

HONITON TOWN COUNCIL Election message - Purdah

This information has been put together using information from EDDC and other sources. As we prepare for the district, town and parish council elections on May 2, 2019, it's timely to remind Members and officers of guidelines and restrictions on publicity during the pre-election period ('purdah').

When is the period of purdah?

For **Honiton Town Council**, purdah officially begins on **Tuesday 26 March, 2019** and finishes the day after the election on **Friday May 3, 2019**.

From the start of purdah, the council must comply with restrictions within the Local Government Act 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity published in 2011. These make clear that particular care should be taken in periods of heightened sensitivity, such as in the run up to an election. The Act defines publicity as **“any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public.”**

Generally, the Act says that we should **“not publish any material which, in whole, or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party.”** The Code of Practice recommends that authorities should generally not issue any publicity which seeks to influence voters and that publicity relating to individuals involved directly in the election should not be published unless expressly authorised by statute.

What does purdah mean?

The purdah restrictions relate to communications issued directly by the council during the pre-election period. Any communications issued by the council prior to the start of purdah, may still be published online or in newspapers during purdah as, of course, this is something that the council cannot control.

For example, the council may send out a press release and photo about a new play park on Tuesday March 19 (before purdah officially begins) and the press release/photo may be used in our local media two weeks later.

That is wholly the decision of the individual/organisation who choose to publish the information.

What are the rules during the purdah period?

- The council can still issue media releases/communications on factual matters provided that these do not identify individual councillors or groups of councillors.
- Any 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. The key restriction is on proactive

publicity by the council which particularly relates to candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election.

- Councillors holding key political or civic positions should be able to comment in an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a councillor level response to an important event outside the council's control.
- Councillors are still free to respond to enquiries received from the media in a personal capacity. Individual councillors can issue their own statements, write letters to the media for publication, contact the media directly or say what they like in a personal capacity, but must not use council resources to do so.
- Any prospective parliamentary candidates requesting visits to council premises must be treated equally. There is no requirement for such visits to be refused. However, council staff should not be included in any photographs that candidates might arrange during such visits.
- The council can respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that the answers are factual and not party political.

In relation to decision making within the council, the position remains that it is **'business as usual'** unless there are very good reasons why this should not be the case. In the vast majority of cases, the pre-election period will have no impact on normal council business, including the approval of planning decisions.

Purdah for Honiton Town Council

- Any communications, photo calls, public events and statements will not involve Members during the purdah period. No councillors will be quoted in any releases/communications during the purdah period other than the chairman in an emergency. In this case, the comment will be factual and not party political.
- If an official quote is necessary in any day- to-day communications, a senior officer will be quoted.
- Officers will 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.
- Social media platforms are subject to the rules of purdah. We will not:
 - Retweet or share political opinion or content posted by political parties or politicians;
 - Tweet, post images or share updates on matters which are politically controversial;
 - Stage a significant social media-based campaign unless it can be demonstrated that it was planned before the election was called.

If you have any queries about the pre-election period that relate to Honiton Town Council, please in the first instance contact the town council offices on 01404 42957. If there are matters relating to EDDC the please contact Alison Stoneham (01395 517581 astoneham@eastdevon.gov.uk) or Richenda Oldham (01395 517559 roldham@eastdevon.gov.uk).