



NHS England & NHS Improvement
Skipton House
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London SE1 6LH

To: Chairs and Chief Executives of NHS Foundation Trusts and
NHS Trusts
Chairs and Accountable Officers of CCGs
STP and ICS leads
Cc: NHS Regional Directors

5th November 2019

Dear Colleague,

GENERAL ELECTION GUIDANCE – FOR ACTION

Please find attached the usual 'Purdah' guidance, which always applies to the NHS in the run-up to a general election. This guidance takes effect from 00:01 hours tomorrow, Wednesday 6th November 2019, until Friday 13th December 2019 or the date at which a new government is formed.

The principles underpinning the guidance are that:

- the day to day operations of the NHS must continue unimpeded;
- as always, the NHS must act and be seen to act with political impartiality, and its resources must not be used for party political purposes; and
- during the election period, democratic debate between candidates and parties should not be overshadowed by public controversy originating from NHS bodies themselves.

Please therefore follow the attached guidance carefully, and in case of doubt please consult your Regional Director ahead of time.

In respect of campaign visits to NHS services and premises, NHS providers and Clinical Commissioning Groups are able to decide whether to agree a visit by a parliamentary candidate. But there should be no disruption to services; the same opportunity should be offered to other candidates in an even-handed way; and election meetings should not be permitted on NHS premises.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Simon Stevens
NHS Chief Executive

NHS England and NHS Improvement



Pre-election guidance for NHS organisations

A general election will take place in the UK on 12 December. This note sets out longstanding guidance which always applies to the NHS during the run-up to an election. Communication activities during a general election should avoid competing with parliamentary candidates for the attention of the public. This note gives guidance to NHS organisations (NHS providers, clinical commissioning groups, STPs and ICS) on:

- the handling of requests for information and other enquiries during a general election campaign;
- briefing of MPs, prospective parliamentary candidates and ministers during the election period;
- carrying out business as usual activities during an election campaign.

Please contact your regional NHS England and NHS Improvement communications team if you need any further advice (contact details can be found below).

What is the pre-election period?

During the pre-election period, also referred to as 'purdah', specific restrictions are placed on the use of public resources and the communication activities of public bodies, civil servants and local government officials.

The pre-election period is designed to avoid the actions of public bodies detracting from or influencing election campaigns.

The pre-election period has implications for all NHS organisations (although it is worth remembering that the *NHS should remain politically impartial at all times*).

When does it start?

The start of the pre-election period is 00:01 hours on Wednesday 6th November 2019. The pre-election period will end once a government has been formed, on or after 13th December 2019.

Key considerations

You should ensure your organisation and staff behave impartially towards all candidates and political parties, and do not influence the election outcomes, whether inadvertently or intentionally.

The Cabinet Office has issued [guidance](#), which also applies to NHS England and NHS Improvement. You are also asked to abide by the principles set out there.

As always during a pre-election period, there should be:

- no new decisions or announcements of policy or strategy;
- no decisions on large and/or contentious procurement contracts;
- no participation by official NHS representatives in debates and events that may be politically controversial, whether at national or local level.

These restrictions apply in all cases other than where postponement would be detrimental to the effective running of the local NHS, or wasteful of public money.

You should consider:

- **Requests for information from prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs):** These should always be handled in an impartial manner so that information is made available to all candidates. Information should be factual, and candidates should be responded to in a timely manner.
- **Briefing and meeting prospective parliamentary candidates and ministers:** Once Parliament is dissolved, every seat in the House of Commons becomes vacant. All business in the House comes to an end and MPs stop representing their constituencies so there will be no MPs until after the general election. Any briefing provided to former MPs should be available to all prospective parliamentary candidates. During an election, the Government retains its responsibility to govern, and ministers remain in charge of their departments. Essential business must carry on. Any briefings for ministers should be handled as per the usual process, ensuring any information shared is factual and provided promptly.
- **Consultations:** No consultations should be launched during the pre-election period unless they are considered essential. Ongoing consultations should continue but should not be promoted. Consultation periods can be extended if it is expected that the pre-election period will impact negatively on the quality of the consultation. Consultation responses should not be published until after the pre-election period has ended. If you have an issue or any questions about if something should or should not go ahead during this period, your regional NHS England and NHS Improvement communications team will be able to advise you.
- **Media handling:** Avoid proactive media work on issues that may be contentious. Reactive lines should be factual and, where possible, in line with previous lines. Any appearances on local or national media (TV, radio) should follow the same principles.
- **Events:** Avoid attending events where you may be asked to respond to questions about policy or on matters of public controversy. This may mean withdrawing from previously agreed engagements.
- **Visits from politicians:** Visits are permitted, but the decision to host visits is at your discretion. The same approach must be applied to all visit requests from candidates/parties to avoid any question of bias. Any visits should not interfere with the day to day running of your service and you should be mindful of patient privacy and dignity.
- **Social media and web:** Nothing contentious should be posted on your website or social media accounts. Updates/posts, including blogs, should only convey essential factual information.
- **Campaigns:** Do not undertake major publicity campaigns unless time critical (i.e. a public health emergency). However, ongoing business as usual campaigns such as the 'Help us Help You' or 'We are the NHS' can continue as planned.
- **Board meetings:** Board meetings should be confined to discussing matters that need a board decision or require board oversight. Matters of future strategy should be deferred.
- **EU Exit:** NHS organisations are expected to continue preparations for EU Exit, and existing guidance can be found [here](#). If you have any questions about this, please contact your regional EU Exit Lead.
- **Appointments of board members and non-executive directors:** Appointments can continue as per the usual process unless you are concerned appointments may result in local political sensitivities, in which case, you may wish to postpone until after the elections. Exercise sensitivity over the timing of any announcements.
- **Foundation trust governor elections:** There is nothing to prevent foundation trust governor elections taking place. As above, exercise caution if there are concerns these may become political. Again, any announcements should be carefully considered during this period.



- **Marketing:** Printed materials, such as posters and leaflets, promoting contentious policy or proposed policy should not be given fresh circulation, but can be retained and issued in small numbers on request. Films and other media produced by the NHS, including the NHS logo, should not be made available for use by candidates/parties.
- **Staff activism:** NHS employees are free to undertake political activism in a personal capacity but should not involve their organisation or create the impression of their organisation's involvement.

Useful resources

[Cabinet Office Guidance for December 2019 Elections](#)

[Electoral Commission Local Election Updates](#)

[Electoral Commission Twitter](#)

Contact details

Please contact your regional NHS England and NHS Improvement communications team if you need any further advice:

- [North East and Yorkshire: england.neymedia@nhs.net](mailto:england.neymedia@nhs.net)
- [North West: england.nwmedia@nhs.net](mailto:england.nwmedia@nhs.net)
- [Midlands: england.memedia@nhs.net](mailto:england.memedia@nhs.net)
- [East of England: england.memedia@nhs.net](mailto:england.memedia@nhs.net)
- [South East: england.secomms@nhs.net](mailto:england.secomms@nhs.net)
- [South West: england.swcomms@nhs.net](mailto:england.swcomms@nhs.net)
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