

## Pre-election propriety 2015

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide Forestry Commission staff with guidance for managing pre-election communications. It is based on a Cabinet Office briefing delivered to all Government departments in February 2015.

### 1. Principles

As the Civil Service code of conduct emphasises, propriety means **integrity, honesty, objectivity** and **impartiality**.

### 2. General good practice

In the run-up to purdah, communications should continue to be:

1. Objective and explanatory
2. Transparent and impartial when in partnership with others
3. Done economically
4. Compliant with the parliamentary process
5. Evidence based

As the fastest developing area of communication with great scope for controversy and misuse, particular care should be taken by officials using social media. For example:

- Officials should avoid retweeting Ministers', MPs' or a political party's tweets
- Always check a tweet's source and links for any political source or bias before retweeting
- Senior officials need to take extra care when using social media, avoiding any political issues and focussing purely on factual updates.

### Visits

Visits may continue until purdah, but officials must guard against arranging visits to politically contentious locations. For example civil servants may continue to suggest or host visits relevant to a specific policy area, but leave it to Ministers if they want to visit marginal seats. Only Government branding should be used for visits, not party political branding.

No events should be attended by prospective parliamentary candidates (sometimes known as PPCs), unless everyone who has declared their candidacy has been invited. If a PPC attends an event, civil servants should be wary of showing any favour or creating opportunities for any positive publicity.

## 3. Purdah

Civil servants should do everything possible to avoid distracting or biasing the public's engagement with the general election.

**29 March**    **End of proactive campaigns**

**30 March**    **Purdah begins**

**7 May**        **Polling day**

Purdah continues until a new Government is formed.

"Distracting" the public's engagement with the general election could involve, for example, promoting a series of high-profile events.

Restrictions:

- Press releases – no proactive press releases, no quotes from Ministers
- Web sites – no new content
- Social media – no proactive content, including retweeting
- Recruitment – no senior grade posts or posts a new government may wish to review
- Stakeholder – no promotion of activity, including events or consultation

We can:

- Issue reactive press releases, with factual information only
- Use social media for essential public service information
- Continue to provide regular stakeholder updates that have routinely been provided, e.g. grants e-alerts
- Update pre-existing web content, but with neutral and factual information
- Continue to carry out surveys that are continuous or regular in nature
- Respond to media enquiries resulting from FOI requests
- Signpost to information already in the public domain in response to enquiries
- Provide communications on operational matters of public interest, for example forest closures

**For more information, contact:**

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