

## **Purdah 2019 - FAQ's**

### **What**

Purdah is the period in the run-up to an election when there is a restriction in place on publicising the views of political parties, issuing press releases or promoting initiatives with quotes or photos from particular councillors as this could be seen to unfairly promote one particular political party.

This period does not stop the usual business of the council taking place, although certain key decisions or activities may be looked at more closely during purdah to avoid any concern that the council is using the period in the run-up to an election to promote a political party.

### **When**

The purdah period will run from 06 November 2019 until the close of polls on 12 December at 10pm.

### **Do these rules apply to organisations/groups that receive funding from the council?**

Yes, the restrictions also apply to publicity issued by other organisations with local authority funding including any programmes or initiatives for which the council is the accountable body.

### **Do these rules apply to councillors who are not Parliamentary candidates?**

Council business continues so all sitting councillors, whether standing in the General Election or not, are bound by the pre-election restrictions.

### **Do the restrictions apply to officers who are members of a trade union?**

Trade unions themselves are not bound by the Code, but individual officers are, and must have regard to the Code.

### **What is publicity?**

Publicity is defined as “any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public”.

In practice, publicity will include newspapers, newsletters, the content of the council’s website or social media platforms (including liking, sharing or linking to posts by others), posters, leaflets, booklets, banners, badges, t-shirts, carrier bags, advertising, campaigns, exhibitions, plays, conferences and consultation exercises

### **Are surveys and consultation exercises included in this definition?**

Yes. There has been a growth in the number of surveys and consultation exercises carried out by local authorities. Surveys can be carried out as long as the questions posed in them can be seen to be a genuine attempt to obtain the views of local people or organisations on council services. Any other surveys, such as those which could be seen as seeking views to inform the campaign of a political party, should be regarded as falling within the purdah period and therefore should not take place.

## **Who are the public?**

The public means people generally, or a section of them. Defined groups of people are not necessarily “a section of the public” and some communications addressed to such groups may not be restricted depending on the aim and effect of the communication.

## **Can we use any publicity in the lead up to an election?**

Yes but you must be cautious and also aware of the impact at a time when councillors may be running as candidates, or campaigning for a political party. You should avoid the issue of all forms of proactive publicity relating to candidates and other politicians involved directly in the elections. The best policy during purdah is to avoid mention of any councillor who is seeking election or re-election. You must also be careful to ensure that any publicity does not appear to be designed to support a particular party, or even to support a single specific viewpoint as promoted by a particular candidate or party.

Publicity should not either deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. However, these restrictions do not prevent officers dealing with controversial matters which are essentially apolitical.

It is also acceptable for the authority and its officers to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political. Members holding key political or civic positions should be able to comment in an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the authority’s control. Proactive events arranged in this period should not involve Members likely to be standing for election.

## **Press releases**

While there is no blanket ban on issuing press releases during purdah you must consider whether the news or information is vital at this time or can it wait until after the elections. If it cannot then the wording must be given careful consideration and the Media & Marketing team consulted at an early stage. It would be normal procedure during this period not to quote any councillors whether they are standing for election or not.

## **Images**

Staff must ensure that during the course of their duties that they do not use any photographs or images involving candidates.

## **Can councillors issue their own press releases or talk to the media?**

Councillors are free to talk to the media and issue press releases, but must not use council resources to do so.

## **Can councillors write letters ‘for publication’ to their local newspaper?**

Yes, as long as they don’t use council resources (such as staff) to help them do it.

## **Can councillors still tweet or blog?**

Councillors can continue, but must not use council resources to do so.