

Meeting	Full Council
Date	Tuesday 24 th January 2023
Report Title	Media Policy & Purdah Reminder
Agenda Reference	13
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Recommendation: To note the report.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Local elections in the United Kingdom will be held on Thursday 4th May 2023. Elections will be held for one Councillor in each of the wards of Swindon Borough Council except Ridgeway ward and all Haydon Wick Parish Councillors.
- 1.2 Councils and council officers must not publish, arrange or give financial support to the publication of any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party. Councils are required to have regard to the [Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity](#) (March 2011), when considering publicity decisions.
- 1.3 The pre-election period, previously known as 'purdah', describes the period immediately before elections or referendums when specific restrictions on communications activity are in place. Councils must take *extra care* when considering their publishing obligations due to the heightened sensitivity of the period.
- 1.4 The pre-election period runs from Wednesday 22nd March 2023 to Thursday 4th May 2023 inclusive. This is a 6-week period which commences with the publication of Notices of Election and ends on election day.
- 1.5 Taking *extra care* means that a council must not do anything which helps to promote or endorse individual candidates. This applies to all local councils, regardless of whether their candidates are independent, or party affiliated.
- 1.6 Once we enter the Purdah period, it is important that this Council, its employees, and Councillors do not engage in activities or publicity that could be seen as influencing the outcome of the election.
- 1.7 This does not prevent a Councillor from expressing their views, as long as they are clear that they are acting in a personal capacity.

2.0 Communications Guidance

- 2.1 We all have different roles in our lives; our roles in the Parish, our role as a Parish Councillor and it is important that the lines are not blurred between the role of private individual, Parish Councillor and in some cases Borough Councillor.



- 2.2 The role of Parish Councillor should not be used to promote personal activities or Swindon Borough Council activities.
- 2.3 Emails should not be used for non-parish correspondence.
- 2.4 Email signatures should not include links to non-Parish websites and Facebook pages.
- 2.5 Publicity about individual Members may include:
 - 2.5.1 Information about their contact details, the positions they hold, their responsibilities; and
 - 2.5.2 Information about their proposals, decisions and recommendations, where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities in the council.
- 2.6 Any such publicity must be objective and explanatory and, whilst it may acknowledge the part played by those individuals as holders of particular positions, the over-personalisation of issues or excessive personal image making should be avoided.

3.0 Media Policy

- 3.1 Councillors are reminded that, any material or press release in which you are described as a Parish Councillor and/or describe your work as a Parish Councillor must be signed off by the Chief Officer/Clerk.
- 3.2 This is to ensure they are factually correct and are a true representation of the Parish Council position of any matter.
- 3.3 Councillors may also wish to send their material to their fellow colleagues to proofread before sending to the Chief Officer.

4.0 All Staff

- 4.1 Under the Council's Member/Officer Protocol the Council requires all employees to exercise care and judgment in the exercise of their duties, endeavouring always to represent the Council's interests to most benefit and avoid damaging the reputation of the Council.
- 4.2 Officers must perform their duties effectively, efficiently and with political neutrality. This includes not conducting themselves in any way that may appear to conflict with their duty of political impartiality. Whatever beliefs a staff member holds whether political or otherwise, it is important to reflect on all behaviour so as not to give the appearance of partiality and to ensure they do not bring the council into disrepute.
- 4.3 An officer's first duty is to the Council as a whole and not to an individual Member, or to a political or other group of Members. However, Officers may be called upon to provide advice to the majority group or Chairs. This should not preclude them offering a similar service to all Members whether politically affiliated or independent.

5.0 Additional Guidance

- 5.1 [Guide to using Social Media during Purdah](#)
- 5.2 [FAQs about Pre Election Period](#)