit our accommodation service in Rothermead to better understand the work we do and the importance of homelessness services in general. You will have the opportunity to speak with both frontline staff and people with lived experience of homelessness.

Many thanks for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Doe, CEO at Homelessness Rothermead

Candidate template letter

Dear ***insert candidate name***,

I am writing to you from ***insert service name*** to invite you to visit our homelessness accommodation service here in ***insert area*** in the near future.

Insert service name work across ***insert area*** in ***insert summary of services offered***.

We provide a vital service to people within the community who have often experienced significant trauma and need extra support to stabilise their life. But the cost of living crisis has led to a huge increase in demand for our services, while the impact of inflation coupled with years of real-terms funding decreases have stretched our budgets to the limit.

Rough sleeping rose by 26% nationally in 2022, the biggest year on year percentage rise since 2015. Meanwhile, ***insert local statistics***. This situation cannot continue. I believe that the looming general election provides the perfect opportunity for political parties to commit to providing adequate and sustainable funding that doesn't leave homelessness services and the people they support vulnerable to short term funding cycles and an ever-changing economic climate. Services like ours need stability and certainty to embed the kind of consistent, person-centred support that we know is most effective in helping people leave homelessness behind.

Insert candidate's demonstrated interest in homelessness, you care deeply about our shared goal of ending homelessness in England. Therefore, I would very much like to invite you to visit our accommodation service in ***insert area*** to better understand the work we do and the importance of homelessness services in general. You will have the opportunity to speak with both frontline staff and people with lived experience of homelessness.

Many thanks for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Insert name and job title

What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

Homeless Link

Minorities House

2-5 Minorities

London

EC3N 1BJ

www.homeless.org.uk

@HomelessLink

**Let's End Homelessness
Together**

