

# 2024 general election: A toolkit for Parkinson's UK groups



# PARKINSON'S<sup>UK</sup>

Printed by Firstpoint Print Victoria, 160-162 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, SW1V 2RA  
Promoted by Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ

## Introduction

**With the general election set for 4 July, your group has a golden opportunity to influence the next generation of MPs to understand and prioritise the needs of people with Parkinson's.**

Now is when you're at your most powerful. Candidates want your vote. They want to hear your concerns. And they'll often commit to taking action on the issues that matter to you, if they're elected.

In this guide we suggest two key things your group/branch can do to influence prospective MPs to improve life for people with Parkinson's and their carers:

- Invite individual candidates to your meetings to chat with your group
- Organise a 'question time' event, inviting several candidates to come together to set out and debate their policies, and answer your questions

Do whatever works for your group, but bear in mind it's likely that candidates will only be able to do one, as it's a busy time for them.

Whatever you decide, it's important to follow these three points:

- 1. Start ASAP.** Candidates are on the campaign trail now. Get in touch with your candidates now, before they get too busy.
- 2. Be impartial.** Legally, charities have to be politically impartial, showing no preference to any one political party. It's important that you don't give preferential treatment to any particular candidate, regardless of your personal opinion.

- 3. Let us know.** Let Parkinson's UK know about candidates who say they're going to take action on Parkinson's. We'll link up with them and support them if they're elected.

## Finding your local candidates

You can find your local parliamentary candidates and their contact details on **whocanivotefor.co.uk**. Or you can call your local council and ask for the list.

Check the list to see if any more candidates have been added.

**TIP:** You don't have to engage with every candidate for any of the activities suggested. But you must be impartial and have an objective reason why you choose candidates.

For example, you could decide to contact the top three performing parties' candidates, based on how they did in your area in the last general election.

Limiting your contact to a handful of candidates will help you use your time more effectively, especially in high profile areas where there may be a large number of candidates.





## Inviting candidates to your group meetings

**Inviting local candidates to your group/branch meetings is a great way for you to have a discussion about issues your group is concerned about.**

It's also the best way for your group and the candidate to get to know each other and develop a good working relationship, which will be invaluable if they get elected.

Don't forget, like many people, candidates are unlikely to know much about Parkinson's unless they've been affected.

Meeting group members and hearing about your experiences will increase your candidate's Parkinson's awareness. It may even spark a fire in their belly to campaign in parliament to improve health, care and welfare services.

Candidates will be very busy in the build-up to the election so will probably meet you for about 20-30 minutes.

Below are some tips to help you plan ahead so you can get your points across and your questions answered.

### The invitation

- Agree who will send the invitations so you don't duplicate the work. Give candidates as much notice as possible. For a template invitation, please contact [campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk)
- Be impartial - you must treat all candidates the same. You can't invite one candidate over another because you prefer their politics. But you can choose candidates to invite on an objective basis - for example, you could invite the top three performing parties from the last local or general election. You must also treat any candidates who happen to be members of your group or branch the same as other candidates.
- Try to offer candidates a different time if they can't attend your group's usual meeting. This shows you understand they're busy, but that meeting their local Parkinson's community matters.

- Candidates' busy diaries can be very frustrating but don't let it stop you. If they can't come to a meeting, then send questions in an email.

## Before the meeting

- Ask your group what issues they want to discuss. You can have time for open questions as well, but having a few key issues to start with will help open up discussion. You might only have 20-30 minutes, so plan well!
- Ask members who can't attend if they have any questions they'd like asked.
- For evidence and data on Parkinson's-related issues to help you prepare for your meeting, please contact the Parkinson's UK Campaigns team on **020 7963 9349** or **campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk**

## During the meeting

- Get photos! We'd love to share photos of you and your candidates on our channels. Make sure you get consent of everyone in the photo.
- If you can post about your meeting on social media, with pictures and any good quotes from the candidates, we can try to share it on the Parkinson's UK website or social media channels. Just let us know in advance that you're planning to post. Note the guidance below on social media posts.
- Ask candidates to come to a future group/branch meeting if they're elected. This way you can find out what actions they plan to take/have taken and continue your relationship, in case you need to involve them in any local campaigning.
- Make notes. This will help you report back to your group what the candidates said and follow up with the candidate if they're elected.

## Afterwards

- Write to thank each candidate for coming and confirm the action they agreed to take.
- Work with the Campaigns team (**campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk**) to issue a press release on what you discussed at the meeting.

### Guidance on using social media

As a charity Parkinson's UK legally must NOT show any support or special treatment for any political parties or candidates over others. This includes on social media.

This means on your group or branch's social media accounts:

- You can factually report what candidates say, NOT what you think about what they've said.
- You can post pictures of candidates with group members (try to make sure you get a balance of candidates and not just one).
- You can't post candidates' posters or leaflets.
- You can't express your own views using your group's social media accounts, but attendees can express their views on their own social media.





## Organising a question time event

Another good way to reach and influence candidates is to hold a 'candidates question time' event. This is where you invite a number of candidates to come together at the same time, introduce themselves, answer questions and debate with each other. We know this might be harder, due to the short timescale.

You can invite the wider community to come, alongside members of your group/branch. This is also known as a 'hustings' event.

### Format

It's helpful for candidates to know in advance what the format will be. The event will work better for everyone if they can prepare. We suggest you:

- Give the candidates five minutes to introduce their party and promises

- Have 45 minutes where candidates answer questions - with some submitted in advance from your supporters (see below for suggested questions)
- Give each candidate 2-3 minutes to answer each question (make sure questions are for all candidates)
- Encourage candidates not to interrupt or speak over each other
- Give candidates five minutes each to give a closing speech or remarks
- Following this format with three candidates would give you an event lasting roughly one hour 30 minutes.

### Before the meeting

- Invite a selection of candidates you can justify on objective grounds (see above), giving as much notice as possible. Let them know the format of the event. For a template invitation, please contact [campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk)



- Be flexible. Candidate's diaries are very busy so they may have to change their timings or cancel at the last minute. We know this can be very frustrating but don't let it stop you. If they can't come, ask if you can send questions in an email. Also ask them to prioritise meeting you.
- Consider inviting other Parkinson's groups in your local constituency to take part.
- Ask your group/branch what issues they want to discuss. You'll need time for open questions as well to involve your audience, but a few key issues will help open up discussion to begin with.
- Ask any member who can't attend to let you know any questions they'd like asked.
- Advertise the event using posters, leaflets and in the press. Parkinson's UK can help you with this. Contact the Campaigns team on **020 7963 9349** or **campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk**.
- Invite journalists. Parkinson's UK's media team can also help you get a press release out to the local media after the event (see below for their contact details).

### During the meeting

- Get photos! We'd love to share photos of you and your candidates on our social channels. Make sure you get consent of everyone in the photo.
- Post pictures and any good quotes from the candidates on your group/branch's social media accounts (please follow the important social media guidance on page 4).
- Ask candidates to commit to coming back to see you if they're elected. This is a good way of finding out what actions they've taken since being elected and what they plan to do in parliament on the issues you raise. It can also help you establish an ongoing relationship.
- Make notes, so you can follow up on commitments made by the elected MP after the election.

### After the meeting

- Follow up. Thank candidates for coming. Stay in touch so you can invite them back to find out what they've been doing to support people affected by Parkinson's in parliament.





## Potential questions

It's up to you what you ask the candidates, but below are some possible questions:

### Research

**Q** People with conditions like Parkinson's are in desperate need of new treatments and a cure. How will your party ensure that Parkinson's researchers get enough funding?

### Benefits

**Q** Will you and your party commit to protecting financial support for disabled people if you win the election?

**Q** How will your party ensure that people with Parkinson's and their care partners get the cost-of-living support they need to meet their needs?

### Mental health services

**Q** How will you and your party ensure everyone with Parkinson's experiencing mental health problems can access timely care that meets their needs?

**Q** What steps will your party take to ensure that the NHS Workforce Plan supports improved mental health in people with long-term conditions like Parkinson's?

### Health

**Q** People with Parkinson's often don't get their medication on time in hospital or care homes, meaning their condition deteriorates. What will you and your party do to improve hospital care for people with Parkinson's?

**Q** People with Parkinson's aren't getting the care and support they need. For example, across the UK, there is a shortfall of approximately 100 full-time equivalent Parkinson's nurses. What will you and your party do to address this?

**Q** What action will your party take to increase understanding of Parkinson's and Parkinson's-related dementia in the healthcare workforce?

**Q** What action will your party take to ensure that diagnosis rates for dementia subtypes include Parkinson's-related dementia?



## Knock knock... the chat on your doorstep

With the general election approaching fast, you might find candidates or their campaigners visit your home to try to convince you to vote for them.

Alongside your group/branch's efforts, don't miss this important opportunity to speak with candidates or, most likely, their campaign teams.

We've created a poster you can put in your window to alert them to your interest in Parkinson's - please display it if you're happy to.

On the back of the poster are some hints and tips on what you might ask in that conversation. We'd like to get your feedback on any conversations you've had with candidates so we can follow up with them if they're elected - the poster also has details of who to speak to at Parkinson's UK about this.

Several copies of the poster have been sent out with this guide. You can also get one by visiting

our campaign webpages [parkinsons.org.uk/get-involved/campaigning-change](https://parkinsons.org.uk/get-involved/campaigning-change) or by contacting the Campaigns team on **020 7963 9349** or [campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk).

## After the general election

**Write to congratulate your newly elected MP** and say that you look forward to following their progress in campaigning for people affected by Parkinson's.

You can email them or send a letter to them at House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. It might take them some time to respond as they'll be inundated with correspondence and if they're a new MP, they'll need to set up their office and recruit staff to help them.

**Please let the Campaigns team at Parkinson's UK know** if your MP was supportive when you spoke to them as a candidate. This allows us to support them to fulfil any commitments they made. Just complete this form.



## More resources and support

### MPs' remit

As the general election is UK-wide we're encouraging groups from every country to take part.

While the role of MPs is slightly different in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, they still have significant influence locally and the ability to make a difference nationally too.

For information on what your MP can do and what the general election means for the four nations of the UK, please see our web pages - [parkinsons.org.uk/get-involved/campaigning-change](https://parkinsons.org.uk/get-involved/campaigning-change)

### Data and evidence

This page on our website has some stats and facts on Parkinson's: [parkinsons.org.uk/about-us/reporting-parkinsons-information-journalists](https://parkinsons.org.uk/about-us/reporting-parkinsons-information-journalists)

For more data to help inform your discussions and questions please contact the Campaigns team on [campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk) or **020 7963 9349**.

### Press release and/or support with social media posts

For advice and/or a template press release for you to adapt please contact our PR team at [pr@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:pr@parkinsons.org.uk).

## Parkinson's UK contacts for support

### General and England

- Tasha Burgess, Public Affairs Lead on **020 7932 1319** or [nburgess@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:nburgess@parkinsons.org.uk)

### Scotland

- Tanith Muller, Campaigns and Parliamentary Manager on **0344 225 3726** or [tmuller@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:tmuller@parkinsons.org.uk)

### Wales

- Rachel Williams, Policy, Campaigns and Communications Manager on **0344 225 3715** or [rwilliams@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:rwilliams@parkinsons.org.uk)

### Northern Ireland

- Sarah McCully Russell, Policy and Campaigns Manager (Northern Ireland) on [smccullyrussell@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:smccullyrussell@parkinsons.org.uk) or **020 7963 3985**









Parkinson's UK volunteers, supporters and staff meeting with MPs and peers ahead of World Parkinson's Day, March 2024



We are Parkinson's UK.  
Powered by people.  
Funded by you.  
Improving life for everyone  
affected by Parkinson's.  
Together we'll find a cure.

**PARKINSON'S<sup>UK</sup>**

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**

Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm, Saturday 10am to 2pm  
(interpreting available)

NGT relay **18001 0808 800 0303**

(for textphone users only)

**hello@parkinsons.org.uk**

**parkinsons.org.uk**

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