A guide to campaigning in the general election

2017
Although the Tories and much of the media would have us believe that the outcome of the general election on 8 June 2017 is a foregone conclusion, there is much to play for. This campaign guide is for UNISON branches and members. It provides information to help UNISON activists and members get involved in the campaign to kick the Tories out.

In terms of public services, the jobs of UNISON members and the living standards of all working people, there could not be more at stake. An emboldened Tory government will implement more cuts, resulting in an ever more challenging time for public services and those that provide them.

But we know that more cuts would be deeply unpopular with the public. Over the coming weeks we have an opportunity to spell out what this election means for the NHS, local government, our schools, policing and all our other public services. We must take it.
UNISON’s general election campaign plan

UNISON’s general election campaign plan has three main strands.

**Keep public services at the top of the political agenda**

The Tories want this election to be all about delivering a big mandate for EU exit negotiations. UNISON’s Public Service Champions campaign gives us an opportunity to keep cuts to public services at the top of the political agenda – so that the general election is not just fought on the Tories’ favoured turf.

To these ends the Public Service Champions campaign includes an advertising campaign, across press, social media (including short films) and outside billboard advertising. The adverts contrast the value the public attaches to public services with the testimonies of UNISON members about the challenges of delivering public services after nearly 10 years of cuts.

[www.publicservicechampions.org](http://www.publicservicechampions.org)

Because of spending restrictions we cannot run the adverts throughout the election period. The adverts run until early May. At this point other materials and ideas produced for the campaign can be used locally by you and your colleagues to keep public services in the election debates.

**Talk to UNISON members about the importance of voting and the issues at stake**

We are at our most effective when we focus on talking to our own members about the issues UNISON has real authority to speak on – public services and the jobs and financial pressures faced by those who provide them.

Involving our own members in the debate gives us a powerful voice to speak up for public services. Members will be provided with the tools to question candidates and canvassers who knock on their doors. And we need to direct them to opportunities to volunteer and campaign at a local level in their own time.

**Focus resources on key electoral battlegrounds**

UNISON will ensure that our resources are used as efficiently and effectively as possible. Although members across the union will want to be active where they live, we should, where possible, be prepared to direct volunteers towards locations where their efforts will make the greatest difference.

Further information about target seats will be communicated through regions and local Labour parties.
We need as many members and activists to take part in the campaign as possible. Here are some of the main things that you can do to get involved.

Use the Public Service Champions campaign materials

Because of the Lobbying Act spending restrictions no election campaign material can be produced at region or branch level.

However, the national Public Service Champions campaign materials can be used for campaigning locally.

They can be ordered from the UNISON online catalogue www.unison.org.uk/onlinecatalogue and include:

Register to vote postcard
People have until 22 May to register to vote (23 May for a postal vote).

The postcard explains how to register to vote and get a postal or proxy vote. It highlights the opportunity that the election provides to raise concerns about public services.

Many of our members are already registered to vote, but those who have moved recently, student nurses and people who might not have voted recently might not be.

Handing out the postcard at union events – or outside places of work (with employer permission if on work premises) will be a good way of communicating a simple message and starting conversations.

Public services pledge card
The pledge card sets out UNISON’s demands for public services. These can be distributed at union or other events outside work and used with members. Members can use the pledge cards to quiz canvassers and candidates when they knock on doors: Do candidates support our demands? If candidates want our votes – they need to show genuine commitment to public services.

Champions campaign briefing
The champions campaign briefing sets out an easy-to-follow guide on how to make and share a short film on your social media using your smart phone. These films tell the real story about what’s happening in public services after close to 10 years’ of cuts. Sharing members’ stories can take your testimony to a wider public and help shape the public debate.

Pens, badges, stickers
As with other UNISON campaigns there are also lots of Public Service Champions badges, pens and stickers that can be used to start conversations and engage members. These can be ordered for specific events by emailing: stockorders@unison.co.uk

Volunteer to help the Labour Party
The only way to get rid of the Tories is for Labour to win seats and gain power. So any help UNISON members can give can make a difference.

UNISON is affiliated to the Labour Party. This is known as The Labour Link. And through this affiliation the union has campaigned for policy commitments that would directly benefit UNISON members.

A Labour victory would result in:
- an end to the pay cap in the public sector
- a commitment to raise the National Living Wage to £10 an hour during the next parliament
- scrapping the Trade Union Act
- tackling zero hours contracts and insecure work
• protecting workers’ rights that are enshrined through European laws and which would be at risk under a Tory EU exit
• an end to privatisation in the NHS.

How to find out more

Labour will fight every seat in England, Wales and Scotland, so it is easy to volunteer locally via your Constituency Labour Party. There might be someone, possibly a Labour Link contact in your branch, who can help you.

You can volunteer online and the Labour Party will get back to you at www.labourparty.org.uk

This can feel like a big step for someone who hasn’t been involved previously, but UNISON members will be made to feel welcome. Everything will be done to help and support volunteers who have not been involved in political campaigning previously.

Alternatively UNISON regional organisers can help put members in touch with the local Labour Link person. Sometimes you will be campaigning alongside members of other unions, through a dedicated union/Labour Party body called TULO [See: Useful links and contacts).

Types of activity include:
• leafletting your neighbourhood
• putting a poster in your own window
• canvassing (knocking on people’s doors and asking them how they plan to vote)
• stuffing envelopes
• working on a telephone bank
• driving.

www.labourparty.org.uk

Focus existing local anti-cuts campaigns on the general election

There are many local campaigns up and running that will gain added significance in the context of the general election. In many cases UNISON members will already support such campaigns and activists may be fully involved. Examples might include campaigns about local NHS services, library closures or school cuts.

In these cases think about how the issues play out in the political context. For example, can a campaign about saving local services that have been under threat from closure, reduced opening or privatisation be used to highlight differences between the parties and candidates at the election?

Think about local campaigns that fit this category and how you might approach others involved to reinvigorate them in the weeks ahead.

However, please remember that fresh materials related to the election can not be produced because of restrictions imposed by the Lobbying Act. Campaigning must be conducted by members as volunteers.

Campaigning against the far right

UNISON works around the year with groups such as HOPE not hate and other local anti-racist, anti-fascist campaigns to tackle racism and to organise local communities against the politics of hate.

Successful campaigns in the past mean that we no longer have to worry too much about the BNP – and UKIP are less of a threat than in 2015. However, following the upsurge in racist incidents since last year’s EU referendum we must remain vigilant, and HOPE not hate will be active throughout the coming weeks.

If you want to volunteer with HOPE not Hate in your own time contact them directly at: hopenothate.org.uk
Lobbying Act compliance

Because of the Lobbying Act, the amount of money that UNISON spends campaigning during the election is tightly regulated. In addition to not producing any materials locally it is important that branches do not:

- hold public rallies and hustings (including events where UNISON would be a partner or sponsor)
- jointly brand election-related campaigns with our allies
- pay for staff time related to election campaigning.

The good news is:

Any volunteering undertaken as a citizen in your own time does not count under the Lobbying Act. Similarly, materials that you order that have been produced by UNISON for engaging with UNISON members do not count.

If you volunteer with Labour, materials you use will already be accounted for by Labour.

If in doubt please get in touch: champions@unison.co.uk

Next steps

The ideas set out above provide something of a pick and mix. A good starting point is holding a branch planning meeting, if you haven’t already done so. Talk through what you can manage and order any materials that you might need.

Key dates

Register to vote – 22 May
Register for a postal vote – 23 May
Register for a proxy vote – 31 May
Polling day – Thursday 8 June
Here are a few bald facts about the impact of government cuts on our public services.

**NHS**
- The NHS is going through the biggest financial squeeze in its history, with spending per head of population set to fall in 2018/19 and waiting times getting longer.
- There are 24,000 fewer nurses and 3,500 fewer midwives than are needed.
- The number of adults who say they do not get the care they need has increased by nearly 50% since 2010.

**Young people**
- More than 600 youth centres have closed since 2012, taking away the help and support provided to some of the most vulnerable young people in our communities.

**Police staff**
- Police funding was cut by 20% between 2010 and 2015, but neighbourhood policing was cut even more, with 30% of police community support officers cut.

**Libraries**
- More than 400 libraries have closed since 2010, depriving communities of access to books, courses and computer facilities.

**Schools**
- Schools are facing a real terms cut of £3 billion, which will result in spending per pupil falling by an average of 8% by 2019/20.

**Impact of devolution**
Public services in the devolved nations are encountering significant challenges because of central government cuts.

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**Useful links and contacts**

**Public Service Champions**
www.publicservicechampions.org

**UNISON online catalogue**
www.unison.org.uk/onlinecatalogue

**Volunteer for the Labour Party**
www.labour.org.uk

**HOPE not hate**
www.hopenothate.org.uk

**Electoral Commission advice on voting**
www.yourvotematters.co.uk

**Government voter registration website**
www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

**Operation Black Vote**
www.obv.org.uk

**Trade Unions for Labour Organisation (Tulo)**
www.unionstogether.org.uk