

Imprints for non-party campaigners – Scottish Parliamentary elections and council elections in Scotland

Under the Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000, the Scottish Parliament (Elections etc) Order 2015 and the Representation of the People Act 1983, there are rules about putting imprints on election material.

Whenever printed or digital election material is produced, it must contain certain details (which we refer to as an ‘imprint’) to show who is responsible for the material. This helps to ensure there is transparency about who is campaigning.

The rules on imprints apply to all non-party campaigners campaigning at Scottish Parliamentary elections and council

elections in Scotland, whether or not you are registered with the Electoral Commission.

This factsheet explains the rules you must follow.

For the imprint rules for campaigners at other elections, please see our separate [factsheet](#).

What is a non-party campaigner?

Non-party campaigners are individuals or organisations that campaign at elections, but are not standing as political parties or candidates.

In electoral law, these individuals or organisations are called ‘third parties’. Where non-party campaigners have registered with the Electoral Commission they are called ‘recognised third parties’. In

our guidance, we call recognised third parties 'registered non-party campaigners'.

What is election material?

There are two types of non-party campaigns: local campaigns and general campaigns.

For local campaigns, election material is published material such as leaflets and adverts that can be reasonably regarded as intended to promote or procure the election of a candidate at an election.

We provide advice and guidance on the rules for local campaigns but we do not enforce them.

Decisions on the investigation and prosecution of imprint offences on election material in local campaigns are a matter for the police and the prosecution services, and any allegations of non-compliance should be made to the police.

For general campaigns, election material is published material such as leaflets, adverts and websites that can reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters to vote for or against:

- one or more political parties
- political parties or candidates that support or do not support particular policies
- other categories of candidates, for example, candidates who went to a state school, or independent candidates (who are not standing in the name of a political party)

We regulate compliance with the rules for imprints on election material in general campaigns.

There are rules on election material, and other campaign activity, undertaken by non-party campaigners in the run-up to certain elections that may also apply to you. These rules cover spending limits, donations and reporting. You can read more in our [guidance for non-party campaigners](#).

What must you include?

On printed material such as leaflets and posters, you must include the name and address of:

- the printer
- the promoter
- any person on behalf of whom the material is being published (and who is not the promoter)

On digital election material containing text distributed via the internet, you must include the name and address of:

- the promoter
- any person on behalf of whom the material is being published (and who is not the promoter)

The promoter is whoever has caused the material to be published.

You must use an address where you can be contacted. It can be a home address or an office or business address. You can also use a PO Box address, or other mailbox service.

If you are putting an advert in a print newspaper, your advert does not

need to include the printer's name and address, but the name and address of the printer of the newspaper must appear on the first or last page of the newspaper. The advert must include the other details as usual.

If you are being paid to publish election material, the material must include an imprint which includes the details of whoever is paying you. This is because either they are the promoter, or you are publishing the material on their behalf.

In all cases, you must make sure that the imprint lists all the organisations involved in publishing and promoting the material.

It is an offence for a printer or promoter to publish printed election material or digital election material containing text without an imprint.

Does everyone have to include an imprint?

For printed material such as leaflets and posters, anyone who promotes or prints election material must include an imprint by law.

For digital material, you do not have to include an imprint on your election material if you are expressing your personal opinion in material published on your own behalf and on a non-commercial basis.

Some people cannot use the personal opinion exemption due to their legal responsibilities under electoral law.

If you are one of these people, you must include an imprint on any digital

election material containing text even if it is your personal opinion.

These people are:

- A candidate at the election
- An election agent or deputy election agent at a Scottish Parliamentary election, Scottish council election, or certain other elections
- A holder of elective office:
 - a member of the House of Commons
 - a member of the Scottish Parliament
 - a member of the Senedd
 - a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - a Police and Crime Commissioner
 - a member of any local authority in the UK, excluding parish or community councils
 - a member of the Greater London Authority
 - the Mayor of London or any other elected mayor
- A registered officer of a political party or one of its accounting units:
 - party leader
 - treasurer
 - deputy treasurer
 - nominating officer
 - campaigns officer
 - deputy campaigns officer
 - accounting unit treasurer
 - accounting unit second officer
- A responsible person for a registered non-party campaigner

An organisation cannot use the personal opinion exemption.

Examples of how to apply the personal opinion exemption

Example 1

A volunteer at a campaign group writes a blog post for the group on one of their campaign issues. They recommend not voting for a political party because of that party's record on the issue.

Although this is also the volunteer's own opinion and they are not being paid, they are writing on behalf of the organisation.

This does not count as their personal opinion, and the blog must carry an imprint. The imprint must include the campaign group's details.

Example 2

Someone is paid to engage on social media and promote some parties over others.

This does not count as their personal opinion because it is done on a commercial basis.

The material must include an imprint. It must include the details of whoever is paying for the material to be published.

Example 3

A campaign group posts some election material which promotes some parties over others.

The campaign group is not an individual, it is an organisation. Organisations cannot use the personal opinion exemption.

The material must contain an imprint with the campaign group's details.

Example 4

Someone who works for a charity shares some election material posted by a party, and adds their own message to encourage people to vote for the party based on the charity's support for a campaign issue.

The new content added does amount to new election material. However, although the issue is one that the charity campaigns on, the employee is acting independently and in their own time. The material is not published on behalf of the charity, and there is no commercial basis for their post.

This is their personal opinion, and no imprint is required.

Example 5

The responsible person for a registered non-party campaigner posts their own thoughts on social media to encourage people to vote for a party.

Their reasons are not connected to the campaign group's issues, and the employee is acting independently and in their own time.

However, even though this is the person's own personal opinion, they are a registered responsible person.

The personal opinion exemption does not apply, and they must include an imprint.

Examples of an imprint

If you are registered with us as a non-party campaigner, the promoter may be the person notified to us as the 'responsible person', or someone authorised by them to incur spending, or the organisation itself. A standard imprint should look like this:

Printed by Armadillo Printing Ltd, 20 Barry Avenue, Leeds.

Promoted by J Smith on behalf of the Campaign Group, both of 110 High Street, Stafford.

If the material is digital there is no printer, so a digital imprint on campaign material should look like this:

Promoted by the Campaign Group, 110 High Street, Stafford.

Where do you put the imprint?

If your material is a single-sided printed document – such as a window poster – or where most of the information is on one side, you must put the imprint on that side of the document.

If it is a multi-sided printed document, you must put it on the first or last page.

Websites and other electronic material

Any election material published on the internet that contains text, such as websites and social media posts, must include an imprint. The imprint must include the name and address of the promoter and any organisation

or individual on whose behalf it has been published.

We recommend that you include the imprint where the material appears – for example, in the footer of the relevant webpage.

In some cases, the imprint may appear somewhere closely and clearly linked.

Social media

You must display the full imprint details, including the details of anyone else on whose behalf you are publishing the material.

We recommend that you include the imprint in the post itself.

In some cases where there is a strong clear link between your post and somewhere else in the platform, the imprint may appear there.

For example, on Twitter your imprint can be included prominently on your profile. For paid adverts on Facebook, you can include the imprint in the disclaimer text which accompanies the advert.

You can also add the imprint as an image.

Remember that the imprint must include the details of both the promoter and anyone else on whose behalf the material has been produced. This means that your own details will not always be enough to meet the imprint requirements.

Sharing material

If you share material that has already been posted, without your own commentary or other additions or modifications, you do not need to include your own imprint. You should

check that the material includes its original imprint.

If you include your own additions when you share material, then if the additional material is election material, it must include an imprint as usual.

If your additional material expresses your personal opinion, published on your own behalf on a non-commercial basis, it does not need an imprint.

Crowdfunding

If your crowdfunding page contains election material as well as asking for donations, it must contain an imprint. Whether or not this is the case, you should ensure that it is clear on the page who the money is being donated to.

You can find out more information in our [crowdfunding factsheet](#).

Images and cartoons

If your digital election material contains text, or appears within material containing text, it must carry an imprint. We expect that this will apply to most election material images.

We recommend that you include the imprint in the image itself.

If it is posted on social media, you can include the imprint in the same way as you would for any social media post.

If an image containing no text is used as election material, you should include the imprint as best practice.

Videos

If your video election material contains text, or appears within

material containing text, it must carry an imprint. We expect that this will apply to most video election material.

We recommend that you include the imprint in the video itself. The imprint must be legible and appear for long enough for voters to read it.

If the video is posted on social media, you can include the imprint in the same way as you would for any social media post.

Posters for downloading

Any posters that are available for download from a website must carry a digital imprint.

If the posters are printed out and displayed as printed material, they must carry a full printed imprint including the printer's details. If you intend people to do this, you should leave a space for them to include their details as the printer.

Comments

Individual comments posted onto discussion forums are unlikely to be covered by the rules on election material and non-party campaigning.

As good practice, we suggest that if you use these forums you make your identity clear where possible.

Where you can find more information

We publish a suite of guidance for non-party campaigners which can be found [here](#).

We also offer an advice service and you can contact us on one of the phone numbers or email addresses below.

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0333 103 1928

Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Electoral Commission:

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