

**CENTRAL SWINDON NORTH
PARISH COUNCIL**

PURDAH COMPLIANCE POLICY

1. Introduction

This guidance note is intended to detail the restrictions that apply to official Parish Council organised publicity in the run up to local elections in our Parish. The relevant guidance is contained in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and Central Swindon North Parish Council is required by the Local Government Act 1986 to have regard to this guidance.

2. Objectives

This guidance applies to all Parish elections; however there may also be occasions throughout the year when a by-election is called in one particular ward.

Whilst this guidance also applies to by-elections, there may be more flexibility in respect of certain types of publicity and events in other areas of the parish where the by election is not taking place. The Clerk and Councillors should ensure caution is exercised during this period and further advice sought during the run up to any by election. The general legal principle set out in the code is that a local authority must not at any time publish any material that in whole or in part appears to be designed to affect support for a political party or a candidate. The run up to an election is a particularly sensitive time and the period is referred to as **Purdah**.

3. Elections, Referendums & Petitions

The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other Councillors involved directly in the election.

Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals, or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual councillors or groups of councillors.

It is however acceptable for the Parish Council to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political.

Councillors 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 Parish Councils control. Proactive events arranged in this period should not involve councillors likely to be standing for election.

4. **Publicity in the Pre-Election period guidance.**

The following points summarise the guidance for Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Senior Parish Officers.

GREEN LIGHT: Acceptable Practice

- Usual Business Matters: Publicity with Parish Council quotes from Parish Clerk only.
- Reactive publicity can include Councillors commenting in an emergency or a major news event outside the Council's control.
- Councillors can create their own individual, non-political publicity.
- Councillors can attend events arranged by other organisations, but the same restrictions apply about quoting such events in any Council publicity.
- Decision-making will continue as usual, and the decisions will be publicised, subject to the restrictions about quotes.

AMBER LIGHT: Acceptable Practice; Proceed with Caution/ Seek advice

- Quotations (direct / indirect): Councillors not involved in the election may make quotes or may be quoted if there are no political tones or references contained within the quotes.
- Avoid proactively scheduling events attracting public and media interest. Events that are unavoidable should not publicise individual councillors or their respective political parties and policies.

RED LIGHT: Unacceptable Practice; Do not Proceed

- Councillors involved in the election will not be quoted in proactive news releases issued by the Parish Council.
- Councillors involved in the election should not attend any events organised by the Parish Council that may attract significant numbers of members of the public, or media interest.
- Councillors due for election will not have access to the Parish Office for the use or preparation of any materials including paper or printing.
 - No election materials, political posters or leaflets must be displayed on any of our Parish notice boards, Within directly managed Parish premises such as Community Centres or property such as on our bins or bus shelters.

5. **Frequently Asked Questions**

Q: *When do the restrictions apply?*

A: The restrictions apply six weeks before an election and up to and including the day of the election.

Q: *What happens to press releases during this period?*

A: The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity provides that: Particular care needs to be taken to ensure that publicity could not be perceived as seeking to influence public opinion or to promote the public image of a particular candidate or group of candidates.

Publicity should not be issued which deals with controversial issues or which reports views on policies in a way that identifies them with

individual councillors or groups of councillors. Councillors involved in the election may not be quoted in any pro-active news releases issued.

The Council's communication spokesperson (Parish Clerk) follows a policy of avoiding mention of any Councillor who is seeking re-election.

Q: Are all Councillors in the same position?

A: No; the guidance applies to publicity about all Councillors who are involved directly in the election whether as a candidate or in some other capacity. CSNPC interprets this to mean those Councillors who are standing: as a candidate; or acting as an agent. Other Councillors may be quoted, but great care must be taken with the contents of any quotes, to ensure that they do not have any party-political flavour.

There may be circumstances where individual councillors are so closely associated with party political issues that it would be impossible to quote them without giving the press release a political slant. Advice should firstly be sought from the Parish Clerk.

Q: What about publicity for events?

A: The word "publicity" has the widest possible meaning, and the restrictions apply to events organised by the Council that attract significant numbers of the public, or media interest. Councillors who are standing as candidates should not be involved in such events.

Other Councillors who are involved in the election should not use such events to publicise themselves, their parties, or the policies or candidates they support. It is better to avoid proactively scheduling PR events and photo opportunities during this period if possible.

Q: What about events that cannot be re-scheduled for operational reasons?

A: If a Council event cannot be postponed until after the election it is vital it is organised in such a way to minimise the likelihood of criticism arising that the real purpose of the event is to publicise one particular party. For example, if a candidate or representative from one party is to attend, then representatives of other parties and independent members should also be invited, and all should be asked not to use the event for political purposes.

Q: Can Councillors attend events organised by other organisations?

A: Councillors can attend events but the same restrictions apply about quoting them in any council publicity.

Q: What happens to Council business during this period?

A: Decision-making will continue as usual, decisions made by any Council are made in a democratic way (by a majority vote by those Members in attendance and voting) and are decisions made as a 'Corporate Body'. Decisions will be publicised as per normal (on the Parish Council website).

Q: What are the rules for Parish Officers?

A: Council staff must always be careful not to give the impression of supporting any political party, policies or candidate. They must not engage in political activity during working hours or with Council facilities.

Parish Officers are not generally employed in formally restricted Politically Restricted roles.

Q: What about posters and leaflets?

A: No election materials, political posters or leaflets must be displayed on any Parish Council premises or property (including street furniture, notice boards, market stalls, web-site etc.). No Councillor is allowed to circulate any such materials before, during, or after, any meeting of the Council during this period.

Q: What happens to the CSNPC Newsletter?

A: The Parish Newsletter will not contain a welcome or update from the Chairman or Vice Chairman during Purdah, this will be written by the Parish Clerk and remain a-political (neutral). The Parish Clerk should suggest avoiding publication of the newsletters during Purdah.

Q; Can Council premises be used for political meetings?

A: Yes provided payment and booking process is made in the normal way.

For enquiries on this Policy please contact CSNPC
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