



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

UK Election Guidance

18 April 2024

Reference: SPCB (2024) Paper 30

Executive summary

1. The SPCB is invited to agree the attached draft UK Election Guidance.

Issues and options

2. Members and their staff will continue to have full access to, and use of all services provided to support Members with their parliamentary duties both at Holyrood and in local offices in the run up to the UK Elections.
3. The SPCB has a responsibility to ensure that the resources of the Parliament are used only in the support of parliamentary duties and not for party political purposes such as campaigning or electioneering. The Members' Code of Conduct requires Members to abide by the policies adopted by the SPCB. Accordingly, Members are responsible for ensuring that SPCB policies on the use of parliamentary resources are fully complied with.
4. The attached draft is based on previous guidance and includes reference to relevant SPCB policies along with applicable deadlines for the issuing of parliamentary funded publications.

Resource implications

5. There are no resource implications.

Publication Scheme

6. This paper will be published in line with the SPCB Publication Scheme.

Next steps

7. Once agreed, a copy of the guidance will be provided to SPCB members to circulate in advance to their groups. The secretariat will ensure a copy is also provided to the LibDem group. Once the date of the UK Election is announced, the guidance will be published and a link circulated to all MSPs and their staff.

Decision

8. The SPCB is invited to agree the UK Election Guidance.

SPCB secretariat

April 2024

The use of Parliamentary resources during a UK election campaign

Overview

The SPCB has a responsibility to ensure that the resources of the Parliament are used only in the support of parliamentary duties, as set out in its [Use of Parliamentary Resources Policy](#).

This document is intended to assist Members by summarising the various relevant policies in place about the use of parliamentary resources during elections and other party political campaigns.

The Members' Code of Conduct requires Members to abide by the policies adopted by the SPCB. Accordingly, Members are responsible for ensuring that SPCB policies on the use of parliamentary resources are fully complied with.

Members are assured that the general principle and priority for all resources provided by the SPCB remains the same during this time. That is, Members and their staff will continue to have full access to, and use of all services provided to support Members with their parliamentary duties both at Holyrood and in local offices. However, in line with existing policies, these resources must not be used to any significant extent for any other purposes, including party political purposes. **Parliamentary resources must not be used for electioneering or campaigning.**

SPCB resources include: local offices; all areas of the parliamentary complex; IT equipment, services accounts and software; postage and stationery; all matters covered by the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme; and all services provided by SPCB staff.

In respect of the UK General election, parliamentary business activities will continue to be supported as normal eg parliamentary questions, motions, chamber debates and committee enquiries.

Where there is any clarity required about the interpretation of any matter related to any SPCB policies, the SPCB will be the final arbiter.

Members are asked to direct any questions they have on the information contained within this document to the relevant office. Contact details are provided throughout the text.

1. Members' Expenses

1.1 A Member is entitled to reimbursement of expenses which have been incurred only for the purpose of carrying out parliamentary duties. Section 10 of the [Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme](#) provides illustrations of what is included as 'parliamentary duties'. A Member should not submit a claim relating to any electioneering, party political activity or party political campaigning nor enter into any arrangement which could give rise to a benefit to a party political organisation.

Contact: Mairi Pearson, Head of Allowances Office, extension 86609

2. MSP Staff

2.1 Members are reminded that during their contracted hours members of staff employed by the Member may not undertake any significant party political activity. Campaigning or assisting in an election or other political campaign would constitute "significant party political activity". Members are responsible to the SPCB for the activities of their staff as for their own activities.

2.2 Members' employees may participate in political campaigning only if it is done either a) outside contracted hours; or b) provided they take unpaid leave (or paid accrued annual leave) to do so. In this instance Members must be able to demonstrate that the employee is on leave and they must ensure that parliamentary monies or facilities are not used for the purposes of political campaigning.

2.3 If a member of staff is taking annual leave in accordance with their contract of employment there is no need to inform the People Services Office. It is for Members to ensure that they keep their own records of staff annual leave.

2.4 If a member of staff is taking unpaid leave then People Services must be informed, in advance of the leave being taken, to enable the appropriate adjustments to be made to their pay.

2.5 Members are encouraged to contact People Services as quickly as possible for help and guidance should they have any concerns or questions on any issue relating to the employment of staff and their participation in political campaigning.

Contact: Neil Mackie, Head of People Services and Diversity and Inclusion, extension 86634

3. Local Office Accommodation

3.1 The Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme makes it clear that a Member's office (which may form part of a shared office with an MP) must be

a clearly defined office space within these premises and must not be used for party political or electioneering activities of any kind.

3.2 Party political or campaign material is not permitted to be displayed, externally or internally, in an area occupied by the parliamentary office and Members should be aware that such premises must not be used as a base for canvassing or campaigning or any party activity related to the UK election.

Contact: Mairi Pearson, Head of Allowances Office, extension 86609

4. Parliamentary Funded Publications

4.1 Parliamentary funded publications such as annual reports, newsletters, general surveys, general circular letters, questionnaires and petitions may not be issued within 3 months of a UK parliamentary general election, Scottish local government election or any national referendum (or within 4 months of a Scottish parliamentary election).

4.2. With a UK general election having now been called for **xx 2024 this prohibition takes immediate effect.**

4.3 Members can apply for an exemption to issue circular letters to local residents provided such publications are solely related to a defined and specific local issue such as the closure of a local facility or the withdrawal of a local service which is time sensitive in relation to the specific deadlines. There must be a defined list of constituents who will receive the letters and the matter must not form part of a wider political campaign. Any Member intending to issue such a circular letter who wishes the costs to be reimbursed under the postage and stationery provision or office costs provision of the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme, **must seek prior approval** by sending a copy of the intended letter to the Allowances Office for approval prior to issuing.

Contact: Mairi Pearson, Head of Allowances Office, extension 86609

5. Parliamentary funded websites

5.1 Members' websites, where setup and/or maintenance costs are paid from the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme, must not be used for political electioneering or canvassing.

Contact: Mairi Pearson, Head of Allowances Office, extension 86609

6. Corporate identity/copyright/broadcast material

6.1 A copy of the SPCB's existing policy in relation to use of the Corporate Identity can be accessed here: [MSPs' use of the Corporate Identity](#). The

Corporate Identity should not be used in any party political or electioneering publications.

Contact: Mairi Pearson, Head of Allowances Office, extension 86609

6.2 The corporate policy and copyright licence arrangements can be accessed here: [Policy on the use of SPCB Copyright Material](#).

6.3 The SPCB permits the use of Parliament copyright material under our copyright licence. The majority of what is published such as written and broadcast material can be used by MSPs, members of the public, and organisations in line with the licence and the requirements of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. However, parliamentary material must not be used as part of electioneering or party political campaigning for example on social media, websites or as an overlay as part of any electioneering or party political campaigning communications. This includes the use of downloadable files such as images and video footage taken in the Parliament.

Contact: Robin Davidson, Head of Information Governance and Data Protection, extension 85281

7. Data protection

7.1 While not specifically related to the use of parliamentary resources, Members and their staff may find it helpful to know that the UK Information Commissioner's Office has published guidance on [data protection handling during party political campaigning](#).

Contact: Robin Davidson, Head of Information Governance and Data Protection, extension 85281

8. Bookable Meeting Rooms

8.1 Meeting rooms must be used for parliamentary purposes and not party political purposes. Members are reminded that only Members, their staff and SPCB staff may book meeting rooms. The person under whom the booking is made must attend personally or be represented by at least one Parliament pass holder with signing-in rights. The guidance can be found here: [Booking a Meeting Room](#).

Contact: Alan Durward, Head of Facilities Management, extension 86131

9. Media Interviews

9.1 Members can continue to undertake media interviews within offices and shared spaces as covered in the general media policy ([Media policy - paragraph 4 refers](#)). However, there should be no recording/filming/ photography by current Members, or anyone else, within the Parliament for electioneering or

party political purposes or for inclusion in party political campaigning material.

9.2 External commentators (other than accredited journalists) must not be interviewed in the building unless there are exceptional circumstances and, in which case, the Parliament Communications Office has agreed to the interview taking place following consultation with the Clerk/Chief Executive and Presiding Officer's offices. ([Media policy - paragraph 3 refers](#)).

Contact: Jane McEwan, Head of Parliament Communications Office, extension 86235

10. News Conferences and Media Briefings

10.1 Parliamentary resources must not be used in the production of any press release which promotes the views of a political party or election candidate.

10.2 External parties' news conferences and media briefings must not be held at the Parliament. Members may, however, continue to call/host news conferences or media briefings in their parliamentary role, supported by an external party. [Media policy – paragraph 5 refers](#). This precludes providing a platform for any group campaigning in relation to the UK General election, including press conferences to launch a campaign specific leaflet, pieces of research or groups allied to particular parties.

Contact: Jane McEwan, Head of Parliament Communications Office, extension 86235

11. Member Sponsored Events and Exhibitions

11.1 Any Member can sponsor an event on a particular topic or issue provided it is not party political or related to election campaigning. Any event must be open to all Members. Information and guidance is available at: [MSP Events & Exhibitions - How to Organise](#)

11.2 Member-sponsored exhibitions which seek to influence/raise awareness with other Members will continue as normal. As such they again must not be party political or related to election campaigning.

Contact: Roy Devon, Head of Events and Exhibitions, extension 86701

12. SPICe

12.1 SPICe will continue to operate as normal during the run up to the UK general election, supporting the business of the Scottish Parliament and its committees and responding to both constituency and parliamentary enquiries. However, SPICe will not respond to enquiries which are clearly related to the

UK election campaign. SPICe services must not be used in any connection to the election campaign.

Contact: Emma Robinson, Head of Enquiries and Collections, extension 86060

13. Educational visits with schools

13.1 The SPCB offers a programme of inward and outreach education visits for Scottish schools in term-time. MSPs are invited to take part in both parts of the programme.

13.2 Inward and outreach school visits will continue to run as usual apart from on the day itself of the UK Election. Whilst Outreach Services will continue to respond to requests from schools, the number of outreach visits with MSPs may naturally reduce as local authorities may issue guidance to teachers about hosting visits by politicians during this period.

Contact: Sally Coyne, Head of Public Engagement Services, extension 85393

14. Financial Assistance for Registered Political Parties

14.1 The SPCB makes payments in accordance with the Scottish Parliament (Assistance for Registered Political Parties) Order 1999 to assist a political party represented in the Parliament with any expenses incurred by the party for the purposes of assisting Members connected with the party to perform their parliamentary duties. As this money is specifically paid in connection with a party's role in the Parliament (and is audited at the end of a financial year) it must not in any way be used in connection with the general election campaign.

Contact: Sara Glass, Director of Finance and Resilience, extension 86819