



# Five ways

**you can campaign  
to save babies' lives  
during the 2024  
general election**

[sands.org.uk](https://sands.org.uk)

Saving babies' lives.  
Supporting bereaved families.

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# Introduction



## ► What is a general election?


- A general election is an opportunity for people in every part of the UK to vote for who their Member of Parliament (MP) is.
- This person will represent a local area, called a constituency, in the House of Commons for up to five years.
- You will usually get to choose between candidates who represent the main national political parties, alongside independents.
- General elections are important as they present an opportunity to get your voice heard by different candidates and raise awareness of a particular issue. Your elected MP could then go on to use their power to make changes that will affect you and the people around you.



## ► When is the election happening?

- The general election is due to take place on **Thursday 4th July 2024**. From the date the election is called, until the day it takes place, we have a crucial window of time to raise the profile of baby loss.

## ► Baby loss: the key issues

-  **Every day 13 babies die during or shortly after birth.**
- In England, the target to halve the number of stillbirths and neonatal deaths is not on track. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there are still no targets.
- There also remain stark and persistent structural inequalities in baby deaths, particularly by ethnicity and deprivation. And, when a baby does die, time and time again bereaved parents are not getting the care they deserve.
- See page 18 for more statistics and information about baby loss.

## ► What difference can I make?

- During this year's general election, we have an important opportunity to raise these problems with politicians from all political parties and make the case for fundamental change with the next generation of MPs.
- The more we can get MP candidates talking about baby loss now, the more likely we'll be able to hold the next Government to account to save more babies' lives and improve bereavement care when they're elected.
- The election will also help us raise awareness of baby loss more generally, helping challenge taboos and stigma.
- **MP candidates want your vote. Your voice has the power to get their attention, make them commit to action, and create change.**
- This guide suggests a few ways you could get involved in the election to help raise the profile of baby loss with political candidates in your local area.

## ► We are here to help!

- Our Campaigns team is happy to help you every step of the way with your general election campaigning and answer any questions you have.
- Please don't hesitate to get in contact to have a chat.  
You can email us at [campaigns@sands.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@sands.org.uk)

## Remaining political neutral

- **As a charity, Sands does not endorse or promote any political party or candidate. Every political party has the potential to get elected and make changes to save babies' lives.**
- **When campaigning on baby loss in the general election, we'd encourage you to be politically neutral, and give candidates from every political party equal attention.**





# Email your local candidates the saving babies' lives pledge

## ► The pledge

- During the general election, we are asking candidates from all parties to sign our **saving babies' lives pledge**.
- The pledge asks candidates to:

***“commit to working towards a future where fewer babies die, and all bereaved parents get the care and support they need.”***

- The more candidates we can get to sign-up, the higher we can raise the profile of baby loss in the election. It will also help us identify MPs we can work with in the next parliament to try and create change.



## ► Emailing your local candidates the pledge

- You can use our quick and easy online tool to send an email to the candidates in your local area. **It takes just two minutes.**
- **Email your local candidate today.**
- The more emails we can send to candidates, the more likely they'll sign! Therefore, it would be useful to encourage your friends and family members to take part.

## How do I know which of my local candidates have signed the pledge?

- We are keeping a track of how many candidates sign the pledge and listing them on our [website](#). You can use this to see who has and hasn't signed the pledge where you live.

### ► Following up with your local candidates

- You can use the [Who Can I Vote For? website](#) to see who the candidates are in your area are. If they haven't replied to your email, we'd recommend following up with another email or, even better, a phone call if possible. You could also try and speak to them at an event, or ask your question on social media by commenting on a post or sending a direct message.
- Local candidates will be extremely busy campaigning, speaking to members of the community and media, and attending events – so you may need to be patient.
- Most candidates will have a phone number on their campaign website, which you can find by googling their name and your local area.

### ► Let us know how you get on

- If you manage to get one of your candidates to sign the pledge, let us know! We can also help you contact different candidates.

# Ask a question when a canvasser knocks on your door

## ► Why will people knock on my door? What is a canvasser?



- In the weeks before an election, especially if you live in an area where the result will be close, it's likely that volunteers from different political parties will come to knock on your door. They may ask how you intend to vote, tell you about their MP candidate and their policies, or ask you questions about the issues that matter to you.
- These volunteers are sometimes called 'canvassers', because they are canvassing you to vote for a certain candidate.
- When they do knock on your door, it's a good opportunity to raise issues related to baby loss with the volunteers. The volunteers should then report back the issues you raised to the MP candidate for the political party.
- Sometimes, the candidates running for MP themselves could knock on your door too. If this happens, it's a particularly great opportunity to ask them questions!

## ► What questions should I ask?

- Sands campaigns on a range of issues around baby loss. We've suggested a few questions below that you could ask canvassers that knock on your door, or the MP candidates themselves. We've grouped them across different themes, like saving babies' lives and improving bereavement care.
- Don't worry too much about asking a question word for word, it's more important to just get the point raised generally.

## ► Suggested questions to ask

### Sands' pledge

- The baby loss charity Sands is asking MP candidates from every political party to sign a pledge during this general election. The pledge makes a commitment to working towards a future where fewer babies die, and every bereaved parent gets the care and support they deserve. **Is this something that your party candidate could sign?**

### Saving babies' lives

- Sadly, 13 babies die before, during or shortly after birth, every day - and still too many are dying from preventable deaths. **What will your party do to reduce the number of babies dying in the UK?**
- (England only): Unfortunately, the target to halve the number of stillbirths and deaths after birth is not on track. 1,000 more lives a year could have been saved if the target was met. **Will your party commit to new targets to reduce the number of babies dying, and putting in the right support for the NHS to achieve this?**
- (Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland only): Across the UK, 13 babies die before, during or shortly after birth, every day - and still too many are dying from preventable deaths. Yet, we don't have a national target for reducing baby deaths in Scotland/Wales/Northern Ireland. **Will your party commit to putting in place an ambitious target to reduce the number of babies dying?**

### Inequalities in baby loss

- Black and Asian babies are still more likely to die than white babies. In fact, 1,704 more babies would have survived if the death rate for Black and Asian babies had been the same as white babies between 2017 and 2021. **Will your party commit to looking at this, and create an action plan to end these inequalities if you're elected?**
- We know that babies born in the poorest area of the country are twice as likely to be stillborn compared to babies in richer areas – and that this has just gotten worse since 2010. **What will your party do to reduce the number of babies dying in poorer areas of the country, compared to the richer areas?**



## Improving care after the death of a baby

- In one survey from the charity Sands, 60% of bereaved parents that needed mental health support after their baby died were not able to get it. **Does your party plan to invest in specific mental health services for bereaved parents as part of your mental health policies?**
- When a baby dies, it's so important that the health care staff looking after the parents have the right training and support. However, many health care professionals across the UK do not have access to the right level of bereavement care training to sensitively support bereaved parents. **Will your party commit to properly funding bereavement care training for every NHS professional that needs it?**

## Staffing

- There are major problems impacting the people working in maternity care due to staff shortages, with nearly 60% of midwives feeling unwell due to stress and many neonatal care units having less than the safe number of staff on shift. **Will your party's plan for the NHS include a commitment to properly funding midwives and other maternity staff?**



# Attend a local hustings



## ► What is a hustings?

- A hustings is a public event where the candidates from different political parties come together to answer questions from the community and debate each other. They are good opportunities for prospective parliamentary candidates to get their messages out to voters, and for voters to have their concerns heard.
- They will usually take place in a setting like a town hall, community centre, or religious building, with members of the audience seated in front of a panel style table. They are also frequently held online via video call.
- At most hustings, there are opportunities for members of the audience to ask whatever questions they would like of the candidates, on top of sections like pre-prepared opening speeches. Candidates should receive equal opportunities to speak at a hustings.
- In a general election, there are usually multiple hustings in each area between the local candidates. Sometimes particular groups may organise a hustings to debate a specific issue, like climate change or local transport.

## ► How can I find details of when a hustings will take place in my local area?

- There is no official website or central place where hustings are listed. The best places to look will be local sources of information in your area, such as:



Local news websites, papers, and TV channels



Noticeboards



Newsletters



The social media pages of the candidates in your area.



Local community Facebook groups

## ► Asking a question at a hustings

- A hustings is a great way to raise a problem with candidates and try to secure commitments from them. By asking a question at a hustings, you could get a public record of their support for saving more babies' lives and improving bereavement care.
- We know it can be nerve-wracking to ask a question at a hustings, so we can help you pick the right question and talk you through the process – [just get in touch with us](#). You could use some of the questions we suggested in the previous section to help.



# Organise your own hustings on baby loss

## ► Why organise your own hustings?

- If you are passionate about campaigning to save babies' lives and improving bereavement care, you could consider running your own hustings specifically on baby loss and related issues.
- This will require a time commitment, but it could be a meaningful way to build relationships with your local political candidates and secure commitments to saving babies' lives.
- We'd recommend running a hustings if there is a particularly active community of people affected by baby loss in your area, as you'll need to have enough audience members present to make it impactful – and to have some help!





## ► Main steps in organising your own hustings

- Please do **get in contact with us** if you decide to organise a hustings – we can go into more detail about how to organise it and explore ways we can support you to run the event.
- Below is an overview of some of the main steps:

### Organising step



1

#### Find people to help you

- If you haven't already, you could contact your **local Sands group** and see if anybody would like to work with you to organise the hustings.
- It's also a good idea to see if there are any local community groups that you could collaborate with to organise the hustings. You may be able to get more people involved if you make the subject of the hustings a bit wider – such as about mental health, bereavement, or the NHS more generally.
- Either way, it is a good idea to agree who is doing what within your group organising the event – maybe one person is contacting candidates, another advertising the event, and another deciding the questions.



2

#### When and where

- Once you know who is organising the event, it would be good to firm up a date.
- Candidates will have a packed schedule during the election period, so you may need to arrange a date around their availability. You should also consider picking a date and time that works for most people, such as an evening during the week. Keep an eye on other local events to avoid clashes.
- Once you have a date, you'll need to decide where you're going to meet. You could setup an online hustings over software such as Zoom, or approach a local community centre, charity, or religious building to see if they could host the debate. Online events may be a bit easier to organise, but they aren't accessible for people who aren't used to using certain types of technology.







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### Invite the candidates

- To be politically neutral, we'd recommend you invite every major political party to your hustings so that you are representing views from across the whole political spectrum. However, you don't have to invite every candidate standing in your area, as that could become unmanageable.
- This should include every party that currently has an MP in parliament, plus any important other parties for your local area or country. For example, in England, this could be the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party, and Reform UK (plus any high-profile local independents). In Scotland, this could be all the above plus the Scottish National Party.
- There's more information about hosting a politically neutral, or 'non-selective', hustings on the [electoral commission's website](#).



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### Pick a chairperson

- You'll need to pick someone to manage the debate, introduce the speakers, field questions from the audience and generally run the conversation on the day. This could be a member of a local Sands group, or a local celebrity, journalist or community figure. It's important that the chairperson is not affiliated to any one political party.
- The chair will also need to ensure they're familiar with the key issues you're talking about. There's also a risk with hustings that candidates may argue between each other, so your chairperson will need to be able to maintain order.





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### Spread the word

- To make the hustings a success, you should encourage as many people in the community to attend as possible. You could advertise the event through:
  - › Your social media
  - › Contacting local newspapers and media outlets
  - › Facebook and WhatsApp groups
  - › Community groups
  - › Your local network of friends and family
  - › Printing off flyers and distributing them in local cafes, libraries, community centres, restaurants, bars and other locations
  - › Encourage the candidates themselves to advertise the hustings.
- We can help too by emailing Sands supporters in your local area. We could also help you design a flyer.



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### Agree a structure for the hustings

- An event like this would usually last somewhere between one and two hours, leaving plenty of time for interactions with the audience and different candidates. A template agenda could be:
  - › Welcome from the chairperson
  - › Introductory remarks from candidates
  - › Questions from the chairperson to candidates
  - › Audience Q&A
  - › Closing remarks from candidates
  - › Chairperson closes hustings and thanks everyone for attending.





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### Prepare some questions

- Good questions are an important part of a hustings, as they allow you to learn about the candidate's positions, get baby loss and other issues spoken about, and possibly even secure commitments.
- You could use some of the questions on pages 8 to 9 as a basis, and include statistics from pages 18 to 21.

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### After the event

- It could be good to do a social media post thanking the participants and asking them to sign the [Sands pledge on saving babies' lives](#). Whatever you say, it will be important to be impartial and not imply any candidate 'won' the debate at the hustings.
- You may want to work with local media outlets to do a feature on the debate on their website.
- Do let us know how you got on!

☐

# Let us know what you hear



- As we get ready to work with a new Government, it will be important for us to identify which new MPs are particularly passionate about baby loss – whether that's through personal experience, or otherwise. These MPs can often become the most vocal champions of bereaved families in parliament.
- So, if you hear from any conversations with volunteers, candidates or friends that an MP candidate is passionate about saving babies' lives or improving bereavement care, please let us know by emailing us at [campaigns@sands.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@sands.org.uk).
- If these candidates get elected, we can work together to use our relationship with them to campaign in parliament.



# Key facts on baby loss and priorities for the next Government

Below are some key facts on different areas of baby loss, alongside what we think the next Government should do. These could be useful if you speak to local MP candidates or volunteers. If you want to really get into the detail, you can see a full briefing on priorities for the next Government we produced with the Sands & Tommy's joint policy unit [here](#).

## ► General statistics on baby loss

-  **Every day 13 babies die during or shortly after birth.**
  - In England, the target to halve the number of stillbirths and neonatal deaths is not on track. Around **1,000 more lives a year could have been saved** if the target was met.
  - In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there are still no targets.
- **What the new Government should do: put in place new targets on reducing the numbers of babies dying, with the right resources, support and improvement plans in place to ensure they can be achieved.**






## ► Safer care

- Lessons are still not being learnt when babies die. Too often, nationally-agreed standards of care are not being followed – which is contributing to avoidable deaths.

-  **At least 1 in 5 stillbirths and neonatal deaths could be prevented with better care.**

## ► Inequalities

- There are stark and persistent inequalities in baby loss – particularly by ethnicity and deprivation.
- If stillbirth and neonatal deaths rates had been the same for Black and Asian babies as for white babies between 2017 and 2021, **1,704 more babies would have survived.**
- Black women are at **40% increased risk of miscarriage** compared to White women.


-  **Babies born in the most deprived area of the country are twice as likely to be stillborn**

- The difference in stillbirth rates between those living in the least and most deprived areas **has increased since 2010.**
- There have been welcome commitments to fund research to eliminate these inequalities from the Government – but this must be part of a wider strategy and result in new policies to reduce inequalities.

- **What the new Government should do: make a strong commitment to ending inequalities in baby loss. This must include a comprehensive programme of research and improvement, with clear targets.**

## ► Staffing

- While there are workforce pressures across the whole of the NHS, there are particularly severe shortages in maternity services.

-  **In 2023**  
**58%**  
**of midwives felt unwell in the last 12 months due to stress.**

- Staffing levels in neonatal care are also consistently below national recommendations, with **nearly a third of Neonatal Intensive Care Units not sufficiently staffed.**
- NHS England's Long-Term Workforce Plan does not have long-term funding to encourage staff to stay in maternity and neonatal roles – meaning we risk losing more valuable skills and experiences as people leave.
- The plan also does not consider the staffing problems with other groups in the wider workforce. This includes the ongoing shortage of perinatal pathologists, which is affecting the care provided to families and the ability to learn from deaths.

- **What the new Government should do: ensure the commitments made in the NHS Long-Term Workforce Plan are backed by adequate funding for the maternity and neonatal workforce. Nobody should go without the care they need during and after pregnancy.**



## ► Bereavement care

- Not all bereaved parents can access the compassionate care they need, which can hugely impact their wellbeing – both in the short-term and for the rest of their lives.
- We estimate that each **NHS bereavement specialist has only two hours working time to dedicate to each death**, highlighting the need for more support.
- Healthcare professionals across the UK do not have sufficient access to bereavement care training. This means they are not adequately supported to gain the skills and confidence they need to provide excellent care for families, or to look after their own wellbeing.
- Sands has spearheaded creating **the National Bereavement Care Pathway** to improve the quality and consistency of bereavement care received by parents in the NHS. Following the pathway should be mandatory for all NHS Trusts and Health Boards, with the right funding in place to support this.
- Specialist psychological support for bereaved parents is all too often unavailable, inaccessible, or inappropriate.



**60%**

**of bereaved parents that feel they need specialist psychological support cannot access it from the NHS.**

- **What the new Government should do: allocate funding to ensure NHS services can provide the best possible support and care following baby loss.**

**Remember the Sands Campaigns team is here to answer your questions and help you with any general election campaigning that you plan. Just drop us an email.**

**Together, we'll raise the profile of baby loss and make the next Government take action to improve bereavement care and save more babies lives.**