

Draft responses to:

Communities in Control: Real people, real power
Code of recommended practice on local authority publicity

Summary

Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity is currently being consulted on and responses are due on 29 April, 2009.

It was first introduced in 1986 and needs to be refreshed to bring it in line with today's changing communications environment. It needs to reflect the current and evolving societal, political and technological landscapes if it is to be relevant.

The Government is carrying out a consultation on its '*Communities in Control: Real people, real power*' White Paper, and within this document it proposes to amend the existing Code. The consultation is seeking views from local councils and other agencies about the application of the Code and whether it should be revised to reflect and promote the needs of local communities.

The existing Code does not take into account the extent to which communities have changed, particularly in relation to the way in which they prefer to receive information and engage in dialogue with local government. For example, when the Code was first proposed, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter did not exist. Neither did broadband internet, which makes internet television and radio possible, nor mass-usage of mobile phones. Furthermore, the changes in technology have meant advertising has become cheaper if targeted through the correct channels and has opened up more avenues to engage with audiences.

The draft responses below set out the specific questions asked and proposed responses for Members' consideration.

Question 1: *Is there other guidance, (additional to the Publicity Code), that councils consider creates a barrier to the provision of publicity or support, or that needs clarifying?*

No .

Question 2: *Is there a requirement for different codes to apply to different types of authority?*

No. However, there should be a set of 'guiding principles' in place to help local authorities devise a local code of practice.

Question 3: *Should the Publicity Code specifically address the presentation of publicity on an authority's website?*

The Code should recognise the internet as an increasingly important medium of communication through which residents receive information and communicate with councils. However, it should not be prescriptive about the type of content or the style of presentation on council web sites.

Question 4: *Does anything need to be added to or removed from the list of matters an authority should consider in determining whether or not to issue publicity on a certain subject?*

The following sections should be amended:

Points 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 & 19:

Councils should be granted the freedom to campaign on issues related to their policies and functions and the well-being of their locality and the people they represent. For example, councils should be allowed to persuade the public about the importance of supporting measures to tackle climate change by adopting different attitudes and behaviours. Councils should also be granted greater flexibility to campaign on issues that are outside their direct influence but affect the wellbeing of local residents. For example, councils should be allowed to lobby supermarkets to reduce the amount of plastic bags they hand out if the public are opposed to plastic bags.

Point 20:

The wording should be amended to encourage councils to involve residents in a dialogue with councils about services, rather simply to 'inform' them, thereby building participation in the decision-making process.

Points 44-45:

Councils should be given greater flexibility to support local partners and community organisations in promoting their services particularly when funded by the council.

Question 5: *Should the Publicity Code specify the different criteria local authorities should use to determine whether or not publicity can*

be judged to be cost effective?

Yes, a set of 'guiding principles' would be useful.

Question 6: *Is there any aspect of the cost section that is not required or anything which should be added?*

No.

Question 7: *Should the Publicity Code contain advice about ethical standards in publicity, or should this be left to local authorities to judge for themselves?*

A set of 'guiding principles' might be useful, but it is our view that this should be left to local authorities to judge for themselves.

Question 8: *Is there any aspect of the content section that is not required or anything which should be added?*

No.

Question 9: *Should the Publicity Code be modified to specifically address the issue of privacy and the dissemination of unsolicited material?*

No, it should be within the remit of the local authority to respect an individual's right to privacy, which is already enshrined in the Human Rights Act (article 8).

Question 10: *Is there any aspect of the dissemination section that is not required or anything which should be added?*

Point 22:

This should be amended to include communities where English is a second language, visually impaired and those with learning disabilities. Communications need to be devised in the appropriate format and disseminated through the relevant channels.

Question 11: *Is there any aspect of the advertising section that is not required or anything which should be added?*

Point 31:

This should be revised. Councils should be able to use media that reach audiences outside the local area when this promotes the wellbeing of its area or its inhabitants, for example, by attracting staff or influencing decisions that might affect the city.

Question 12: *Should adverts for local authority political assistants appear in political publications and websites?*

Yes.

Question 13: *Is there any aspect of the recruitment advertising section that is not required or anything which should be added?*

No.

Question 14: *Given the emphasis given to supporting and raising awareness of the role of the councillor in the white paper, is there any aspect of the section on councillors that is not required, or anything which should be added?*

No. This section should remain as it is.

Question 15: *Is there any aspect of the timing of publicity section that is not required, or anything which should be added?*

This section should remain.

Question 16: *Is there any aspect of the assistance to others for publicity section that is not required, or anything which should be added?*

No