



# Local Elections 2023

## Key human rights issues, policy ‘asks’ and questions for local candidates

Local elections are due to be held in England on the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023. These will include district councils, unitary authorities and all directly elected mayors. It will also highlight to the Parliamentary parties what will resonate with the electorate for the general elections next year. Elections are a chance to voice our concerns, and hopefully see our values reflected by those in power.

In the run-up to these elections, candidates and their teams will ask you for their vote, so it is important to make these decisions in full awareness of where they stand on the issues that really matter to you. Modern human rights protections were introduced in response to the horrors of the Holocaust and the desire for a new, fairer, and more peaceful order is being eroded at home and abroad. **These elections, in the wake of an increasingly hostile environment and increased pressure for the UK to U-turn on its international treaty's commitments, are a chance to renew and strengthen that commitment to fairness, equality, and compassion.**

This briefing aims to provide a summary of the most important human rights issues at stake at the election. This list is not exhaustive but covers issues that resonate most with Jewish history and values. More detailed information on specific issues can be found on our website, and useful reading is hyperlinked throughout. Each section provides a sample question and background information.

### Protecting equality and human rights in the UK:

In recent years, the respect that our elected politicians, and indeed many within society, have for the internationally legally binding universal standards for human rights has been regressing. Through claims of ‘asserting sovereignty’, successive UK governments have sought to pass laws that undermine these they cannot guarantee are in line with these obligations. As ever, the vocal base calls for a permanent departure from them. Any move to withdrawing from the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) or weakening the UK’s [Human Rights Act](#) could severely undermine human rights and cause serious damage to the most vulnerable among us. **We ask our local candidates to protect equality and the role of key international instruments within our society.**

*As a candidate in this election will you...*

- *Work to protect equality and human rights in our local area and in the UK as a whole?*
- *Protect the UK’s commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Human Rights Act?*
- *Use your platform to challenge measures contrary to the ECHR?*
- *Seek to calm demonisation of human rights institutions and present them in an accurate fashion?*



### Tackling Hate Crime in the Local Community:

In the year ending March 2022, [police recorded 155,841 hate crimes](#), continuing a trend in year-on-year increases over the previous 10 years. As a Jewish community, we have seen antisemitic hate crime rise disproportionately in this period and know how deeply communities are affected by hate. It is essential that local communities are facilitated to work together for better integration and a deeper, human understanding of the different groups living together. Hate must be confronted in all its forms. **We ask our local candidates to commit to a hate crime strategy, as the likes of [Bradford Council](#) and the [Hammersmith & Fulham Council](#) have in recent years. These must work to prevent hate crime, understand and respond to its causes in our communities and better support victims of hate crime.**

*As a candidate in this election will you...*

- *Work to understand the causes of hate and discrimination in our local area?*
- *Ensure the voices of communities affected by hate are listened to and respected?*

### Challenging the Hostile Environment to Refugees and Asylum Seekers:

Since 2012, the national Government has had an overall policy of creating a 'hostile environment' for those who arrive irregularly in the UK. Whilst immigration detention is controlled by the Home Office and policies must be challenged at a national level, local government still has a role to play. Lewisham Council, for example, has helped become a '[Borough of Sanctuary](#)', which seeks to create an empathetic, people-centric approach whilst removing barriers to integration with the community. Many other authorities offer advice and helplines for those affected by the hostile environment. Local authorities also have a statutory duty to meet the safeguarding needs of unaccompanied children. It is essential that they use this opportunity to aid their transition into life in the UK whilst working through potential trauma.

**We ask our local candidates to work to change the narrative around asylum seekers. Through providing support and a compassionate, people-centric approach, local government can curb some of the negative excesses of national government policy and prove that there is room for more compassionate solutions and provide alternatives to detention.**

*As a candidate in this election will you...*

- *Seek to promote a positive perception of refugees and asylum seekers within your local area?*
- *Promote integration projects and other people-centric approaches to refugees and asylum seekers in your area e.g. alternatives to detention?*
- *Actively challenge the 'hostile environment' on the ground through providing support to refugees and asylum seekers?*



### Supporting Victims of Modern Slavery:

The [Local Government Association](#) has recognised that modern slavery can be tackled affectively at a local level. In particular, through identifying and supporting victims. Victims of modern slavery are identified through the [National Referral Mechanism](#) (NRM), which has recently seen its highest ever number of referrals. Many child trafficking victims are exploited by county lines criminals. New proposed legislation will make it harder for survivors to access support. It is therefore essential that local authorities reduce the risk of perpetuating a cycle of exploitation. **We ask our local candidates to support victims of trafficking and modern slavery by following the [guidelines on providing homelessness services to victims of modern slavery](#).**

*As a candidate in this election will you...*

- *Endeavour to provide support and protection to victims of slavery, and out of the hands of those who wish to exploit them?*
- *Actively seek and support people who are vulnerable to trafficking in the local area, such as unhoused people and people seeking asylum?*

### Enshrining The Right to Food:

Food prices in the UK are surging, whilst crucial supply chains remain disrupted. Set against a backdrop of a wider cost of living crises and widening inequality, [9.7 million adults and four million children have recently experienced food insecurity](#). Many local authorities have implemented strategies to help alleviate the issue. Examples include [Colchester Borough Council](#) pledging £25,000 to local food banks and [Islington](#) and [Southwark](#) ensuring universal free school meals to children at all maintained nursery and primary schools in the borough.

**We ask our local candidates to empower existing local assets such as food partnerships, provide easy access to information regarding support, dedicate funds to the reduction food insecurity and for local councils to commit to become a 'right to food' borough ensuring free school meals to children.**

*As a candidate in this election will you...*

- *Ensure your local council becomes a 'right to food' borough....*
- *Collaborate with food partnerships towards the shared goal of ending food insecurity in the local area?*
- *Support schools to provide free school meals?*