

HILLINGDON RESIDENTS' SURVEY 2010/11

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| Cabinet Members | Councillor Ray Puddifoot Councillor Scott Seaman-Digby |
| Cabinet Portfolios | Leader of the Council Co-ordination and Central Services |
| Officer Contact | David Holdstock, Central Services |
| Papers with report | Appendix A – The Code of Recommended Practice On Local Authority publicity |

HEADLINE INFORMATION

| | |
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| Purpose of report | <p>To report to Cabinet the main findings of the Hillingdon Residents' Survey, evidencing high levels of residents' satisfaction.</p> <p>To note and endorse the main principles of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and endorse the continued publication of six editions of Hillingdon People a year.</p> |
| Contribution to our plans and strategies | <p>The results of the residents' survey support our understanding of residents' needs and levels of satisfaction and contribute to all of the council's business and service plans as a key indicator of council performance.</p> <p>The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity is key to the delivery of all communications activity in Hillingdon, contributing to the council's communications strategy, as well as supporting directorate business plans.</p> |
| Financial Cost | There are no additional financial costs associated with the recommendations of this report. |
| Relevant Policy Overview Committee | All are relevant. |
| Ward(s) affected | All |

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 That Cabinet notes the findings of the Hillingdon residents' survey 2010/11.**
- 2 That Cabinet:**
 - (i) Welcome the new Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity code and the seven principles of communications.**
 - (ii) Endorse the council's approach to pro-active communications to inform, explain, justify and change behaviour for the public good.**
 - (iii) Note the specific requirements of local residents and duties under other legislation which means that while we will have regard to the code, we will act as local circumstances demand, in the interests of Hillingdon's residents and in line with legislation.**
 - (iv) Agree that the council will continue to publish six editions of Hillingdon People a year, based on the available evidence and in the best interests of our residents.**
 - (v) Authorise the Authority to continue to lobby the Secretary of State to end the requirement to place statutory and other advertising in local newspapers on the grounds of efficiency and effectiveness.**

Reasons for recommendation

As part of the council's approach to managing performance and to find out the views of residents, the Council has for the last four years undertaken a residents' survey. As well as questions about council services, the survey also includes questions which examine how well the council communicates with residents and how well informed they feel about council services.

In addition, this Cabinet report sets out the main elements of the new Codes of Practice on Local Authority Publicity, which is likely to come into force in April 2011.

The report also makes a recommendation about maintaining the frequency of publication of Hillingdon People, the council's residents' magazine.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The council could decide to reduce the number of editions of Hillingdon People to four a year.

Comments of Policy Overview Committee(s)

None at this stage.

Hillingdon residents' survey 2010/11

Information

Each year, the council commissions a survey of residents to find out their views and track satisfaction with council services. This report sets out the main findings of the Hillingdon Residents' Survey 2010/11. The fieldwork was conducted between 15 November and 11 December 2010.

The survey was conducted online with email invitations sent to a sample of residents aged 18+. 1,808 respondents completed the survey.

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-----|
| The age profile of respondents was: | 18-34 | 13% |
| | 35-55 | 47% |
| | 55+ | 39% |

Although an absolute like-for-like comparison to previous government-led surveys is not possible due to the methodology (postal compared to online), this is a bigger sample than the council has ever had and is more representative in terms of age profile. This allows us to look at trends in perception and satisfaction.

In addition, the costs were significantly reduced and around 1,000 residents have agreed to remain on a database for the council to undertake future consultation with them.

The research allows the council to understand residents' views about its image and performance across a range of services and issues. It also enables the council to track changes in residents' opinions over time.

The research explored the following specific areas:

- advocacy of and image of Hillingdon Council;
- views on council services (including usage of services);
- Council communications and information provision;
- Contact with the council.

Financial Implications

None in relation to the noting report about the residents' survey.

No additional costs arising from the recommendation about Hillingdon People.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

The noting report about the residents' survey will help strengthen the evidence base to support our vision of 'putting our residents first'.

The information about the Codes of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity provides Cabinet with detailed information about the impact of the new Codes in Hillingdon.

The recommendation about maintaining the frequency of Hillingdon People will help to keep our residents informed. Research and evidence shows that residents value Hillingdon People as a key source of local information, In addition, it is cited as the preferred method of getting information about the council and council services.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

To support the recommendation about Hillingdon People, results from the residents' survey have been used to support the business case to maintain six editions a year, along with the results of a residents' communication survey and media consumption habits survey.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and is satisfied that there are no additional financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Although a reduction in the number of editions generated per year, would provide some level of savings, the feedback from residents is that this is the most appropriate and cost-effective way to communicate with them. Maintaining the current level of editions would therefore be most beneficial to the Council.

Legal

Residents' survey 2010/11

There are no legal implications resulting from the noting report about the residents' survey.

The Codes of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity

Section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986 enables the Secretary of State to "issue one or more codes of recommended practice as regards the content, style, distribution and cost of Local Authority Publicity". The section goes on to state that "local authorities shall have regard to the provisions of any such code in coming to any decision on publicity". Any codes must be approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.

The status of the Code, once approved, is that it constitutes the Secretary of State's view of "recommended practice". There is no legal obligation on the Council to adhere to the provisions of the code; only to have regard to its content before making any decisions about the publicity it wishes to generate. If the Council wishes to depart from any provisions of the code it should be ready to explain its reasons for doing so. In this regard, this report recommends that the Council continues to publish six editions of Hillingdon People per year. The Report explains the reasons why it is considered appropriate to do so and these reasons are considered to be a reasonable exercise of the Council's discretion.

Cabinet is also advised of two other provisions of the Local Government Act 1986. Section 2 prohibits the publication of material "which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party". In this regard the draft code (paragraph 24) states that "publicity material produced by local authorities relating to a particular Member must not seek to affect public support for that individual". This provision of the Code accurately reflects the law.

Further, Section 5 of the Act requires the Council to "keep a separate account of their expenditure on publicity" and for this account to be available for public inspection. This record is kept by the Head of Corporate Communications.

Corporate Landlord

Not applicable.

Relevant Service Groups

The council's senior managers are aware of the residents' survey results and service-specific findings are being presented to individual senior management teams.

The council's senior management has also been briefed on the broad proposals contained within the Codes of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

This report presents a summary of the main findings from the residents' survey. A fuller version of the findings will be published on the council's website.

The report also includes:

The Codes of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (Annex A).

Supporting Information

The residents' survey 2010/11

Overall findings

The results for the council corporately are excellent, with good levels of satisfaction with the way the council is run, offering value for money and overall advocacy. This is against the national mood and media reporting about councils, council services, value for money and how well they are being run. Encouragingly, more residents would speak highly of the council than would be critical. Other overall perceptions of the council are that it does its best to protect the environment and the borough's heritage. This shows a clear alignment with the council's corporate priorities.

Satisfaction with most of the council's signature services – household waste collection (88%), doorstep recycling (83%), parks and open spaces (76%) and libraries (79%) – remains very high.

Questions related to the borough's older residents show that the free burglar alarms and council tax freeze initiatives are rated as 'very important' by residents (93% and 88% respectively).

Satisfaction amongst users of youth facilities is good as is satisfaction with primary and secondary education.

Some further work to examine the levels of satisfaction with childcare/play facilities will need to be undertaken as these scores are relatively low.

(i) Advocacy

Overall, residents have a positive view of the council and the way it is run (42%), manages its finances (48%) and keeps them informed (70%). Advocacy is high and shows an increase on previous years with more residents speaking highly of the council than would be critical (45%). The results for the number of residents who feel the council ‘does a lot for people like me’ and ‘considers residents’ views when making decisions’ have held up on previous year.

| | |
|---|------------|
| I would speak highly of the council | 45% |
| The council is well run | 42% |
| The council gives local people good value for money | 48% |
| Takes account of residents’ views when making decisions | 34% |
| Is helpful when you contact the council | 52% |
| Does enough for people like me | 35% |
| The council keeps me well informed | 70% |

Base: All residents

(ii) Our people - Supporting older people

Older residents show high levels of satisfaction with the council and specific initiatives under the Older People’s Plan and Leader’s Initiative. Free burglar alarms and council tax freeze initiatives are rated as ‘very important’ by residents (93% and 88% respectively).

| How important are the following initiatives? | 2010 |
|---|-------------|
| Council tax freeze for over 65s | 88% |
| Support for victims of burglary | 93% |
| Older people’s budget | 84% |
| Brown badge scheme | 76% |
| Free swimming | 74% |

(iii) Our people – Customer care

52% of respondents say the council is helpful when contacted. Three quarters (77%) of those who have contacted the council in the last two years for reasons other than to make a complaint say that staff are helpful, while two thirds (64%) are satisfied with the information they were given. The telephone continues to be the preferred option for people to contact the council, with 68% stating it as their first choice. Interestingly, more people (69%) would prefer to be contacted by email rather than telephone (50%) or letter (29%).

| | 2010 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| Satisfaction with information given | 64% |
| Helpfulness of staff | 77% |

Base: All those who contacted the council in the past two years for reasons other than to make a complaint.

(iv) Our people – feeling safe

More than two thirds of residents feel safe living in the borough, with more than half saying the council and the police are tackling anti-social behaviour effectively. Satisfaction has increased since the launch of the community safety partnership’s anti-social behaviour campaign. Of those who don’t feel safe, only 25% say they know who to contact about their concerns. Work has already started to address this issue.

| | Yes | No |
|---|------------|-----------|
| Satisfaction with the way the council and police deal with anti-social behaviour | 51% | 36% |
| Overall, do you feel safe living in Hillingdon? | 65% | 29% |
| Do you know who to contact with your concerns Based on those who do not feel safe)? | 25% | 67% |

(v) Our people – Young people

Residents’ satisfaction with primary and secondary education is high and satisfaction with youth facilities amongst users is also good. However, this falls amongst non-users which may be explained by a lack of knowledge or interest in youth facilities in the borough.

| | 2010 |
|--|------------------------------|
| Satisfaction with childcare/play facilities | 53% |
| Satisfaction with quality of primary education | 73% |
| Satisfaction with quality of secondary education | 62% |
| Satisfaction with youth clubs – All residents | 12% (53% of Users) |

Base: All users unless otherwise mentioned

(vi) Our built and natural environments

Protecting the environment (58%) and borough’s heritage (55%) are the two highest rated council priorities by residents and show a clear alignment with the council’s corporate priorities. Satisfaction with parks and open spaces (76%) is very high.

Satisfaction with household waste collection (88%) and doorstep recycling (83%) are both excellent but there is some concern about the lack of a tip in the south of the borough.

The key issue in relation to the Planning Service is an apparent lack of understanding about its role. Work is already underway to explain the role of the Planning Service (such as an article in Hillingdon People) and the decisions that are taken in relation to planning.

Satisfaction is high with leisure and library services.

| | 2010 |
|--|-------------|
| Household waste collection | 88% |
| Doorstep recycling | 83% |
| Local recycling facilities | 69% |
| Waste and recycling centres | 67% |
| The planning service | *34% |
| Street cleaning | 60% |
| Improving road safety | 44% |
| Satisfaction with sport/leisure facilities | 66% |
| Satisfaction with libraries | 79% |
| Satisfaction with theatres | 74% |
| Satisfaction with parks & open spaces | 76% |
| Satisfaction with adult education facilities | 52% |

Base: All residents excluding No Opinion and No Response

*Satisfaction as a proportion of the total response has remained stable but has gone down when calculated as per the Government guidelines used in the surveys in 2008 and 2009. This means that overall, satisfaction with the planning service has stayed (27%) about the same but people are now less likely to say don't know.

Areas for further analysis

Where satisfaction with individual service areas (such as satisfaction with childcare/play facilities, the planning service) is lower than for other services, work is already underway to provide further analysis to look at the reason behind this.

The difference between service users and non-service users for some services influences satisfaction considerably and work is underway to look at this issue.

In some areas (such as advocacy of the council) there are still significant numbers of 'don't knows'. This is an area the council should seek to influence.

A full version of the residents' survey will be published on the council's website – www.hillingdon.gov.uk

Supporting Information

Code of Conduct on Local Authority Publicity

Summary

Keeping residents informed is a key driver of satisfaction (as evidenced in the results of the residents' survey 2010/11). Local authority publicity is governed by legislation and a number of codes. Following consultation, a new code is due to be introduced. This report sets out the main principles of the new Code of Conduct on local Authority Publicity, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government on 11 February 2011 and which is likely to come into force in April 2011. It replaces the 2001 Code. The new code focuses on seven principles. Council publicity should:

- be lawful
- be cost effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to equality and diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

Specifics include the prohibition of using lobbyists, a restriction on the frequency of council publications, a duty to promote community protection issues and secure value for money.

Election arrangements remain unchanged.

Introduction

Following a period of consultation, The Department for Communities and Local Government has recently announced changes to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. The new codes are likely to come into force in April 2011. These will impact on all council publicity and in particular, the frequency of council publications.

Hillingdon contributed to the consultation, setting out the case for retaining more local decision-making about the frequency of council publications.

The revised Code includes seven new central principles that make sure that council publicity is lawful, cost effective, objective, even handed and appropriate, and that it has regard to equality and diversity and is issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

- Advertising should be balanced, factually accurate and not likely to be perceived by the public as a political statement or a commentary on contentious areas of public policy.
- Councils should not publish newspapers in direct competition to local press. They should not appear more than quarterly and should only include material directly related to local services.
- Councils should not spend taxpayers' money to lobby government through private sector lobbyists or through publicity stalls at party conferences.

Council publications

A key element of the new Code is to recommend that the frequency of council publications be restricted to quarterly. This recommendation was produced largely in response to concerns raised by the Newspaper Society (the trade body for local newspapers) which claims such publications are damaging the viability of local newspapers and present 'unfair competition'.

The Code states that councils 'should not publish newsletters, newsheets or similar communications which seek to emulate commercial newspapers in style or content. Where local authorities do commission or publish newsheets, they should not issue them more frequently than quarterly. They should not include material other than information for the public about the business, services and amenities of the council or other local service providers.'

During consultation on the new code, a Select Committee heard significant evidence from individual councils, the LGA, London Councils and trade bodies (such as LGcommunications and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations). The Committee's final report stated that 'there is no evidence to suggest that council publications are damaging local newspapers.'

It should be noted that in Hillingdon, circulation figures for the local newspaper are relatively low (between 12,000 and 14,000 a week), reporters are not able to cover large parts of council business and newspaper offices are based outside the borough.

Residents are more satisfied with councils if they are well informed. Satisfaction with local authorities rises among those who feel they are informed about it and falls¹ among those who feel they are not informed.

Reading a local newspaper on its own keeps you as well informed about the services and benefits provided by the local council (46%) as if no newspaper was read at all (42%). This is not surprising as local newspapers focus on scrutiny of events, such as meetings, rather than the details of what a council offers. It is when someone has read either a council publication on its own (72%), or in conjunction with a local newspaper (70%), that they feel more informed about the council. There is also a difference in terms of satisfaction with a more positive outlook among those reading a local newspaper (65%), or in conjunction with a council publication (73%). Eight percent of the population only read a council publication and they are the most satisfied residents (81%).

Council publications are a proven and valued conduit of information for local communities and should continue to be used in conjunction with local media to inform and engage especially at a time when local newspapers are unable to provide journalists to cover council meetings.

Hillingdon People

The results of a media consumption ('who reads what') survey in November 2010 shows that Hillingdon People is the most popular source of finding out about council services with 63% of residents finding it useful (the figure was 43% for local newspapers). This is consistent with previous residents' surveys. In 2008, Hillingdon People was the source of information about the council which residents were most likely to say they found useful, which was rated as 'helpful' in 2009 by three quarters (75%) of residents. In the 2009 survey, Hillingdon People was also the channel through which the highest proportion of residents said they prefer to receive information about the council (55%).

Value for money

¹ Are residents prepared for budget cuts and how can you help them? LGinsight October 2010

When asked, residents have consistently told us they would prefer information about council services to be contained within Hillingdon People rather than through leaflets and flyers.

As a result of work undertaken to reduce the amount of printed material, It is projected that the council will save in the region Of £200,000 this year 9when compared to the same period last year) on printed materials.

Powers of sanction

The new code is advisory and has to be considered, but is a statutory instrument, not statute. The department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) says: 'The Department's view is that there is no power in the 1986 Act to provide for any enforcement mechanism in response to any purported breach of the Publicity Code. If members of the public consider that an authority has failed to have regard to the Publicity Code, they should raise their concern with the local authority directly, or contact the authority's auditor.' (Explanatory Memorandum CLG. 11/02/11).

The DCLG believes in the importance of communications, saying in its response to the Select Committee report: "For a community to be a healthy local democracy local understanding of the operation of the democratic process is important and effective communication is key to developing that understanding. Local authority publicity is important to transparency and to localism, as the public need to know what their local authority is doing if they are to hold it to account. In order to hold their local authority to account, the public need to have information about what their council is doing and why it is doing it." (DCLG Response to the Local Government Select Committee, February 2011).

Hillingdon has a demonstrable need for council information and Hillingdon People is well regarded by residents, fulfilling this need.

Public notices

The Code directs councils that 'the purchase of advertising space should not be used as a disguised method of subsidising voluntary, public or commercial organisations.'

We agree but believe that the government should also immediately lift the obligation on councils to advertise public planning, licensing and transport notices in local newspapers. This could be viewed as a 'disguised method of subsidising the local newspaper industry'.

Recent Local Government Association (LGA)² research shows that an average council will have to pay its local newspaper £105,000 a year (around £140,000 in Hillingdon) to print public notices which are routinely published online. It is estimated that existing outdated laws which require councils to advertise planning notices in local newspapers will cost £200m over the next five years. For the same money councils could fund the construction of 2,180 new council homes, pay the annual salaries of another 3,000 care workers or employ an extra 2,000 refuse collectors.

As local and central government are making extremely tough decisions about the service levels it can commit to it seems indefensible that councils remain obligated to advertise planning notices in this way when councils can identify more cost effective advertising channels.

Summary

² Report of the local authority newsletter/magazine survey LGA 2010

Hillingdon People does not seek to emulate a local newspaper and the feedback from residents is that this is the most appropriate and cost-effective way to communicate with our residents. On that basis, it is recommended to continue to publish six editions a year.

Cabinet is also asked to endorse the council's continued lobbying of the Government to lift the requirement to publish public notices in local newspapers. This information could be provided on the council's website, saving in the region of £140,000 a year.

Full details of new Government Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity can be found here: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/publicitycode2011.

Draft Code of Practice laid before Parliament under section 4(5) of the Local Government Act 1986, for approval by resolution of each House of Parliament.

THE CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY

Introduction

1. This code applies to all local authorities in England specified in section 6 of the Local Government Act 1986 and to other authorities in England which have that provision applied to them by other legislation. Where the term “local authorities” is used in this code it should be taken as referring to both those categories of authority. References to “the Act” are to the Local Government Act 1986.

2. Local authorities are required by section 4(1) of the Act to have regard to the contents of this code in coming to any decision on publicity. Section 6 of the Act defines publicity as “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 newsheets and maintenance of websites – including the hosting of material which is created by third parties.

3. Nothing in this code overrides the prohibition by section 2 of the Act 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. Paragraphs 21 to 24 offer some guidance for local authorities on the management of publicity which may contain or have links to party political material.

Principles

4. Publicity by local authorities should:-

- be lawful
- be cost-effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to equality and diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

Lawfulness

5. Local authorities should ensure that publicity complies with all applicable statutory provisions. Paid-for advertising must comply with the Advertising Standards Authority’s Advertising Codes.

6. Part 3 of the Communications Act 2003 prohibits political advertising on television or radio. Local authorities must ensure that their publicity does not breach these restrictions.

7. Section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 places a specific restriction on the publication by a local authority of material relating to a referendum under Part 7 of that Act, during the period of 28 days immediately before the referendum is held.

8. Regulation 5 of the Local Authorities (Conduct of Referendums) (England) Regulations 2007 (S.I. 2007/2089) prohibits local authorities from publishing material in the 28 days immediately before a referendum which expresses support for, or opposition to a particular answer to a referendum question relating to the constitutional arrangements of the authority.

9. Regulation 15 of the Local Authorities (Referendums, Petitions and Directions) (England) Regulations 2000 (S.I. 2000/2852) prohibits local authorities from incurring expenditure to publish material which appears designed to influence people in deciding whether or not to sign a petition relating to the constitutional arrangements of the authority, or to assist others to publish such material.

Cost-effectiveness

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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. Additional value might be achieved if locally produced publicity gives a local context to national issues.

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

14. 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.

Objectivity

15. 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.

16. 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. Such publicity should seek to explain the facts in an objective manner.

17. Where paid-for advertising is used by local authorities, it should be clearly identified as being advertising. Paid-for advertising, including advertisements for the recruitment of staff, should not be used in any publication owned or controlled by a political party.

18. Advertisements for the recruitment of staff should reflect the tradition of political impartiality of local authority employees and should not (except in the case of advertisements relating to the appointment of staff pursuant to section 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (assistants for political groups)) refer to any political activities or affiliations of candidates.

Even-handedness

19. 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.

20. Other than in the circumstances described in paragraph 34 of this code, it is acceptable for local authorities to publicise the work done by individual members of the authority, and to present the views of those individuals on local issues. 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.

21. It is acceptable for local authorities to host publicity prepared by third parties – for example an authority may host a blog authored by members of the authority or a public forum on which members of the public may leave comments. 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.

22. It is generally acceptable for local authorities to host publicity, such as a blog, which itself contains links to external sites over which the local authority has no control where the content of those sites would not itself comply with this code. This does not amount to giving assistance to any person for the publication of material which local authorities are not permitted to publish. However, particular care must be taken by local authorities during the period before elections and referendums to ensure that no breach of any legal restriction takes place. It may be necessary to suspend the hosting of material produced by third parties or public forums which contain links to impermissible material during such periods.

23. It is acceptable for publicity containing material prepared by third parties and hosted by local authorities to include logos of political parties or other organisations with which the third parties are associated.

24. It is acceptable for publicity produced or hosted by local authorities to include a logo associated with a particular member of the authority, such as a directly elected mayor, or leader of the authority. Publicity material produced by local authorities relating to a particular member must not seek to affect public support for that individual.

25. 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.

Appropriate use of publicity

26. 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.

27. Local authorities should not incur expenditure on providing stands or displays at conferences of political parties for the purpose of publicity designed to influence members of political parties to take a particular view on any issue.

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

29. 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.

30. All local authority publicity should clearly and unambiguously identify itself as a product of the local authority. Printed material, including any newsletters, newssheets or similar publications published by the local authority, should do this on the front page of the publication.

Equality and diversity etc

31. Publicity by local authorities may seek to influence (in accordance with the relevant law and in a way which they consider positive) the attitudes of local people or public behaviour in relation to matters of health, safety, crime prevention, race relations, equality, diversity and community issues.

32. 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.

Care during periods of heightened sensitivity

33. Local authorities should pay particular regard to the legislation governing publicity during the period of heightened sensitivity before elections and referendums – see paragraphs 7 to 9 of this code. It may be necessary to suspend the hosting of material produced by third parties, or to close public forums during this period to avoid breaching any legal restrictions.

34. During the period between the notice of an election and the election itself, local authorities should not publish any publicity on controversial issues or report views or proposals in such a way that identifies them with any individual members or groups of members. Publicity relating to individuals involved directly in the election should not be published by local authorities during this period unless expressly authorised by or under statute. It is permissible for local authorities to publish factual information which identifies the names, wards and parties of candidates at elections.

35. In general, local authorities should not issue any publicity which seeks to influence voters. However this general principle is subject to any statutory provision which authorises expenditure being incurred on the publication of material designed to influence the public as to whether to support or oppose a question put at a referendum. It is acceptable to publish material relating to the subject matter of a referendum, for example to correct any factual inaccuracies which have appeared in publicity produced by third parties, so long as this is even-handed and objective and does not support or oppose any of the options which are the subject of the vote.