

## Pre-election Guidance – General Election 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024

The general election will take place on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024, and we expect the pre-election period to begin on 30 May 2024 when Parliament is dissolved.

The guidance below is designed to support planning and activities during this period. If anyone is unsure about anything, or would like further clarification, please contact the communications team at [ssotics.comms@staffsstoke.icb.nhs.uk](mailto:ssotics.comms@staffsstoke.icb.nhs.uk)

### What is the pre-election period?

The pre-election period, previously referred to as 'purdah', is the period immediately before elections and is designed to avoid the actions of public bodies distracting from or having influence on election campaigns. It normally lasts for six weeks before an election.

During this time specific restrictions are placed on the use of public resources and the communication activities of public bodies. It has implications for all NHS organisations, although it is worth remembering that the NHS should always remain politically impartial.

### Key Considerations

During the pre-election period, the ICB must be seen to behave impartially towards all candidates and political parties, and not be seen to be influencing the election and its outcomes, whether inadvertently or intentionally. Not publishing information can be just as influential as publishing it. You are strongly encouraged to abide by these general principles.

During the 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 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.

*Ultimately, we must always be guided by the principle of fairness. It is crucial that any decision we take would be seen as fair and reasonable by the public and those standing for office.*

### You should consider:

- **Requests for information from Parliamentary candidates:** These should always be handled in an impartial manner, so information is made available to all candidates. Information should be factual, and candidates responded to in a timely manner.
- **Briefing MPs and ministers:** MPs remain in-post until polls have closed and correspondence should be handled as per the usual processes, ensuring any information shared is factual.

- **Consultations and engagement exercises:** Unless it is a statutory duty, don't start any new formal consultations or publish report findings from consultation exercises. If a consultation or engagement campaign is already running, is non-controversial and it would be a waste of public money to cancel or postpone, then these can continue. However, think carefully if a campaign could be deemed likely to influence the outcome of the election and do not use councillors in press releases / events. In such cases we should stop or defer them.
- **Media handling:** Proactive media work on issues that may be contentious should be avoided. Reactive media enquiries should be responded to in a manner that is factual and where possible, in line with previous lines.
- **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:** The decision to host visits is at the ICB's discretion. The same approach must be applied to all visit requests from candidates/parties to avoid any question of bias – if one candidate is allowed to visit all others should be invited to visit also. Any visits should not interfere with the day to day running of the service, and you should be mindful of patient privacy and dignity.
- **Online:** Nothing contentious should be posted on websites or social media accounts. Updates/posts should only convey essential information.
- **Campaigns:** Do not undertake major publicity campaigns although factual campaigns aimed at giving practical health guidance to patients should continue
- **Board meetings:** Matters of future strategy should be deferred.
- **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.
- **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.

Communications activities necessary for operational delivery purposes should continue as normal. For instance, vaccination, 111 or if a facility was closed because of a flood or fire, it would be essential to tell patients directly affected by whatever means necessary.

## Boundary changes

Parliamentary constituency boundaries will change at the next UK general election. The four Boundary Commissions for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland published their final recommendations in late June 2023 following three rounds of public consultation.

[You can see the boundary changes on the House of Comms Library website.](#)

## MPs not standing for re-election

These are the MPs who've announced that they will not be seeking re-election. In Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent this includes Jo Gideon (Conservative) for Stoke-on-Trent Central and Sir William Cash (Conservative) for Stone.