

**GUIDANCE CONCERNING THE PRE-ELECTION PERIOD (PURDAH)**

***Part A - General Guidance***

This guidance relates to the period (commencing 31 May 2024) which leads up to the General Election being held on 4 July 2024.

There are no County Council elections during this period but this is a period of heightened sensitivity, therefore safeguards need to be put in place to avoid breaches of the Code of Recommended Local Authority Publicity published by the Government in 2011.

This guidance is to ensure that the Council complies with the law which prevents us from communicating any material to the public that appears to be designed to influence public support for a political party or an individual candidate for election, but at the same time allowing day-to-day business to carry on at election time.

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During the election period there will be increased scrutiny on all publicity produced by the Council and extra care should be taken, and advice sought, when considering events and publicity.

The law applies to all information which is addressed to the public and published by the Council, for instance, its website or social media channels, in Council leaflets or other publications (including consultations), within a press release, at a Council event or presentation, etc.

**Council publicity**

County Council business will continue as usual; however the following restrictions must be observed in any material County Council publishes:

* The Council **must not** publish any material which promotes any candidate or political party or may appear to do so;

In particular:

* + No public events involving candidates should be organised. This includes the opening of any new buildings, awards ceremonies, or anything which may attract publicity.
	+ Councillors are reminded that they must not use Council resources for political campaigning purposes (this includes emails, NCC stationery, webpages etc);
	+ employees are not able to help with political campaigning and must not use Council stationery or printing facilities, ICT equipment, notice boards, emails, etc. for that purpose.
	+ employees and Councillors should check they are aware of, and understand, the relevant provisions of their Code of Conduct which can be found in the [Constitution](https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/dms/Constitution/tabid/105/FolderID/5/Constitution-2012-13-Current-Version.aspx?Council%20Constitution).

This does not prevent factual information about the County Council being reported but officers need to consider how such information is presented. Reporting on controversial issues, views or proposals in ways which identify them with individual candidates or political parties should be avoided.

**Permitted activities**

Candidates may have their photo taken outside County Council buildings providing they (or their political party) cover any costs and this does not disrupt service provision at Council premises.

Councillors who are candidates may produce their own publicity provided that they do not use Council resources. They may also speak to local media and be photographed by them provided they arrange their own publicity. If visiting Council premises this must not disrupt service provision.

**County Councillors**

County Councillors may:

* continue to carry out their routine County Council business and commitments;
* where necessary, act as spokesperson for the County Council, but care should be taken to avoid promoting or appearing to promote any candidate or political party, or referring to an issue of political controversy, particularly where any members are standing as election candidates;
* **not** use Council facilities or equipment to publish material for campaigning purposes or for party political activities (for example photocopying or posting campaign leaflets).

**Additional support and guidance**

Guidance for schools is available separately. If you are in doubt on any matter please contact:

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| Keith Ford | keith.ford@nottscc.gov.uk  | 0115 977 2590 |
| Charles Mason | charles.mason@nottscc.gov.uk  | 0115 804 4486 |
| Linda Walker | linda.walker@nottscc.gov.uk  | 0115 977 2438 |
| Sara Allmond | sara.allmond@nottscc.gov.uk  | 0115 977 3794 |
| Jo Toomey | jo.toomey@nottscc.gov.uk  | 0115 977 4506 |
| Heather Dickinson | heather.dickinson@nottscc.gov.uk  | 0115 977 4835 |

**N.B.** **All Councillors are entitled at any time, including the pre-election period, to arrange any publicity for themselves as they wish.**

**Candidates are entitled (on giving reasonable notice) to the use of available meeting rooms on County Council premises, including schools for free except for any expenses, such as heating costs which may be charged for.**

***Part B – Additional Guidelines for Officers Planning Council Events or Publicity***

It is important that all publicity should be objective and even-handed and nothing should be published that could appear to actively support a political party or any candidates.

Careful consideration should be given to one off events, new initiatives and consultations during this time, particularly how they are publicised using Council resources to ensure that they are not seen to be associated with one political party over another.

Although this guidance applies during the pre-election period you should consider it now when planning events or publicity for the pre-election period.

* + - You should ask yourself:
* could this activity be perceived as being designed to encourage support for a particular party?
* if so, does the activity need to take place now or could it wait until after the election?
* When considering whether or not the activity is prohibited you need to consider:
	+ the content and style of the material;
	+ the time and circumstances of the publication;
	+ the likely effect of the material on those to whom it is directed;
	+ whether the material promotes or opposes a particular point of view on a question of political controversy or relevance to the election taking place which can be specifically identified as the view of one political party (or candidate) but not another;
	+ references to a political party or candidate or to persons identified with a political party;
	+ if the material is part of a campaign, what effect the campaign appears designed to achieve.
* The restrictions on publicity should not prevent the reporting of factual information about the Council (which may include factual references to the candidates) but you may need to think about how such information is presented when you take into account the above considerations.
* Some activities may need to be brought forward/ postponed until after the election. During this period of time: -
	+ No public events involving candidates should be organised by the Council. This includes the opening of any new buildings, awards ceremonies, or anything which may attract publicity.
	+ The content and/or timing of announcements regarding new initiatives or services or the launch of consultations should be carefully considered during this period.

***Part C – Additional guidelines regarding hire of meeting rooms***

All candidates, including current County Councillors, can use meeting rooms which the County Council, and its schools, hire out for public meetings and events. Reasonable notice must be given and the reservation will only be accepted if it does not clash with another booking.

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| **Practical application of the guidance** |
| * Publicity must not deal with controversial issues or report views or proposals in ways which identify them with individual candidates or political parties. Announcements on these matters should be deferred until after the election wherever possible.
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| * Publicity must not include descriptions of achievements which could imply that a specific Councillor or political group deserves to be rewarded for their achievements by being elected. Achievements and successes should be reported in relation to the Council generally and not in relation to any particular candidate or political group.
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| * In light of the D-Day 80th anniversary events in June it is considered both inappropriate and impractical for these to be postponed. These events may be attended by candidates but no specific photographs of those individuals should be arranged via Council resources, although group shots with a range of other attendees at such events would be permissible. However no speeches or press interviews with candidates will be allowed using Council resources.
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| * If statements to (or interviews with) the media are unavoidable, consideration should be given to whether it is necessary/appropriate for a Councillor spokesperson to provide a response. Where this is not considered appropriate, senior Council officers should provide responses. All comments should be confined to statements of fact and references to Councillors who are candidates must be kept to an absolute minimum if they cannot be completely avoided.
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| * When responding to media enquiries, officers should not be drawn into discussion of matters which may be politically controversial or which are still under consideration/ where policy is yet to be determined.
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| * Quoting from candidates or their agents or advisors, must be avoided and if quotes are necessary, they should, if possible, be attributed to an officer.
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| * If briefing Councillors in advance of press interviews, etc., officers should only provide factual responses.
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| * Serving County Councillors standing for election should be treated in the same way as other candidates unless their enquiries relate exclusively to their role as councillor and not as candidate.
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