# What’s involved in being a General Election Candidate?

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## Put yourself forward. Being a candidate is a rewarding experience.

Being a Green Party General Election candidate is a brilliant experience. For many, it’s a memorable or even life-changing experience. Suddenly being on the stage, putting your points directly to an MP can feel incredibly rewarding. We all agree the current political offering doesn’t address the critical issues that need to be focussed on. Only with people like you putting yourself forward can we hold establishment MP’s to account and get media attention for critical messages on climate change and social justice. Being a General Election candidate can also assist your local election campaign in the future.

Being a candidate is different for everyone as it depends on what campaign you feel you can take part in and what’s happening in your area. For example, some marginal constituencies or seats with a high profile MP can attract additional media interest that you may wish to take part in. A campaign in a target constituency can require a lot of time from a candidate but in a non-target constituency, as the candidate, a large part of the campaign can be influenced by your interests and the time you feel you can commit. Quite often the campaign will consist of:

* Attendance at hustings (anything between one and ten of these tend to be held with most constituencies having just one or two events and very political areas having more)
* Talking to local journalists – usually press and local radio but sometimes TV
* Signing pledges proposed by NGOs in the few weeks ahead of polling day

You won’t be expected to be available at literally any time. Usually a colleague can substitute for you at hustings, assist with emails, pledges and even media appearances. In the months ahead of a General Election, the time commitment can be around 1 to 3 hours per week but in the 6 weeks ahead of polling day, it can be anything from 1 hour per week to taking up most weekends and evenings, depending on the time you are willing and able to commit.

The Green Party provides candidate, agent and press officer training. The Party will produce a manifesto and associated policy briefings and other literature and campaigning materials to assist candidates in all constituencies. There will also be regular briefings and provision of model responses you may wish to send to NGOs.

Crucially, the Green Party wishes to attract candidates from a range of backgrounds so we have a diverse set of life experiences feeding into the political process. If you have accessibility needs that are currently holding you back, please contact your Field Organiser who will be very pleased to discuss how we can help you meet your needs.

## Importance of the General Election and strategic considerations

General elections are taken more seriously by the general public and the media than any other kind of election in the UK. It is therefore important that the Green Party puts up a credible performance in such elections. This requires, amongst other things, that it stands enough candidates to qualify for a Party Election Broadcast, can take part in Leaders’ debates and that it stands enough candidates to demonstrate the Green Party is a serious, nationwide political party.

It is important that members putting themselves forward for selection understand the local, regional and national strategic focus for the election and to work within those frameworks. This ensures that time, money, materials and goodwill deliver a positive return on the investment.

For the majority of local parties and their candidates the campaign at the next General Election should not primarily be about the number of votes received. The most important considerations are how effectively the work done in the run up to the General Election, and the follow-through afterwards, contributes to:

improved prospects for winning principal authority council seats

improved awareness of the Green Party’s offering, to assist in member recruitment

holding the would-be constituency MP to account and influencing their agenda

In constituencies containing target wards, the focus throughout therefore needs to be on working those wards with proven election-winning methods, particularly canvassing and delivery of literature that demonstrates how the Green Party is using the General Election campaign to benefit the areas we are campaigning in (our target ward(s). This has clear implications for the kind of work members and supporters need to be encouraged to do, the geographical spread of that work and the careful focussing of resources to ensure that the momentum of local government targeting work is maintained and enhanced post-general election.

In other constituencies, we need to do things that will add to, and not detract from, such efforts. Simply by adding to the number of candidates, the party can expect more media coverage locally, and greater national credibility. The emphasis here needs to be on activity that requires limited person hours and low expenditure – such as conventional media work and web presence - so that more people and money can be directed to target areas. Where resources are very limited, candidates in these constituencies may not have campaign leaflets.

## Qualifications for and disqualifications from standing

Before putting yourself forward for selection, you need to check that you are qualified to stand as a candidate at the general election.

The national party’s constitution states that ‘Nominees must expect to be legally qualified, and not disqualified, from being a candidate at the time of the election.’ An example of someone being disqualified from standing at the time of nomination for selection, but qualified at the time of election, is the 17 year old who will be 18 before close of nominations for the election proper. Note that a candidate must be qualified and not disqualified at the time of their nomination, as well as on the date of the election.

*Legal qualifications and disqualifications*

To be qualified to stand:

* Nominees must be 18 on the date of their nomination for the election, as well as on the date of the election.
* A citizen of the UK, Republic of Ireland or a Commonwealth nation who does not require leave to enter or remain in the UK, or has indefinite leave to remain in the UK.

Certain categories of people are not eligible to stand for Westminster elections in the UK. In general terms these categories are as follows:

* Members of the police or armed forces
* Civil servants
* People who are subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order or a debt relief restrictions order in England, Wales or Northern Ireland.
* People who have been convicted of an offence and have been sentenced for more than a year and detained in prison.
* People who have been convicted of corrupt or illegal electoral practices or of an offence relating to donations.

Those who are qualified to stand are entitled by law to do so in any UK Westminster constituency but not more than one constituency at the same election.

*Party qualifications and disqualifications*

1. Membership criteria

The existing party rules also require that you have been a member of the Green Party of England and Wales for at least one year by the last possible date for the election in May 2020, and must hold continuous membership up to the date of the election during that period. You must have two nominators who must be fully paid up members of the GPEW. However, an exemption from the membership requirement for nominees may be granted by Regional Council if at least ten nominating signatures are obtained. In each case nominators must be members who are resident in the area being balloted for the selection in question. Local parties may choose to adopt Regional Council’s proposed amendment to this, which requires you to have instead been a member of GPEW for one complete year prior to the first opening of nominations for candidates with the same additional conditions and caveat still applying. It will be up to the Returning Officer for the selection ballot to ensure that members are informed in good time as to which cut-off point has been agreed.

1. Personal declaration

On the nomination form, nominees are requested to declare any criminal convictions received in the past 10 years and to declare anything in their personal history (and the history of someone you are connected with such as your partner or immediate family) that may attract media attention.

The declaration of criminal convictions is a straightforward matter of fact.  You should also include anything for which you, your partner or member of your immediate family may have recently been arrested for or for something you/they are awaiting trial.

Outside of criminal cases, it’s not possible to write a strict set of rules on everything that should be declared but anything that could be called into question should be declared. If in doubt, you should discuss with your Field Organiser, in confidence, whether something needs to be declared.  Declaration of something that could be called into question by the media is not necessarily a reason to preclude you from standing.  It is also to assist you from the outset so that we can discuss how to deal with any potential media query in advance of such a query arriving.

## Selection process

The basic rules governing the selection process are laid down in the Green Party constitution, which is available in full from the members’ website. The parts that are relevant to General Election candidate selection are provided in the Parliamentary selection guidelines and rules document in the elections section of the members website. All General Election candidates must be selected according to the agreed rules so that the Party’s Nominating Officer can be authorised to issue the paperwork enabling them to use the description ‘Green Party’ on the General Election ballot paper.

A Local Party first needs to decide which constituency/ies it wishes to contest. If it decides to field one or more candidates, then it is obliged to put out a formal call for nominations to members. It may decide to cast the net wider and invite nominees from neighbouring areas.

If there are only male nominees after the first call for nominations, there must be a second call for nominations.

There must be a hustings meeting, at which members are afforded the opportunity to question nominees.

The ballot, which must include provision for postal voting, will close after the hustings. Irrespective of how many nominees there are, voters must be given the option of voting for ‘Re-open nominations’ as an indication that they do not think that any of the nominees on offer would make a suitable candidate. Voting is by Single Transferable Vote.

Candidates’ statements are circulated ahead of the vote, usually with the ballot papers.

Due to a desire to be ready for any snap general election, but mindful of the length of time before one is due under the Fixed Term Parliament Act, the Green Party’s Regional Council has proposed that ‘early’ selections may be made which build in a provision for ‘confirmation hearings’ to determine at intervals whether the selected candidate should carry on, or a new selection should be made. Local parties have been advised that if they decide to go down this route, and since this is not currently a constitutional requirement, they should get nominees to state in writing at the time of nomination whether agree to abide by this procedure or not. This would minimise the risk of challenges further down the line from someone who said ‘fine’ at first, but then changed their mind if they later became subject to what would amount to ‘de-selection’ by this means later on.

## What exposure will I get as a General Election candidate?

To a large extent this will depend on the level of campaign that the local party has decided to run in the constituency that you wish to put yourself forward for.

The law requires that you appoint an election agent who will be legally responsible for the conduct of your campaign, the financial aspects of it and submitting a return of expenses (set of accounts for the campaign) after the election. The local party should be able to recommend a member who you can appoint as your election agent.

The local party should take the lead in ensuring that sufficient money is raised to finance the agreed campaign activities. While candidates sometimes make a financial contribution towards their campaign, it is a legal requirement that donations go through their election agent. All sides should be clear about whether any monies are a donation or a loan, and if the latter, when it will be repaid by.

It is important to understand that as a candidate you will be a public figure, and that the local, regional and national party will be providing media outlets and NGOs with contact details for yourself (agreed with you first of course) and your campaign team members. It is likely that your photograph, biographical and contact details will be made public on Party and other election-related websites. If there is a problem with giving out some personal contact information, then an alternative address, phone number and e-mail address can be set up. The Party can set up Green Party addresses for candidates.

The local party may well provide a press officer volunteer. If you are contacted by the media it is perfectly acceptable to make a note of their questions and say that you or the press officer will ring back shortly with a considered response. This will give you time to get advice or ensure that someone who may be better qualified speaks to them.

Your name and address and a list of the names of the people who nominated you will be posted, along with those of other candidates, on Notices of Election for the constituency - but only election die-hards will take much notice! Your address will also appear (in small print) beneath your name on the ballot paper unless you make use of the new piece of legislation which allows you to have this ‘hidden’ and replaced by just the name of the constituency you reside in.

## Further Support:

The candidate role may well involve activities you have not faced before. The Green Party is not looking for polished candidates who have been candidates many times before. The Party is extremely keen to have candidates with all sorts of life experiences and to put up candidates with a wide range of backgrounds and skills. If you would like to talk through the possibility of standing as a candidate, the Green Party’s Field Organisers are on hand to help and advise.

See: < <https://my.greenparty.org.uk/elections/help-advice> > (if this link doesn’t work for you, simply copy and paste it into your browser).