

CIPR

CHARTERED INSTITUTE
OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

UK General Election 2024

Political Activity
and Communications
Guide

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By the end of 2024, almost half of the world's population will have taken part in national elections. This document focuses on considerations and regulations for communicators in the United Kingdom in the context of a General Election; however, as a global Institute, we recognise our members operate in diverse and sometimes complex socio-political environments. We recommend you review the rules for communications in your own markets, countries and territories; your own industry or sectoral contexts; and refer back to the overarching CIPR Code of Conduct and Integrity documents in your decision-making process. If in doubt, please contact the CIPR [Ethics Hotline](#) for a confidential discussion.

During a general election period an organisation's political activities, including its communications, are regulated by law.

These regulations are covered by the following Acts:

- [Representation of the People Act 1983](#) – regulates activity regarded as promoting individual candidates standing for election.
- [The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act \(PPERA\) 2000](#) – regulates activity intended to influence the electorate as well as political donations. Amended by the [Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014](#).
- [Companies Act 2006](#) – regulates an organisation's campaigning expenditure and donations.

Regulated Period

We are now in the regulated period as set by the Electoral Commission. During this time, prior to the day of an election or referendum, restrictions on political activities apply. Rules on spending and donations apply at all times, including during the regulated period. All organisations must ensure their staff abide by these laws, including those working for charities or for clients in the third sector, and those working in local government.

Regulated Activity – public / purpose test

The Electoral Commission interprets whether activities comply with their guidelines via the [purpose test](#):

- Public – Are activities designed for a public audience?
- Purpose – Could activities be interpreted as intending to influence voters for or against a candidate standing for election or a political party?

If the answer is 'yes' to both these questions it is likely the activity constitutes regulated activity and may impact the spending limit. It is advised organisations keep records of costs associated with these activities.

For more information on non-party campaigning visit the [Electoral Commission](#).

Controlled expenditure

The limits on how much you can spend as a registered non-party campaigner during the regulated period for a UK Parliamentary general election was updated in December 2023.

[Find out more.](#)

These costs – defined as “controlled expenditure” – include spending on areas such as:

- Producing or publishing public material.
- Canvassing or market research.
- Hosting press conferences or media events.
- Hosting public rallies or events.

Charities

Charities have a legitimate and valuable role in lobbying for change; often their policy position on an issue will be similar to a political party's. However, charities must ensure that they make their independence from political parties entirely clear. In doing so they must offer no encouragement to, or financially support, a party or candidate. Charities may not be established for political purposes although may engage in political activities to achieve its purpose. There may be circumstances where spending on activities that are in pursuit of their purposes means that they must register with the Electoral Commission as a non-party campaigner.

DO

- Charities can campaign for a change in the law on matters where such change would support the charity's purposes. This can include raising the public interest and encouraging debate.
- Charities can campaign to ensure that existing laws are observed.
- In any publicity material a charity may promote its own views on a particular policy issue but must remain impartial.
- Charities are permitted to continue their purpose to influence public opinion and policy, but the electorate must not be influenced who to vote for.
- During the election period charities are permitted to share the views of candidates where their views relate to the charitable objectives.
- Any charity spend on regulated political activity over £20K in England (or £10K in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland) is required to be registered with the Electoral Commission.
- Social media activity will also be regulated if it passes both the 'public' and 'purpose' tests. Producing infographics or videos that pass the tests must count all the staff and non-staff costs that relate to the design and production of these materials.

DON'T

- A charity must not advocate support or opposition for a particular party or candidate.
- Charitable engagement with political parties and candidates is bound by financial restrictions; charities must never donate funds to political parties, candidates or politicians.
- Trustees must not allow a charity to be used as a vehicle for the expression of their political views. Any trustees, staff members, or employees who engage in regulated political activity in a personal capacity must officially declare it.
- Under electoral law, some charities or schools may be required to hold meetings for political events free of charge. Alternatively, a candidate may wish to use the charity's premises for a meeting – in this instance they will be subject to normal commercial rates.

Further information

- Electoral Commission – [‘Charities and Campaigning’](#).
- Charity Commission for England and Wales – [Campaigning and political activity guidance for charities](#).
- Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) Scottish Charity Regulator – [‘Charities and campaigning on political issues FAQs’](#).
- The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland – [‘Guidance for charities in Northern Ireland on political purposes, political activity and campaigning’](#).
- Bond – [‘Understanding the Lobbying Act’](#).
- NCVO – [‘Political Campaigning as a Charity’](#).

Local Government

For local councils, pre-election rules restrict activity beyond publicity including the use of council facilities and resources, the member's code of conduct, developing new policies and holding of events featuring elected officials. It is not necessary for communication to stop during an election period. Instead, the ordinary functions of councils should continue, although restrictions do apply by law to all councillors and officers.

DO

- Councils may engage in normal council business, for example determining planning applications.
- Councils may continue to run local campaigns. If these are already running and would waste public money to cancel or postpone them, then they are able to continue, so long as they are not deemed to influence the outcome of the election. Councillors should not feature as part of a campaign.
- Councils should take extra caution when launching new consultations – with the exception of those required by law – to ensure they are not politically sensitive.

- Councils may publish factual information to counteract misleading, controversial or extreme information relating to the council.
- Councils may use relevant lead officers rather than elected members for reactive media releases.
- Councils may use a politician who is involved in an election when the council is required to respond to an emergency beyond the council's control. However, councils are encouraged to use an official at the council who holds a politically neutral role.

DON'T

- Politically controversial matters should not be included in council publicity activities; either in support or opposition of a political party through direct campaigning or sharing content on social media.
- Campaigning activities must not attempt to influence the outcome of an election.
- Councils should not make references to individual politicians or groups in press releases.
- Councils should not issue photographs which include candidates or supply council photographs and other materials to councillors or political group staff unless you have verified that they will not be used for campaigning purposes. It is advised to remove the option to download council photos of candidates during the election period.
- Councils should not continue hosting third party blogs or e-communications.
- Councils should not arrange proactive media or events involving candidates or help with national political visits. These should be organised by political parties with no cost or resource implications for the council.

For more information read the Local Government Association guides;

- [A short guide to publicity during the pre-election period.](#)
- [Pre-election period: social media.](#)

Further Reading/Resources

- The Cabinet Office and Civil Service – [‘Election Guidance for Civil Servants’](#).
- Electoral Commission – [‘Media Handbook’](#).
- Institute for Government – [How is election spending regulated in the UK.](#)