

Election protocols for elected members

Updated for the 2019 Local Election

Context

Local government elections are held every three years. In 2019, the elections will be held on Saturday 12 October. The period leading up to an election is a time of high interest from parties including the media, members of the public, and electoral candidates.

As an incumbent elected member seeking re-election, you have two roles. You will continue to make the decisions of Hastings District Council as members of the Council or its community board, while at the same time campaigning for re-election as a candidate.

These protocols provide guidance for you to balance your dual role as elected members and candidates seeking re-election. For further guidance or for clarification, please contact Democracy & Governance Services in the first instance.

Summary

1. If you are standing for re-election, you must clearly and transparently differentiate between activities conducted as an incumbent elected member (e.g., business-as-usual activities) and activities conducted while campaigning for re-election.
2. Resources owned by the Council and made available to you should only be used for Council purposes. The use of Council resources for election purposes is unacceptable. This includes Council-owned computers and mobile phones, social media channels, email addresses and publications.
3. Council-run social media accounts are considered Council resources and must remain politically neutral during the election. You must comply with our social media guidelines for candidates at all times.
4. You will continue to have access to the information you need to do your job as an incumbent. Council officers will not provide assistance with electioneering activities.
5. These protocols have general application at all times, but are especially relevant in the three months before the local election (Friday 12 July – Saturday 12 October). It is your responsibility to ensure your behaviour falls within these guidelines.

Protocol 1: Continuation of Council business

The normal business of Council continues during the pre-election period. Incumbents seeking re-election must balance and differentiate between these two roles.

Leading up to the election, elected members continue to have the right and responsibility to govern and to make decisions.

However, you should be mindful of an increased level of media and public scrutiny during this period and make a clear and transparent distinction between your activities as an elected member and your activities as a candidate.

Protocol 2: Use of Council resources

A local authority must not promote, nor be perceived to promote, the re-election prospects of assisting member. The use of Council resources for re-election purposes is unacceptable.

Council would be directly promoting a member's re-election prospects if it allows incumbent elected members to use Council resources¹ explicitly for campaign purposes. This includes all Council communications facilities (such as Council branding, stationery and postage, social media channels, and communications devices).

Council communications will be restricted during the pre-election period, to remove any perception that the Council is helping incumbents to promote their re-election prospects over other candidates.

Therefore, during the pre-election period:

- Council resources must not be used for campaigning purposes (including for positions not at Hastings District Council). This includes Council-supplied computers, social media channels, email addresses, mobile phones and telephone numbers.
- Elected members' columns in Council publications will be suspended.
- Elected members' radio slots will be suspended.
- Elected members will be required to comply with Council's social media guidelines for candidates in all aspects of their role.
- Access to Council resources for members to issue media releases will be limited to what is strictly necessary to communicate current Council business. Comments or quotations from the Mayor, chairpersons, and portfolio leaders will continue to be used in media releases setting out the Council's position on an issue (for example, where a decision has been made at a committee meeting). Officers will comment on or issue media releases as required. Journalistic use of information that may raise the profile of a member will be discontinued.

Your Council contact information will still be available (for example on the Council website or in the Annual Report) so your constituents can contact you about Council business. However, you should not be using your Council-supplied email address or mobile phone for electioneering purposes. If someone contacts you regarding the election on either of these channels, you should reply from your personal email address or mobile phone.

¹ Council resources include, but are not limited to, Council-owned or -controlled property and other resources including the Council logo and branding, all Council marketing and communication channels (including social media), Council-supplied business cards, stationery, computers, email, mobile phones, photocopiers, cars, Council venues (other than those available for hire to the general public), Council funds, and Council's human resources.

Protocol 3: Social media

Council's social media channels are Council resources and must remain politically neutral during the election. Elected members seeking re-election must follow Council's social media guidelines for candidates at all times, and not comment on, share, or otherwise use Council social media channels for electioneering.

Council has produced a set of social media guidelines for candidates, which are attached as Attachment One. You must comply with these guidelines at all times.

Council's social media channels will remain neutral at all times. Council will promote elections and the importance of voting, but will not associate these posts with any candidates.

Please note that for the period of the election:

- Council's social media channels must not be used by anyone for campaigning purposes. Any campaign-related material (including posts related to nominations and candidacy) will be removed.
- Council social media accounts will not follow any candidates. This may result in your account being unfollowed.
- You may not reply to comments or posts on Council's social media channels encouraging people to like or follow your social media accounts.
- You may not rate, review, check-in or tag the Council's social media channels in your own posts or comments.

Advice on how to effectively and safely use social media during the election period can be found in the social media guidelines for candidates.

Protocol 4: Availability of information

Elected members will have access to the information they need to discharge their roles as incumbents and their Council contact information will still be publicly available. However, Council officers will not provide assistance with electioneering activities.

You will continue to be supported in your role as an incumbent elected member. However, information requests should be clearly related to Council business and not for re-election purposes.

Information requests for election purposes are welcome. These should be made to the Democracy & Governance Services team and will be carried out in accordance with the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987.

Where the Council supplies information that is not already in the public domain to a candidate, the Council may consider any broader interest in this information alongside the requirement that Council resources are not to be used to give an electoral advantage to any candidate, and at its discretion the Council will make this information available to all other candidates.

Protocol 5: Use of Mayoral resources

Council resources provided for mayoral use should not be used for any electioneering activities associated with any candidate.

If an incumbent mayor is seeking re-election a clear and transparent distinction will be made between that mayor's business-as-usual activities and the mayor's campaigning activities. An incumbent mayor seeking re-election will establish a separate office, with separate staff, for any campaigning activities at their own expense.

The incumbent mayor's office will establish systems and protocols to ensure that any information or other requests from the public, media, other elected members or council employees during the preelection period are identified as either business as usual or campaign related and to ensure that these are kept separate and responded to appropriately.

Application of protocols

As an elected member seeking re-election, it is ultimately your responsibility to ensure that your behaviour falls within these guidelines.

If you are unsure as to whether a particular action or request is in breach of these protocols, you should seek advice from the Electoral Officer (Jackie Evans, 06 871 5018) or Deputy Electoral Officer (Jennifer Bainbridge, 06 871 5000 ext 5445) as soon as possible.

Election protocols for elected members

Updated for the 2019 Local Election

Attachment One

Hastings District Council's Social Media Guidelines for Candidates

Candidates must comply with the following guidelines for social media use and presence related to campaigning:

Things to be aware of

- Election advertising, using any media, including social media, must identify the person under whose authority they have been produced, as per sections 113-115 of the Local Electoral Act 2001. This means in your profile photo/bio, you must have a statement saying that all content/images on your social media channel are authorised by you or your agent. You must include a physical address in the authorisation statement.
- The Council's social media accounts (listed in Appendix 1), including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Neighbourly, are not permitted to be used as a communications channel by anyone (Candidates or members of the public) for promotion, electioneering or campaigning. This also applies to all social media accounts owned by Council-controlled organisations.
- The Council's social media accounts are constantly monitored and any campaign related or electioneering content will be removed immediately.
- If Hastings District Council already follows your public social media accounts, please note you will be unfollowed 3 months prior to the election date. This protocol is in line with the Local Electoral Act 2001.
- Any social media post – positive or negative – made by any individual specifically relating to their own – or someone else's – nomination, intention to run for Council, or election campaign, will be removed immediately.
- Candidates cannot reply to the Council's social media posts or share with a comment encouraging people to like or follow their own social media accounts or any other electioneering tool. Any posts that do this will be removed immediately.
- Candidates must not link their own social media accounts (if they are used for campaigning purposes) to the Council's social media accounts.
- Candidates cannot rate, review, check-in or tag the Council's social media channels.
- The Council's social media accounts will remain neutral. Hastings District Council will promote elections and the importance of voting but will not associate these posts with any candidates.

Hastings District Council's social media accounts are listed in Appendix 1.

Some things you can do

It's a good idea to encourage people to follow your social media accounts while campaigning, include it in any promotional material. It's a great way to engage with the public – you can ask questions, run polls, encourage people to register to vote and then actually vote! Remind them of important dates, etc.

Great images are important on social media – post pics from your campaign trail, or post videos of yourself explaining who you are and what you stand for. You may have people who are happy to be filmed sharing why they will be voting for you – seeing other members of their community may encourage people to vote.

Facebook

- It's a good idea to have a public figure Facebook Page with a clear profile picture to help your election campaign. It's best to have a new photo.
- Set-aside budget for Facebook advertising to reach voters. You need to become authorised to run ads with political content. Facebook has helpful info on this here.
- Facebook has a helpful guide about using Facebook to engage with voters and build your online community here.

Twitter

- Create a Twitter account. Some residents are very active on Twitter especially when it comes to political discussions. See what hashtags are trending for the election. Follow prominent local people, and if people follow you, follow them back.
- Think of Twitter more like a newsfeed or forum to release information about everything you are doing.
- Twitter is a great platform to get involved in conversation and engage the public in the issues you are passionate about. Let people know what you stand for/what you want to change, give people the chance to share their views and explain the reasons for the changes you want to make.

Neighbourly

- Set up a personal profile on Neighbourly if you don't have one already and then you can add a special candidate pin to your profile picture so the community knows you are a candidate. On this platform you can speak directly to your ward and let the community get to know you and see what upsets them/what they care about. Neighbourly often runs special groups for local elections that you can be part of. Visit neighbourly.co.nz/help for more info.

Instagram

- Instagram is all about photos. You can feature a single photo or a collage of photos that will show up on your follower's feeds. You want to drive engagement, not just reach. So remember to focus on quality rather than quantity. Instagram is most successful when you tell personal stories and pictures that give the public greater insight into your campaign, rather than promotional images.
- Stories are a great way to group photos into albums. You might use them to share behind the scenes, promote an event, or focus on a specific issue you care about. You can also customise your Stories by adding music, text, emoji or even polls so you can make them more interactive and add a bit of your own personality.

Appendix 1

Social media channel list

Facebook

The Council has a number of Facebook pages:

- HDC www.hastingsdc.govt.nz
- HDC Libraries www.hastingslibraries.co.nz
- Opera House www.hawkesbayoperahouse.co.nz
- Art Gallery www.hastingscityartgallery.co.nz
- Aquatics www.aquaticshastings.co.nz
- Splash Planet www.splashplanet.co.nz
- iway www.iway.org.nz
- my voice my choice www.myvoicemychoice.co.nz

Instagram

www.instagram.com/hastingsproud

YouTube

www.youtube.com/user/hdcwebteam