

EEAST guidance to staff and volunteers for the 2019 General Election



Dear colleagues,

As you will be aware, we are now in a pre-election period, also referred to as 'purdah', which will end once a government has been formed, on or after 13 December 2019. During this period 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 restrictions imposed by NHS England NHS Improvement apply in all cases other than where postponement would be detrimental to the effective running of the local NHS, or wasteful of public money. It is essential that EEAST staff and volunteers behave impartially towards all candidates and political parties, and do not influence the election outcomes, whether inadvertently or intentionally.

The principles underpinning the guidance issued by NHS England NHS Improvement 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
- during the election period, democratic debate between candidates and parties should not be overshadowed by public controversy originating from NHS bodies themselves, and
- communication activities during a general election should avoid competing with parliamentary candidates for the attention of the public.

N.B. Regarding *Visits from politicians* (point 6 in the official guidance below), EEAST has decided not to permit visits to our premises or take part in ride outs during purdah, other than in exceptional circumstances (*please refer all requests to the communications and engagement team*).

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.

If you are unsure please contact Adrian Penrose, Senior Communications Manager adrian.penrose@eastamb.nhs.uk or call 07565 200506.

The detailed guidance issued by NHS England NHS Improvement is as follows:

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

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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.
- **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 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 our discretion (see note above). 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 our 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. [EEAST guidelines are here](#)
- **Appointments of board members and non-executive directors:** Appointments can continue as per the usual process unless there is concern that 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.
- **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.

Adrian Penrose

Senior Communications Manager

8th November 2019