

**IBBERTON, BELCHALWELL & WOOLLAND VILLAGE HALL**  
**Reg. Charity No. 1095817**  
**[www.ibbertonvillagehall.co.uk](http://www.ibbertonvillagehall.co.uk)**

**CAMPAIGNING AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY POLICY**

Ibberton, Belchalwell & Woolland Village Hall will follow the guidance below before they engage in campaigning and political activity.

To be a charity an organisation must be established for charitable purposes only. It will not be charitable if its purposes are political.

Political campaigning and activity are legitimate activities for a charity to undertake - but only in the context of supporting the delivery of its charitable purposes. And it must not be the continuing and sole activity of the charity. Trustees need to ensure that this is not, and does not become, the reason for the charity's existence.

Charities can campaign for a change in the law, policy, or decisions where that change would support the charity's purposes. A charity cannot exist to further the interests of a political party.

In the political arena, a charity must stress its independence and ensure that any involvement it has with political parties is balanced.

A charity must not give support or funding to a political party, nor to a candidate or politician.

Trustees must not allow their charity to be used as a vehicle for the expression of the political views of an individual trustee or staff member.

Trustees should comply with the Code of the Advertising Standards Authority. Emotive or controversial material is allowed where this is lawful and justifiable in the context of the campaign, but it must be factually accurate and be evidence-based.

Trustees should weigh up the benefits against the risks in deciding whether a campaign is likely to be an effective way of furthering the charity's purposes.

**What's the difference between campaigning and political campaigning?**

The Commission clarifies campaigning as being about awareness-raising, educating or involving the public by mobilising their support on a particular issue, or to influence public attitudes. This is distinct from an activity which involves trying to secure

support for, or opposition to, a change in the law or government or local authority policy, which is said to be 'political activity'. Moreover, the public's understanding of the terms 'campaigning' and 'political activity' can vary. 'Political activity' may be associated in people's minds with party political activity.

This is worth repeating - political activity can only be undertaken by a charity in the context of supporting its charitable purposes. The Commission defines this as activity which is aimed at securing, or opposing, any change in the law or in the policy or decisions of government, local authorities or other public bodies. This differs from activity aimed at ensuring that an existing law is observed, which is part of campaigning.

Clearly, there is not always a fully clear demarcation between campaigning and political activity, and a charity might well undertake a phase of activity which has mixed elements.

## **FAQs**

### **Can a charity carry out campaigning and political activity?**

Yes - if it supports and furthers its charitable purposes, unless its governing document prohibits it. Those activities must never be party-political.

### **Can a charity have a political purpose?**

No. Again, a charity must not undertake political activity that is not relevant to supporting the charity's charitable purposes. Political activity might include:

- raising public support for change
- influencing political parties or candidates, decision-makers, politicians or public servants on the charity's position in support of desired change and responding to consultations. Remember though, that charities cannot give their support to a political party.

### **Can a charity have campaigning or political activity specified in its governing document?**

Yes - so long as the document clearly states this is in support of furthering its charitable purposes.

### **Can a charity carry out political activity for a change in the law?**

Yes - but only if it supports its charitable purposes.

### **Can a charity campaign or carry out political activity to influence government or other bodies?**

Yes - but again, only if this supports its charitable purposes. And trustees must take care to avoid an approach which is purely focused on political activity as this could call into question the propriety of their actions, or even their charitable status.

If a campaign is directed at a private company the activity is not political - but trustees should still ask themselves whether the campaign is furthering the purposes of the charity.

### **Can a charity engage with (without supporting) a political party?**

Yes - but only on aspects that affect the charity's beneficiaries. A political party might ask a charity for advice on its proposed policies. This is within the limits of how that input might impact upon the charity's purposes.

### **Can a charity engage with (but not support) individual candidates or politicians?**

Yes. As above, in objective furtherance of the charity's defined purposes. The charity might ask candidates' views on an issue and publish the response or host a public debate between candidates. But the charity must remain politically neutral to help ensure public perceptions of neutrality.

### **What happens when an election has been called?**

Charities need to take special care to ensure their political neutrality. A charity must not provide funds, or other resources, to a political candidate, nor encourage its supporters to support a particular candidate.

### **What if a charity breaks the rules or the law?**

If a charity, deliberately or mistakenly, appears to be carrying out campaign activity that is not sufficiently connected to its purposes, the Charity Commission will investigate. It will aim to resolve such situations informally but may need to take regulatory action where there has been misuse of charity resources or misconduct.

### **A checklist for political campaigning**

What are the objectives of this campaign?

How might this campaign or political activity further or support the purposes of the charity?

Are any of the objectives of this campaign outside the purposes of the charity?

Are any of the activities party political?

Is all campaign material factually accurate?

What evidence is there to justify the campaign?

Are there other activities that the charity could undertake to achieve the same objectives?

Would the campaign be undertaken in partnership with other organisations? If so, how would financial and partnership arrangements be managed?

Is there any risk of acting outside the charity's purposes?

Is there any reputational risk?

### **Social media**

Seemingly harmless social media posts can easily be taken out of context, because of their brevity and lack of scope to explain purpose. Charities must ensure their messages are clear and not perceived as being party political. MissionBox cites the case of a national charity which was investigated following a tweet about austerity and food poverty; the Charity Commission accepted that the charity wasn't acting in a party-political way but highlighted the need for clarity to avoid perception of political bias.

Law firm Mills and Reeve advises that "Even if their intention is not to act politically, charities must consider how the social media message will be interpreted and whether there is a risk the charity may be seen as political."

Further information

You can read more detail on The Charity Commission's advice here.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/political-activity-and-campaigning-by-charities#:~:text=The%20Charity%20Commission%20uses%20the,devolved%2C%20local%20or%20overseas%20government>

You can read more advice on health checks for political campaigning here.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/political-activity-and-campaigning-by-charities>

Non-profit advice group MissionBox covers similar points and cites examples of where charities have been unwittingly 'caught out' in the past - here. They also warn of care needed when using social media in political campaigning.

<https://www.3rdsectormissioncontrol.co.uk/introducing-missionbox/>

Perhaps the last word belongs to Helen Stephenson, CEO of the Charity Commission who, whilst warning of the hazards of political campaigning, pays tribute to the hard work of the VCSE sector here.