

## Code of recommended practice on local authority publicity

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On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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**Circular 20/88**  
(Department of the Environment)  
**Circular 16/88**  
(Scottish Development Department)  
**Circular 30/88**  
(Welsh Office)

Joint Circular from the

**Department of the Environment**  
**2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3EB**

**Scottish Development Department**  
**New St. Andrew's House, Edinburgh EH1 3SZ**

**Welsh Office**  
**Cathays Park, Cardiff CF1 3NQ**

*15 August 1988*

## **Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity**

**1.** We are directed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Wales to draw the attention of your authority to the annexed code of recommended practice on local authority publicity, which they have issued under their powers under section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986, as amended by section 27 of the Local Government Act 1988.

**2.** Section 4 provides for the Secretary of State to issue codes of recommended practice as regards the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity, and such other matters as he thinks appropriate. That section, as amended, also requires that local authorities shall have regard to the provisions of any such code in coming to any decision on publicity.

3. The code has been prepared following consultations with the associations of local authorities, the local authorities with whom the Secretaries of State thought consultation desirable, and other bodies concerned. A draft of the code has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.

4. The code has no significant implications for either local authority expenditure or manpower.

**A J C SIMCOCK**, *Assistant Secretary*  
**MRS G M STEWART**, *Assistant Secretary*  
**D M TIMLIN**, *Senior Principal*

The Chief Executive

County Councils in England and Wales  
Regional and Islands Councils in Scotland  
District Councils in England, Wales and Scotland  
London Borough Councils  
The Council of the Isles of Scilly

The Town Clerk, City of London

The Chief Officer

Metropolitan County Passenger Transport Authorities  
Metropolitan County Police Authorities  
Metropolitan County Fire and Civil Defence Authorities  
The London Fire and Civil Defence Authority

The Education Officer and Chief Executive, Inner London Education Authority

The Chief Executive, The Broads Authority

The Clerk

Parish Councils in England  
Community Councils in Wales

[DOE LGR/57/5/02]  
[SDD L/ACT/217/2]  
[WO LG/49/3/49]

# CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY

## INTRODUCTION

### **Status of the Code**

1. This Code is issued by the Secretaries of State for the Environment, Scotland and Wales in pursuance of their powers under section 4(1) of the Local Government Act 1986. The Code was drawn up following the consultations with interested parties in local government required by section 4(4) of the Act. It has been approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament. Local authorities are required by section 4(1) of the Act as amended by section 27 of the Local Government Act 1988 to have regard to the Code in coming to any decision on publicity.

### **Why have a Code?**

2. Local authorities are accountable to their electorate. Local accountability requires local understanding. This will be promoted by local authorities explaining their objectives and policies to their electors and ratepayers. In recent years authorities have increasingly used publicity to keep the public informed, and to encourage greater participation. Local authorities also need to tell the public about the services which they provide. Increasingly, local authorities see the task of making the public aware of the services available as an essential part of providing all kinds of services. Good, effective publicity, aimed at improved public awareness of a council's activities, is to be welcomed. This Code is not intended to discourage such publicity.

3. Publicity is, however, a sensitive matter in any political environment, because of the impact which it can have. Expenditure on publicity by some local authorities has been significant. It is essential, therefore, to ensure that local authority decisions on publicity are properly made, in accordance with clear principles of good practice. The purpose of the Code is to set out such principles. It reflects the conventions which should apply to all publicity at public expense, and which traditionally have applied in both central and local government.

4. The principles set out below recognise the political nature of local government. They take account of the fact that some local authority publicity will deal with issues that are controversial because of particular local circumstances, or because of a difference of view between political parties locally or nationally. The principles do not prohibit the publication of information on politically sensitive or controversial issues, nor stifle public debate. They set out the matters a local authority should consider, to safeguard both the proper use of public funds and those members of the public at whom publicity is directed. They apply to all publicity, but some aspects will be especially relevant to publicity which deals with controversial or sensitive issues. The underlying objective of the Code is to ensure the proper use of public funds for publicity.

## **Scope of the Code**

**5.** The Code is not concerned with the interpretation of section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986. (That section provides that a local authority shall not publish (or assist others to publish) material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party.) The Code is concerned with all the other publicity which a local authority may publish. In particular, it highlights factors which should be borne in mind in decisions on publicity which deals with matters or issues which are, politically or otherwise, controversial, but which are not prohibited by section 2.

**6.** Section 6 of the 1986 Act defines publicity as "any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public". The Code will therefore be relevant across the whole range of local authorities' work. It covers all decisions by a local authority on publicity and most public relations activities, such as paid advertising and leaflet campaigns, and local authority sponsorship of exhibitions and conferences, as well as assistance to others to issue publicity.

**7.** The Code has no relevance to the methods which a local authority may use to make its views known where these do not involve publicity in the sense of the 1986 Act.

**8.** The Code does not affect the ability of local authorities to assist charities and voluntary organisations which need to issue publicity as part of their work, but it requires local authorities, in giving such assistance, to consider the principles on which the Code is based, and to apply them accordingly.

**9.** By virtue of section 6(6) of the 1986 Act, nothing in the Code is to be construed as applying to any decision by a local authority in the discharge of their duties under the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

## CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

### Subject matter

1. Local authorities have a variety of statutory powers which enable them to produce publicity and circulate it widely, or to assist others to do so. Those commonly used include the powers in sections 111, 142, 144 and 145 of the Local Government Act 1972, sections 69, 88 and 90 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and sections 15 and 16 of the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982; but there are several others.
2. Some of these powers relate directly to the publishing authority's functions. Others give a more general discretion to publicise matters which go beyond an authority's primary responsibilities. For example, sections 142(1A) of the 1972 Act and 88(1) of the 1973 Act authorise local authorities to arrange for the publication within their area of information as to the services available in the area provided by them or by other local authorities; and Section 54 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 empowers local authorities to arrange for the publication within their area of information on questions relating to health or disease.
3. This discretion provides an important degree of flexibility, but also heightens the need for a responsible approach to expenditure decisions.
4. In considering the subject areas in which publicity is to be issued, the following matters will be important:
  - (i) the publicity should be relevant to the functions of the authority.
  - (ii) it should not duplicate unnecessarily publicity produced by central government, another local authority or another public authority.
  - (iii) in areas where central government, another tier of local government, or another public authority have the primary service or policy responsibility, local authorities should issue publicity only on matters that are directly relevant to their own functions.

### Costs

5. Local authorities are accountable to the public for the efficiency and effectiveness of their expenditure, in the first instance through the audit arrangements.
6. For publicity, as for all other expenditure, the aim should therefore be to achieve the greatest possible cost-effectiveness.
7. To achieve this, there may well be cases where the benefit of higher expenditure to gain better presentation or improve other aspects of publicity will justify the extra cost.
8. Local authorities should therefore always have in mind the extent to which expert advice is needed for publicity.



**9.** In some cases publicity may justify its cost by virtue of savings which it achieves. More commonly it will be necessary to take a view of the importance of the unquantifiable benefits as compared with other uses to which the resources could be put.

**10.** In deciding whether the nature and scale of proposed publicity, and consequently its cost, are justified, the following matters will be relevant:

- (i) whether the publicity is statutorily required or is discretionary.
- (ii) where it is statutorily required, the purpose to be served by the publicity.
- (iii) whether the expenditure envisaged is in keeping with the purpose and expected effect of the publicity.

## Content and style

**11.** Local authorities produce a variety of publicity material. It ranges from factual information about the services provided by the authority, designed to inform clients or attract new ones, to material necessary to the administration of the authority, such as staff recruitment advertising. There will also be publicity to explain or justify the council's policies either in general, as in the annual report, or on specific topics, for example as background to consultation on the line chosen for a new road.

**12.** Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.

**13.** Where publicity is used to comment on, or respond to, the policies and proposals of central government, other local authorities or other public authorities, the comment or response should be objective, balanced, informative, and accurate. It should aim to set out the reasons for the council's views, and should not be a prejudiced, unreasoning or political attack on the policies or proposals in question or on those putting them forward. Slogans alone will not be an adequate means of justifying or explaining the authority's views or their policy decisions.

**14.** Publicity relating to the provision of a service should concentrate on providing factual information about the service.

**15.** In some cases promotional publicity may be appropriate - for example about the local authority's sports and leisure facilities or about tourist attractions.

**16.** Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the council, should be handled with particular care. It should not over-simplify facts, issues or arguments. Again, it is unlikely that slogans alone will achieve the necessary degree of balance, or capture the complexities of opposing political arguments.

**17.** Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.

**18.** Publicity campaigns by local authorities are appropriate in some circumstances: for example, to promote the effective and efficient use of local services and facilities, or to attract tourists or investment. Publicity campaigns may also be an appropriate means of influencing public behaviour or attitudes on such matters as health, safety, crime prevention or race relations.

**19.** Legitimate concern is, however, caused by the use of public resources for some forms of campaigns which are designed to have a persuasive effect. Publicity campaigns can provide an appropriate means of ensuring that the local community is properly informed about a matter relating to a function of the local authority and about the authority's policies in relation to that function and the reasons for them. But local authorities, like other public 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.

## Dissemination

**20.** The main purposes of local authority publicity are to increase public awareness of the services provided by the authority and the functions it performs; to explain to electors and ratepayers the reasons for particular policies and priorities; and in general to improve local accountability.

**21.** Information and publicity produced by the council should be made available to all those who want or need it. Local authorities should not discriminate in favour of, or against, persons or groups in the compilation and distribution of material for reasons not connected with the efficiency and effectiveness of issuing the publicity.

**22.** Where material is distributed on matters closely affecting vulnerable sections of the community - for example, the elderly - particular care should be taken to ensure that it is unambiguous, readily intelligible, and unlikely to cause needless concern to those reading, seeing or listening to it.

**23.** Local authority newspapers, leaflets, and other publicity distributed unsolicited from house to house are inevitably more intrusive than publicity available on application to the council.

**24.** Publicity that reaches the public unsolicited should be targeted as far as practicable on those whose interests are clearly and directly affected by its content.

**25.** Material touching on politically controversial issues should be distributed unsolicited only where there is a strong case for letting a particular group of people have information of direct concern to them and no other equally efficient and effective means can be found.

**26.** Local authority newspapers or information bulletins are a special case. They are often a cost-effective means of disseminating information, but they may touch on controversial issues. If they do, they should treat such issues in an objective and informative way, bearing in mind the principles set out in paragraphs 11 -19 of the Code.

**27.** Where it is important for information to reach a particular target audience, consideration should be given to using the communications networks of other bodies, for example those of voluntary organisations.

## Advertising

**28.** Advertising, especially on billboards or on television and radio, is a highly intrusive medium. It can also be expensive. It may however provide a cost effective, efficient means of conveying public information to the widest possible audience. Advertising on local radio networks has, for example, been used as a relatively inexpensive means of telling potential clients about local authority services. Advertising can also be the most cost-effective means of publicising a local authority's activities on tourism, and in the area of economic development generally.

**29.** The primary criterion for decisions on whether to use advertising should be cost-effectiveness.

**30.** Advertisements are not normally likely to be appropriate as a means of explaining policy or commenting on proposals, since an advertisement by its nature summarises information, compresses issues and arguments, and markets views and opinions.

**31.** Advertising in media which cover an area significantly wider than that of the authority is not likely to be an appropriate means of conveying information about a local authority's policies as opposed to attracting people to the authority's area or to use its facilities.

**32.** The attribution of advertising material leaflets and other forms of publicity that reach the public unsolicited should be clearly set out.

**33.** It is not acceptable, in terms of public accountability, to use the purchase of advertising space as a disguised means of subsidy to a voluntary, industrial or commercial organisation. Such support should be given openly through the normal grant arrangements. However, the conditions attached to a grant may require the provision of publicity, including publicity for the work of the authority.

**34.** Any decision to take advertising space in a publication produced by a voluntary, industrial or commercial organisation should be made only on the grounds that it provides an effective and efficient means of securing the desired publicity.

**35.** Local authorities should never use advertising as a means of giving financial support to any publication associated with a political party.

## Recruitment advertising

**36.** Local authorities have respected in their staff employment policies the tradition of a politically impartial public service. Their recruitment publicity should reflect this tradition, and the fact that local authority staff are expected to serve the authority as a whole, whatever its composition from time to time.

**37.** The content of recruitment publicity and the media chosen for advertising job vacancies should be in keeping with the objective of maintaining the politically independent status of local authority staff.

**38.** Advertisements for staff should not be placed in party political publications.

### Publicity about individual members of an authority

**39.** The functions of a local authority are discharged by the council corporately. It is therefore inappropriate for public resources to be used to publicise individual councillors.

**40.** In the interests of public accountability, however, it may be appropriate to give publicity to the views or activities of individual members when they are representing the council as a whole: for example, when the chairman of a council speaks or acts as the first citizen of the whole community, or when a chairman of a committee opens a new scheme or launches a policy approved by the council or by his committee on the council's behalf.

**41.** For the same reason a local authority may justifiably in certain circumstances issue press releases reporting statements made by individual members. Examples of cases where such press releases may be appropriate are as reports of the discussion at the meetings of the council or committees, or quotations of comments made by leading members of the council in response to particular events which call for a particularly speedy reaction from the council.

**42.** This does not prevent a member of staff of a local authority from responding to questions about individual members, since that is not publicity as defined in the 1986 Act.

### Timing of Publicity

**43.** Particular care should be taken when publicity is issued immediately prior to an election or by-election affecting the authority's area to ensure that this could not be perceived as seeking to influence public opinion, or to promote the public image of a particular candidate, or group of candidates. Between the time of publication of a notice of an election and polling day, publicity should not be issued which deals with controversial issues, or which reports views or policies in a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members.

### Assistance to others for publicity

**44.** The principles set out above apply to decisions on publicity issued by local authorities. They should also be taken into account by local authorities in decisions on assistance to others to issue publicity. In all such decisions local authorities should, to the extent appropriate:

- (a) incorporate the relevant principles of the Code in published guidance for applicants for grants;

- (b) make the observance of that guidance a condition of the grant or other assistance;
- (c) undertake monitoring to ensure that the guidance is observed.

**45.** It can be appropriate for local authorities to help charities and voluntary organisations by arranging for pamphlets or other material produced and paid for by the organisation to be available for collection by the public in public libraries and other suitable locations. Such material should not offend against any legal provision, but (subject to this) any such facility should be made available on a fair and equal basis.

*DETR Circular 06/2001*

**Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions  
Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU**

*2 April 2001*

## **ALTERATIONS TO THE CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY**

- 1.** Section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986 provides for the Secretary of State to issue, revise or withdraw a code of recommended practice as regards the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity, and such other related matters as he thinks appropriate. Local authorities shall have regard to the provision of any such code in coming to any decision on publicity.
- 2.** Using these powers the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Wales issued, on 15 August 1988, "The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity" ("the Code") as an annex to a Joint Circular from the Department of the Environment (20/88), the Scottish Development Department (16/88) and the Welsh Office (30/88).
- 3.** The Secretary of the State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, in exercise of his powers conferred on him by section 4(3) of the Local Government Act 1986 now revises the Code to reflect changes in council constitutions and the advent of referendums and petitions. I am directed by the Secretary of State to draw the attention of your authority to the annexed alterations to the Code which shall apply to county councils, district councils and London borough councils in England only.
- 4.** In accordance with section 4(6) of the Local Government Act 1986, The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions laid before each House of Parliament a draft of proposed alterations to the Code on 15 February 2001.
- 5.** The proposed alterations have been the subject of a consultation with the Local Government Association in accordance with section 4(4) of the Local Government Act 1986.

P ROWSELL,  
a Senior Civil Servant in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

## ANNEX

### ALTERATIONS TO THE CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY, WHICH APPLY TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND ONLY

1. Insert after paragraph 9 of the Introduction to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, dated 15 August 1988, ("the Code") the following:

#### **"Alterations to the Code - local authorities in England**

10. The alterations to the Code which are set out in Appendix 1 shall apply in relation to county councils, district councils and London borough councils in England only. The alterations reflect changes in council constitutions and the advent of referendums and petitions. Throughout this Code, as it applies to such local authorities in England, any reference to "councillor" includes, unless the context requires otherwise, a reference to an elected mayor. The alterations shall have effect on and after Monday 2nd April 2001.

2. Insert after paragraph 45 of the Code the following:

Appendix 1

*Alterations to the Code which shall apply to county councils, district councils and London borough councils in England only*

Paragraph of the Code	Alteration to paragraph
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4(iii)	Omit paragraph 4(iii)
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16	Insert after the word council,, the words
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*is unavoidable, particularly given the importance of wide consultation whenever material issues arise. Such publicity*

For the words It should, substitute the words

*Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although councils should*

18	Insert after the words "for example,", the words -
----	--

*"as part of consultation processes where local views are being sought, or"*

For the words "race relations", substitute *"equal opportunities"*

20 Insert after the word "performs;", the words -

*"to allow local people to have a real and informed say about issues that affect them;"*

23 After the word "leaflets," , omit the word "and"

Insert after the words "house to house" , the words -

*"and information on websites"*

For the words "inevitably more intrusive", substitute the words -

*"able to reach far wider audiences"*

Insert after the word "council." , the words -

*"Councils should give particular consideration to the use of electronic and other new media communication systems. However, councils should ensure that they do not rely solely on such mechanisms and that they do not exclude those without access or easy access to such systems."*

24 & 25 For both paragraphs substitute -

*"24. Such publicity should be targeted as appropriate for its purposes, taking particular care with material touching on politically controversial issues."*

26 For the words " , but they may touch on controversial issues. If" , substitute the words -

*"or facilitating consultation and can provide a means for local people to*



*participate in debate on decisions the council is to take. The advantage of using websites and other information technology for consultations should also be considered. Inevitably such publications will touch on controversial issues and where"*

27 Insert after the words "voluntary organisations", the words -

*", and making use of electronic communication systems"*

28 For the words "tourism, and in the area of economic development generally" substitute the words -

*"promoting the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area"*

39-43 For paragraphs 39 to 43, and the headings to those paragraphs, substitute -

#### **"Individual Councillors**

39. Publicity about individual councillors may include the contact details, the positions they hold in the Council (for example, member of the Executive or Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee), and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual councillors' proposals, decisions and recommendations only where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and whilst it may acknowledge the part played by individual councillors as holders of particular positions in the Council, personalisation of issues or personal image making should be avoided.

40. Publicity should not be, or liable to misrepresentation as being, party political. Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual councillor which are relevant to her/his position and responsibilities within the Council, and to put forward her/his justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating policies of those of a particular political party or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups or individuals.

## **Elections, referendums and petitions**

41. The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. However, it is acceptable for the authority to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political. Members holding key political or civic positions should be able to comment in an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the authority's control. Proactive events arranged in this period should not involve members likely to be standing for election.

42. The Local Authorities (Referendums) (Petitions and Directions) (England) Regulations 2000 (which apply under the Local Government Act 2000 to county councils, district councils and London borough councils) prohibit an authority from incurring any expenditure to

- Publish material which appears designed to influence local people in deciding whether or not to sign a petition requesting a referendum on proposals for an elected mayor;
- Assist anyone else in publishing such material; or
- Influence or assist others to influence local people in deciding whether or not to sign a petition.

Publicity in these circumstances should, therefore, be restricted to the publication of factual details which are presented fairly about the petition proposition and to explaining the council's existing arrangements. Local authorities should not mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view in relation to petitions generally or on a specific proposal.

43. County councils, district councils and London borough councils should ensure that any publicity about a referendum under Part II of the Local Government Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) either prior to or during the referendum period is factually accurate and objective. The referendum period means the period beginning with the date on which proposals under Part II of the 2000 Act are sent to the Secretary of State and ending with the date of the referendum. The publicity should not be capable of being perceived as seeking to influence public support for, or opposition to, the referendum proposals and should not associate support for, or opposition to, the proposals with any individual or group. Local authorities must conform with any specific restrictions on publicity activities which are required by Regulations under section 45 of the 2000 Act."

For the words "can be ", substitute the word "*is*"

After the words "legal provision", insert the words -

*"(authorities may be able to draw on their powers of well-being in section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000)"*

## CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

### Subject matter

- 1.** Local authorities have a variety of statutory powers which enable them to produce publicity and circulate it widely, or to assist others to do so. Those commonly used include the powers in sections 111, 142, 144 and 145 of the Local Government Act 1972, sections 69, 88 and 90 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and sections 15 and 16 of the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982; but there are several others.
- 2.** Some of these powers relate directly to the publishing authority's functions. Others give a more general discretion to publicise matters which go beyond an authority's primary responsibilities. For example, section 142(1A) of the 1972 Act and 88(1) of the 1973 Act authorise local authorities to arrange for the publication within their area of information as to the services available in the area provided by them or by other local authorities; and Section 54 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 empowers local authorities to arrange for the publication within their area of information on questions relating to health or disease.
- 3.** This discretion provides an important degree of flexibility, but also heightens the need for a responsible approach to expenditure decisions.
- 4.** In considering the subject areas in which publicity is to be issued, the following matters will be important:
  - (i) the publicity should be relevant to the functions of the authority.
  - (ii) it should not duplicate unnecessarily publicity produced by central government, another local authority or another public authority.

### Costs

- 5.** Local authorities are accountable to the public for the efficiency and effectiveness of their expenditure, in the first instance through the audit arrangements.
- 6.** For publicity, as for all other expenditure, the aim should therefore be to achieve the greatest possible cost-effectiveness.
- 7.** To achieve this, there may well be cases where the benefit of higher expenditure to gain better presentation or improve other aspects of publicity will justify the extra cost.
- 8.** Local authorities should therefore always have in mind the extent to which expert advice is needed for publicity.
- 9.** In some cases publicity may justify its cost by virtue of savings which it achieves. More commonly it will be necessary to take a view of the importance of the unquantifiable benefits as compared with other uses to which the resources could be put.

**10.** In deciding whether the nature and scale of proposed publicity, and consequently its cost, are justified, the following matters will be relevant:

- (i) whether the publicity is statutorily required or is discretionary.
- (ii) where it is statutorily required, the purpose to be served by the publicity.
- (iii) whether the expenditure envisaged is in keeping with the purpose and expected effect of the publicity.

## Content and Style

**11.** Local authorities produce a variety of publicity material. It ranges from factual information about the services provided by the authority, designed to inform clients or attract new ones, to material necessary to the administration of the authority, such as staff recruitment advertising. There will also be publicity to explain or justify the council's policies either in general, as in the annual report, or on specific topics, for example as background to consultation on the line chosen for a new road.

**12.** Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.

**13.** Where publicity is used to comment on, or respond to, the policies and proposals of central government, other local authorities or other public authorities, the comment or response should be objective, balanced, informative, and accurate. It should aim to set out the reasons for the council's views, and should not be a prejudiced, unreasoning or political attack on the policies or proposals in question or on those putting them forward. Slogans alone will not be an adequate means of justifying or explaining the authority's views or their policy decisions.

**14.** Publicity relating to the provision of a service should concentrate on providing factual information about the service.

**15.** In some cases promotional publicity may be appropriate - for example about the local authority's sports and leisure facilities or about tourist attractions.

**16.** Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the council, is unavoidable, particularly given the importance of wide consultation whenever material issues arise. Such publicity should be handled with particular care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although councils should not over-simplify facts, issues or arguments. Again, it is unlikely that slogans alone will achieve the necessary degree of balance, or capture the complexities of opposing political arguments.

**17.** Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.

**18.** Publicity campaigns by local authorities are appropriate in some circumstances: for example, as part of consultation processes where local views are being sought, or to promote the effective and efficient use of local services and facilities, or to attract tourists or

investment. Publicity campaigns may also be an appropriate means of influencing public behaviour or attitudes on such matters as health, safety, crime prevention or equal opportunities.

**19.** Legitimate concern is, however, caused by the use of public resources for some forms of campaigns, which are designed to have a persuasive effect. Publicity campaigns can provide an appropriate means of ensuring that the local community is properly informed about a matter relating to a function of the local authority and about the authority's policies in relation to that function and the reasons for them. But local authorities, like other public 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.

## Dissemination

**20.** The main purposes of local authority publicity are to increase public awareness of the services provided by the authority and the functions it performs; to allow local people to have a real and informed say about issues that affect them; to explain to electors and ratepayers the reasons for particular policies and priorities; and in general to improve local accountability.

**21.** Information and publicity produced by the council should be made available to all those who want or need it. Local authorities should not discriminate in favour of, or against, persons or groups in the compilation and distribution of material for reasons not connected with the efficiency and effectiveness of issuing the publicity.

**22.** Where material is distributed on matters closely affecting vulnerable sections of the community - for example, the elderly - particular care should be taken to ensure that it is unambiguous, readily intelligible, and unlikely to cause needless concern to those reading, seeing or listening to it.

**23.** Local authority newspapers, leaflets, other publicity distributed unsolicited from house to house and information on websites are able to reach far wider audiences than publicity available on application to the council. Councils should give particular consideration to the use of electronic and other new media communication systems. However, councils should ensure that they do not rely solely on such mechanisms and that they do not exclude those without access or easy access to such systems.

**24.** Such publicity should be targeted as appropriate for its purposes, taking particular care with material touching on politically controversial issues.

**25.** there is no paragraph 25

**26.** Local authority newspapers or information bulletins are a special case. They are often a cost-effective means of disseminating information, or facilitating consultation and can provide a means for local people to participate in debate on decisions the council is to take. The advantage of using websites and other information technology for consultations should also be considered. Inevitably such publications will touch on controversial issues and where they do they should treat such issues in an objective and informative way, bearing in

mind the principles set out in paragraphs 11-19 of the Code.

**27.** Where it is important for information to reach a particular target audience, consideration should be given to using the communications networks of other bodies, for example those of voluntary organisations, and making use of electronic communication systems.

## Advertising

**28.** Advertising, especially on billboards or on television and radio, is a highly intrusive medium. It can also be expensive. It may however provide a cost-effective, efficient means of conveying public information to the widest possible audience. Advertising on local radio networks has, for example, been used as a relatively inexpensive means of telling potential clients about local authority services. Advertising can also be the most cost-effective means of publicising a local authority's activities on promoting the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area.

**29.** The primary criterion for decisions on whether to use advertising should be cost-effectiveness.

**30.** Advertisements are not normally likely to be appropriate as a means of explaining policy or commenting on proposals, since an advertisement by its nature summarises information, compresses issues and arguments, and markets views and opinions.

**31.** Advertising in media which cover an area significantly wider than that of the authority is not likely to be an appropriate means of conveying information about a local authority's policies as opposed to attracting people to the authority's area or to use its facilities.

**32.** The attribution of advertising material leaflets and other forms of publicity that reach the public unsolicited should be clearly set out.

**33.** It is not acceptable, in terms of public accountability, to use the purchase of advertising space as a disguised means of subsidy to a voluntary, industrial or commercial organisation.

Such support should be given openly through the normal grant arrangements. However, the conditions attached to a grant may require the provision of publicity, including publicity for the work of the authority.

**34.** Any decision to take advertising space in a publication produced by a voluntary, industrial or commercial organisation should be made only on the grounds that it provides an effective and efficient means of securing the desired publicity.

**35.** Local authorities should never use advertising as a means of giving financial support to any publication associated with a political party.

## Recruitment Advertising

**36.** Local authorities have respected in their staff employment policies the tradition of a politically impartial public service. Their recruitment publicity should reflect this tradition, and the fact that local authority staff are expected to serve the authority as a whole, whatever its composition from time to time.

**37.** The content of recruitment publicity and the media chosen for advertising job vacancies should be in keeping with the objective of maintaining the politically independent status of local authority staff.

**38.** Advertisements for staff should not be placed in party political publications.

## Individual Councillors

**39.** Publicity about individual councillors may include the contact details, the positions they hold in the Council (for example, member of the Executive or Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee), and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual councillors' proposals, decisions and recommendations only where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and whilst it may acknowledge the part played by individual councillors as holders of particular positions in the Council, personalisation of issues or personal image making should be avoided.

**40.** Publicity should not be, or liable to misrepresentation as being, party political. Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual councillor which are relevant to her/his position and responsibilities within the Council, and to put forward her/his justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating policies of those of a particular political party or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups or individuals.

## Elections, referendums and petitions

**41.** The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. However, it is acceptable for the authority to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political. Members holding key political or civic positions should be able to comment in an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the authority's control. Proactive events arranged in this period should not involve members likely to be standing for election.

**42.** The Local Authorities (Referendums) (Petitions and Directions) (England) Regulations 2000 (which apply under the Local Government Act 2000 to county councils, district councils and London borough councils) prohibit an authority from incurring any expenditure to



- Publish material which appears designed to influence local people in deciding whether or not to sign a petition requesting a referendum on proposals for an elected mayor;
- Assist anyone else in publishing such material; or
- Influence or assist others to influence local people in deciding whether or not to sign a petition.

Publicity in these circumstances should, therefore, be restricted to the publication of factual details which are presented fairly about the petition proposition and to explaining the council's existing arrangements. Local authorities should not mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view in relation to petitions generally or on a specific proposal.

**43.** County councils, district councils and London borough councils should ensure that any publicity about a referendum under Part II of the Local Government Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) either prior to or during the referendum period is factually accurate and objective. The referendum period means the period beginning with the date on which proposals under Part II of the 2000 Act are sent to the Secretary of State and ending with the date of the referendum. The publicity should not be capable of being perceived as seeking to influence public support for, or opposition to, the referendum proposals and should not associate support for, or opposition to, the proposals with any individual or group. Local authorities must conform with any specific restrictions on publicity activities which are required by Regulations under section 45 of the 2000 Act.

### Assistance to others for publicity

**44.** The principles set out above apply to decisions on publicity issued by local authorities. They should also be taken into account by local authorities in decisions on assistance to others to issue publicity. In all such decisions local authorities should, to the extent appropriate:

- (a) incorporate the relevant principles of the Code in published guidance for applicants for grants;
- (b) make the observance of that guidance a condition of the grant or other assistance;
- (c) undertake monitoring to ensure that the guidance is observed.

**45.** It is appropriate for local authorities to help charities and voluntary organisations by arranging for pamphlets or other material produced and paid for by the organisation to be available for collection by the public in public libraries and other suitable locations. Such material should not offend against any legal provision, (authorities may be able to draw on their powers of well-being in section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000) but (subject to this) any such facility should be made available on a fair and equal basis.