

Campaigning Guidance Booklet

2017 General Election

LIVE ON 

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Background to the 2017 General Election

The Date

The date of the next General Election is Thursday 8th June 2017.

Background to the Election

On Tuesday 18 April 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May announced her intention to hold a snap General Election.

Under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, however, the Prime Minister no longer has the prerogative power to request the early dissolution of Parliament. As such, the Government was required to lay a motion before the House of Commons, which needed the approval of at least two thirds of the House, or 434 Members of Parliament. A motion was duly tabled on Wednesday 19 April 2017 and agreed by 522 votes to 13.

Campaigning priorities for the 2017 General Election

In advance of the 2015 UK General Election, the Legion called for the next Government to adopt the policy recommendations contained within our 2015 Manifesto. Since then, the Legion has overseen the successful implementation of eight of these proposals, with a further two also making good progress. We also launched our major new *Count Them In* campaign in May 2016, which before the snap General Election was called had secured the support of over a third of all MPs and over 100 local authorities.

In advance of the forthcoming General Election, we would be grateful if you could help raise the profile of our *Count Them In* campaign among candidates standing for election in your area. We have also produced a new 2017 Manifesto, which contains five key policy recommendations that the Legion would like to see implemented during the next Parliament to the benefit of Service personnel, veterans and their families.

Count Them In

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the last census in 2011 left us knowing more about the number of 'Jedi Knights' living in our country than about the men and women who have served in our Armed Forces, and the families that have supported them throughout.

The Legion's own research has estimated that the Armed Forces community – serving personnel and veterans, whether Regular or Reserve, along with their spouses and dependent children - accounts for around 1 in 10 of the UK population. Yet despite numerous attempts to survey this often hidden community, there remains no definitive information to confirm this population estimate, or accurately map the profile, needs and location of members of the Armed Forces community.

The census has proven to be an extensive, robust and secure form of data collection on the UK population. If new questions concerning membership of the Armed Forces community were added to the next census, which is due to take place in 2021, the nation could establish a comprehensive snapshot of this unique population, and ensure that resources and policies developed in support of serving personnel, veterans and their families are evidence-based and reach those most in need of support.

The Legion is calling on the UK, Scottish and Northern Irish governments, along with their respective statistical agencies, to include a new topic in the 2021 census that concerns membership of the Armed Forces community. The precise wording of any question(s) on the Armed Forces community will ultimately be a matter for the statistical agencies, the devolved governments, and Parliament to decide.

To find out more about the campaign, please visit www.britishlegion.org.uk/census

2017 Manifesto

Given the sudden nature of the General Election, the Legion was unable to replicate the large-scale consultation with staff, members and external experts that it conducted in advance of the publication of its 2015 Manifesto. As such, the Legion's 2017 Manifesto pulls together outstanding policy recommendations and emerging areas of work being undertaken by the Legion's Policy and Campaigns team. Each of these issues has already been researched and consulted upon with colleagues across the sector, and if implemented will make a positive difference to the lives of Service personnel, veterans and their families.

Our five policy proposals call on the next Government to:

- Ensure questions concerning military service and membership of the Armed Forces community feature in the next national census in 2021
- Invest in research on 'what works' in treating veterans with Gulf War illnesses, and set up formal communication channels to convey the results of US research developments to these individuals
- Provide an enhanced practical package of support to corporate signatories of the Armed Forces Covenant
- Enable veterans to receive treatment for Non-Freezing Cold Injury through Defence Medical Services
- Ensure bereaved, divorced or separated spouses and partners of Service personnel are able to access local authority housing on the same terms as other Armed Forces families

To view and download a copy of the Legion's 2017 Manifesto, please visit:

www.britishlegion.org.uk/manifesto2017

Key statistics to reference

In addition to our previously mentioned campaign messages, you might want to reference the following statistics in your correspondence with candidates. They tackle the pervading myths that surround the ex-Service community, which often give the mistaken impression that veterans are 'mad, bad and sad', and also highlight some of the most pressing welfare issues. These statistics can be found in our 2014 Household Survey of the ex-Service community, which was the largest study of its kind ever undertaken.

- We estimate that the size of the UK Armed Forces community is between 6.5 and 6.7 million people, of which there are between 6.1 and 6.2 million members of the ex-Service community
- Working age veterans (16-64yrs) are less likely to be employed than the general population of the same age (63% vs 77%), more likely to be unemployed (11% vs 6%), and more likely to be economically inactive (25% vs 17%)
- Working age veterans are more likely than the general population of the same age to report a long-term illness that limits their activities (24% vs 13%), including depression (10% vs 6%); back problems (14% vs 7%) and problems with legs and feet (15% vs 7%)
- Younger veterans (16-34yrs) are particularly vulnerable to a range of problems, including financial difficulties (25% are in arrears); bereavement (20% report needing support); integration difficulties (16% of those discharged in the past 5 years report difficulty reintegrating into society); and housing difficulties (6% of those discharged in the past 5 years report problems getting a council or housing association place)
- Despite public perceptions, rates of PTSD remain far lower within the serving and veteran community than common mental health conditions, although there are some groups that are at a heightened risk; namely Reservists and combat troops
- Veterans appear to be less likely than the general population to have a criminal conviction, with the most reliable statistics suggesting that ex-Service personnel make up between 3.5% and 7% of the prison population in England and Wales, which is broadly similar to the percentage of veterans in the population as a whole
- A 2007 National Audit Office survey of veterans undergoing the resettlement programme found that just under 5% of respondents, mainly young and of junior rank, reported that they had experienced some form of homelessness at some point in the past two years.

Your role in our campaigns

Why your voice is important

Candidates standing for election will be paying particular attention to the views of individuals residing within their constituency. The candidates will want to be seen as speaking on their constituents' behalf and championing issues of importance to them.

As one of the largest membership organisations in the UK, we know that each and every one of you can help us to get our message out there. That being said, it is important to remember that all campaigning should be done in a personal capacity; you should refrain from speaking on behalf of the Legion.

While the Legion's campaigns team will continue to engage with the political parties, officials and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates at the national level, it is important not to underestimate the power of your local campaigning voice. Remember; even if a candidate appears to have very little chance of being elected, many politicians began their political lives as 'paper candidates' and some may already be local councillors.

How to find your election candidates

If you would like to know who is standing for election in your local constituency, all the main parties include lists of their confirmed candidates on their websites. Media outlets such as the BBC will also include full lists of candidates online.

Engaging with election candidates

The main purpose of engaging with your local election candidates is to inform them of the Legion's welfare work across the country and within the local community, as well as to raise awareness of the charity's latest campaigns and the ongoing needs of the Armed Forces community. If you do decide to engage with your local candidates, there are a couple of specific asks that you can make of them. For instance, you could ask that they consider:

- Writing to their party leader to ask that the party consider the Legion's 2017 Manifesto recommendations and work to implement some or all of them;
- Raising awareness of the Legion's latest campaigns, Household Survey results and welfare work by speaking about them in Parliament, holding a debate, or asking a Parliamentary Question, if elected.

If you are planning on contacting your local candidates, it would be great if you could let the Legion's Policy and Campaigns team know about your plans so that they can then record that information and provide any supporting materials that you may need, including tailored campaign briefing papers and a hard copy of the 2017 Manifesto. The team would also be interested in hearing how your planned engagement goes, so that we can then follow up on any points raised, if necessary. You can get in touch with the team by emailing: publicaffairs@britishlegion.org.uk.

Campaigning within the law

Charity and Electoral Law

Charity Law dictates that charities cannot be established for political purposes and must never engage in party political activities. However, charities can still be political in so far as this enables them to achieve their charitable objectives e.g. by campaigning on issues that directly affect the welfare of their beneficiaries. There may, therefore, be certain circumstances when spending on activities that are in pursuit of charitable purposes will also require charities to comply with Electoral Law, which regulates how much 'non-party campaigners' can do and spend during an election period.

The Lobbying Act 2014

Part II of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act (Lobbying Act) came into force on 19th September 2014. The Act largely builds on the provisions of existing Electoral Law, as set out in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), but it has a greater focus on what 'non-party campaigners' (including charities, voluntary organisations and faith groups) are able to do during the 'regulated period'.

For General and Devolved elections, the regulated period now applies for one full year before the date of the election. For the 2017 General Election, the regulated period thus applies from 9th June 2016 until 8th June 2017.

The Lobbying Act has brought in a couple of significant changes for non-party campaigners in the run up to General and Devolved elections. Namely, the Act reduces the amount an organisation can spend on campaigning activities without registration, while increasing the range of activities that count towards that spending limit. In addition, it also introduces a limit on what can be spent in any one constituency.

Implications: the DOs and DON'Ts of Legion Campaigning

The two most important rules for ensuring legal charitable campaigning are:

- **DO** remain independent of any candidate or political party
- **DON'T** seek to influence, or be perceived to influence, voter intentions

—> *DO remain independent of any candidate or political party*

This effectively means that you must be careful not to be seen as engaging with any one particular candidate or political party over others. Whilst campaigning that is directed at Parliamentarians, Prospective Parliamentary Candidates, or local councillors is not directly covered by the new rules, every effort should be made to uphold the charity's political neutrality and spirit of constructive engagement with politicians from across the political spectrum. In practice, this means:

- Meeting with, and writing to, candidates and political party representatives from as wide a political spectrum as possible, within reason.
- Not using 'official' Legion channels, such as branch websites or social media accounts, to publicise support or opposition to individual candidates or political parties, either explicitly or implicitly.
- Not using branch or club premises to hold meetings for particular political parties or candidates, whether these events are policy focused or not.

—> *DON'T seek to influence, or be perceived to influence, voter intentions*

This essentially means that your local campaign should not engage in vote-seeking activities such as rallies, speeches, or 'hustings', which are generally intended to persuade voters to vote for or against a particular politician or party, based on their support or non-support for our policies. Legion premises should also not be used for hustings or political gatherings organised by external groups or organisations, in order to safeguard the Legion's independence.

It also means that, should a candidate or political party express their support for our latest campaigns or one of our manifesto policies, perhaps as a result of your local campaigning, you should not seek to publicise their support, no matter how much we might welcome this endorsement. This is because if one candidate or political party in your constituency has not declared their support, we might 'reasonably be regarded' as intending to influence members of the public to vote against that particular candidate or political party. Whilst you may not be able to publicise statements of support, this kind of information is still very helpful to the Legion's Policy and Campaigns team, and we would be grateful if you could share this kind of intelligence with them.

Finally, it also means that under no circumstances should individuals, branches or other Legion formations produce their own Legion branded material based on our latest campaign or manifesto during the regulated period. This is because such publications are considered 'election material', which means that if they are aimed at or read by members of the public, and not just politicians, all costs associated with its production – including staff time – must be formally accounted for. If a formation were to then produce its own campaigning material, these costs would need to be accounted for centrally and would count towards this limit. Furthermore, if only one branch were to do this, the Legion would then be involved in what is known as 'focused constituency campaigning', which brings with it its own administrative difficulties.

Further Guidance

The Electoral Commission, which monitors UK elections and ensures compliance with Electoral Law, has put together a number of helpful briefings on how to campaign within both Electoral and Charity Law. You can find their full list of briefing papers on their website: www.electoralcommission.org.uk.