



General election on 4 July 2024: Supporting you to make the case for theatre.

What happens now?

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has called a summer General Election – which will take place on Thursday 4 July 2024 (the first July General Election since 1945). The final Bills have been through ‘wash up’ (including the Finance (No.2) Bill 2024, which enshrines the permanent higher rate of tax relief in law). Parliament was prorogued on Friday 24 May and dissolved on Thursday 30 May. From this date and until 4 July, there are no MPs – only prospective parliamentary candidates.

There are 650 seats available across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and to secure a majority, a political party must secure more than half – so 326 or more. Some candidates will be fighting in new constituencies, as many have been redrawn as a result of the 2023 Boundary Review.

There is already a lot to play for in this General Election – we already know there will be at least 127 new MPs, as many have already declared they will be standing down.

From 30 May, candidates will be pounding the streets of their constituencies to campaign for votes. And in June we can expect to see political parties publish their manifestos – setting out their high-level commitments should they win at the polls. Manifestos are a useful way to understand the policy priorities of a particular party at a national level, but it is worth remembering that, while echoing national priorities, candidates will also be keen to reflect, and act on, the local issues affecting constituents. For that reason, it can be highly effective to engage with candidates in the pre-election period.

Why is this important?

Elections are a key time for us to make the case for theatre. Those seeking election, are in listening mode. They also want to understand local issues and align themselves with positive things about the area they are seeking to represent – particularly things that bring jobs to the area and that people value. Is there anything that fits that bill more perfectly than theatre?

Once elected, politicians will make decisions that will affect many of you both directly and indirectly. Arts funding is an issue that has a local and national dimension and matters enormously to many of our members. Similarly, we are keen for members to highlight other local-relevant issues that can be addressed at a national level, including funding for theatre visits for school pupils and investment in our theatre buildings.

We know that many of you have excellent relationships with your local MPs. Whereas others might be starting from a lower base. Fear not! An election is the perfect time to establish or build relationships.

What can you do?

To help you do this, there are some key things you may want to consider.

Get in the know: Firstly, check to see what constituency your organisation is in – this information can be found here:

<https://www.electoralcalculus.co.uk/newseatlookup.html>.

Once you know this, you will be able to identify the candidates for that ward online. Sites such as whocanivotefor.co.uk or electoralcommission.org.uk can make this easier.

You may also find it useful to check opinion polls for your area. You can find these on various websites, including bbc.co.uk/news. It's worth knowing whether the incumbent MP is likely to be re-elected, or whether there is likely to be a change.

If there is likely to be a change in the party affiliation, at a local or national level, it would be useful to consider what might that mean for your organisation and for culture in your area.

Engage: You might want to consider writing to candidates and invite them to meet to discuss their plans for culture in your area, and to tell them what you do in, and with, your local community.

Prospective candidates love to visit iconic locations in the area they are representing – it is a great photo opportunity and generates some positive local press coverage. It is also a great opportunity for candidates to see the work that you do and to get to know you better. Before you engage and if you are a charity, make sure you check the rules – see below for more info.

Things they are likely to be interested in, include:

1. Your role as a key institution in the local economy and local community.
2. Any schemes you provide that help to engage audiences who may otherwise struggle to access theatre.
3. Any work you do to otherwise engage with and support the local community.
4. The number of people you employ and any schemes you provide to train local people, particularly young people.

We have prepared a [template letter](#) for to use that you can tailor as you see fit.

If a local candidate does visit your theatre, make sure you share on socials using our pre-election hashtag, **#ThrivingTheatres**.

Advocate: Engaging with local politicians is an opportunity to share the transformational power of theatre with them and to talk about the conditions that would enable theatre to thrive. Here are some key messages you might want to consider sharing (more information can be found in our [Pre-Election Briefing](#)):

1. Theatres are economic powerhouses and sources of transformative social good, embedded in communities up and down the country.
2. To achieve our full potential, the theatre sector needs the right fiscal and policy conditions to thrive. Costs are rising for our sector faster than revenue, which poses significant challenges.
3. Investing in cultural infrastructure: The investments announced for Theatr Clwyd and The National Theatre in the Spring Budget are welcome, but we need a systematic and strategic approach to cultural infrastructure if theatres are to thrive. The Society of London Theatre (SOLT) & UK Theatre stand ready to collaborate with politicians and other relevant stakeholders to achieve this. We are currently building the evidence base for both the jeopardy if investment is not received and opportunity for growth if it is.
4. Investing in children's access: Every child has the right to access our world-class theatre sector. It supports wellbeing, educational attainment and talent pipelines. However, access to the theatre is declining, despite the fantastic work producers and venues do up and down the country to improve and develop children's engagement. This is why we are calling on politicians to support our campaign to fund at least one trip to the theatre for every child before they leave school. You can show your support for this ask on socials using **#theatreforeverychild** and don't forget to tag us @soltnews and @uk_theatre.

If you host meetings or visits to your organisations, shout about what you do, what matters to you and our shared priorities on your website and social media. Please use the hashtag **#ThrivingTheatres** for any posts and don't forget to tag us @soltnews and @uk_theatre. If you would like any other branded assets, please drop the Public Affairs team a line: PublicAffairs@soltukt.co.uk.

Understand the rules. There are election engagement rules that you to be aware of, especially for those members who are charitable organisations:

1. The pre-election period starts on Thursday 30 May and ends after the elections. This restricts what government departments, arms-length bodies and publicly funded organisations can say. For example, the Government, and other bodies such as the national arts councils, cannot announce any new initiatives or policies that could be perceived as influencing the election.
2. If you are a charity, there are rules you need to follow around elections in order to maintain political independence. You can still approach candidates, but crucially you cannot endorse one over another and you should seek to engage all major parties with your priorities (as they relate to your charitable aims).

More information is available [here](#). These are good rules for most organisations that serve the entire community.

If you have any questions, we are here to help! Do also let us know about your activity, so we can build a picture of which candidates have been engaged. Feel free to get in touch PublicAffairs@soltukt.co.uk.

What can we expect to happen after the General Election?

Polls will close at 10pm on the evening of Thursday 4 July, and results will begin to come in from Friday 5 July.

The new Parliament will be summoned to meet on Tuesday 9 July.

The State Opening of Parliament will take place on Wednesday 17 July.

It is worth noting that summer recess is expected later in July.

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