

First-time Voter Hustings events for Belfast City Council

- To engage and encourage first-time voters to participate in the democratic process and increase turnout at the ballot box on 22 May 2014

A hustings event is a meeting where election candidates or parties debate policies and answer questions from the audience

What

- We propose organising four hustings style events for Belfast City Council, broken down into north, south, east and west Belfast.
- 18 year olds from the relevant area would be invited, through their school/HE Colleges, to attend the event as the audience and the political parties would be asked to nominate a representative to form a debate panel.
- Each event would last approximately 1.5 hours to include opening introductions, presentations from candidates to outline their policies, an interactive Q&A session and a casual networking opportunity for candidates to talk individually to pupils
- The events would be chaired by a relevant political personality such as Liam Clarke, Noel Thompson or Mark Davenport.

It is essential that each event is cross-community and non-promotional for any specific party or candidate

When

We would aim for the events to take place within the two weeks leading up to the local council elections (5 – 16 May 2014).

Where

Belfast City Hall

The main aim would be to change apathy to action when it comes to voting

Why

Voter turnout is declining, especially among the younger generations. They are especially apathetic about voting and unsure about how the democratic process relates to them. This initiative aims to stimulate interest in democracy and emphasise the importance of voting, putting it firmly in the minds of young people just before the upcoming election.

This type of initiative has proven in other countries to be very effective in encouraging youth participation in voting. We previously piloted this event in South Antrim in 2010 and it was very well received

It will also provide political candidates with a platform to directly inform/influence constituents and grasp up-and-coming 'real' issues.

We believe it would be successful in making politics more accessible, interesting and relevant to young people.

How much is needed?

£1500 per event x 4 = £6000 to include event management, administration, photography and PR (It does not account for venue or catering costs)