



## Publicity Policy

Adopted by council on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2019

**The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011**, applies to local councils as well as principal councils. Local authorities are required by law to have regard to the contents of this Code in coming to any decision on publicity. Publicity means “any communication in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public”. The code therefore applies in relation to all decisions by local authorities relating to paid advertising and leaflet campaigns, publication of free newspapers and news sheets and maintenance of websites –including the hosting of material which is created by third parties.

Nothing in this code overrides the prohibition on the publication by local authorities of material which in whole or in part appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party.

Publicity by local authorities should be:

- lawful
- cost effective
- objective
- even-handed
- appropriate
- in accordance with equality and diversity rules
- issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

Paid for advertising must comply with the Advertising Standards Authority’s Advertising Codes.

In relation to all publicity, local authorities should be able to confirm that consideration has been given to the value for money that is being achieved, including taking into account any loss of potential revenue arising from the use of local authority-owned facilities to host authority publicity.

In some circumstances, it will be difficult to quantify value for money, for example where the publicity promotes a local amenity which is free to use. In such a case, authorities should be able to show that they have given thought to alternative means of promoting the amenity and satisfied themselves that the means of publicity chosen is the most appropriate.

If another public authority, such as central government, has issued publicity on a particular topic, local authorities should incur expenditure on issuing publicity on the same matter only if they consider that additional value is achieved by the duplication of that publicity.

The purchase of advertising space should not be used as a method of subsidising voluntary, public or commercial organisations.

Local authorities should consider whether it is appropriate to seek advice from economic analysts, public relations experts or other sources of expert advice before embarking on a publicity campaign involving

very large expenditure.

Local authorities should ensure that publicity relating to policies and proposals from central government is balanced and factually accurate. Such publicity may set out the local authority's views and reasons for holding those views, but should avoid anything likely to be perceived by readers as constituting a political statement, or being a commentary on contentious areas of public policy.

Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both. Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy. It is acceptable for local authority publicity to correct erroneous material which has been published by other parties, despite the fact that the material being corrected may have been published with the intention of influencing the public's opinions about the policies of the authority.

Where paid-for advertising is used by local authorities, it should be clearly identified as being advertising.

Advertisements for the recruitment of staff should reflect the tradition of political impartiality of local authority employees.

Where local authority publicity addresses matters of political controversy, it should seek to present the different positions in relation to the issue in question in a fair manner.

In most circumstances, it is acceptable for local authorities to publicise the work done by individual members of the authority. This might be appropriate, for example, when one councillor has been the face" of a particular campaign. If views expressed by or attributed to individual councillors do not reflect the views of the local authority itself, such publicity should make this fact clear.

Maintenance by a local authority of a website permitting the posting of material by third parties constitutes a continuing act of publication by that local authority which must accordingly have a system for moderating and removing any unacceptable material. Where local authorities provide assistance to third parties to issue publicity they should ensure that the principles in this code are adhered to by the recipients of that assistance.

Local authorities should not incur any expenditure in retaining the services of lobbyists for the purpose of the publication of any material designed to influence public officials, Members of Parliament, political parties or the Government to take a particular view on any issue. Local authorities should not incur expenditure on providing stands or displays at conferences of political parties.

Local authorities should not publish or incur expenditure in commissioning in hard copy or on any website, newsletters, news sheets or similar communications which seek to emulate commercial newspapers in style or content. Where local councils do commission or publish newsletters, news sheets or similar communications, they should not issue them more frequently than monthly. Such communications should not include materials other than information for the public about the business, services and amenities of the council or other local service providers.

Publicity about local authorities and the services they provide should be freely available to anyone who wishes to receive such information in a format readily accessible and understandable by the person making the request or by any particular group for which services are provided. All local authority publicity should clearly and unambiguously identify itself as a product of the local authority.

Publicity by local authorities may seek to influence positively the attitudes of local people or public

behaviour in relation to matters of health, safety, crime prevention, race relations, equality, diversity and community issues. Local authorities should consider how any publicity they issue can contribute to the promotion of any duties applicable to them in relation to the elimination of discrimination, the advancement of equality and the fostering of good relations.

Local authorities should pay particular regard to the legislation governing publicity during the period of heightened sensitivity before elections and referendums.