



Neighbourhood Plan Referendums – a brief guide for parish councils, ward councillors and campaign groups.

This guidance note outlines the key issues that apply in relation to publicity during the period leading up to any Neighbourhood Plan Referendum. This period runs from the publication date of the information statement (a minimum of 28 days before the date of the referendum) to the date of the referendum.

This guidance deals with specific restrictions in relation to any individual's role as an elected or co-opted ward or local parish councillor.

The guidance also deals with restrictions on how much may be spent by campaigners by way of expenses incurred in the conduct of any campaign either in support of or in opposition to the referendum question.

KEY POINTS - PUBLICITY:

- Councillors can create their own publicity, provided Council resources are not used.
- Council business will continue during a referendum period. This includes publicity around normal Council business and events. However this must be carefully thought through to ensure Council "machinery" is not used or allowed to be used or manipulated by anyone in relation to the referendum.
- Councillors representing the referendum area should not be quoted in any press releases issued (if any) relating to the referendum.
- No posters or leaflets must be displayed on Council premises (including street furniture) or vehicles.
- Views on the referendum question, which could be seen as in favour of or against the proposal, must not be published by Milton Keynes Council or a local council.
- Press releases issued by Milton Keynes Council or a local council should not be used to support or oppose the referendum question.

- **Councillors** in the Neighbourhood Plan Area need to maintain a clear distinction between their official duties as a serving Councillor and their involvement with any campaign relating to the referendum. For example, they should guard against giving any impression of use of Council resources for referendum or private purposes. During the referendum period Councillors may continue to deal with ward work and represent their constituents.
- Particular care must be taken by Councillors who hold positions of responsibility within a council where, by virtue of their role, they could be seen to be supporting or opposing a referendum question.

KEY POINTS - REFERENDUM EXPENSES:

- A maximum of £2,362 plus £0.059 for each entry in the relevant register of electors may be spent by campaign organisers in connection with a referendum campaign. The exact amount allowed for each referendum area will be published in the Information Statement or may be obtained from Milton Keynes Council's Elections team (elections@milton-keynes.gov.uk)
- Expenses mean the expenses incurred by or on behalf of any individual or body during the referendum period in relation to :
 - Advertising of any nature
 - Unsolicited material addressed to voters
 - Information about the referendum, information about the question, arguments for and against
 - Market research or canvassing
 - Provision of any property, services or facilities in connection with press conferences or dealings with the media
 - Transport (by any means) of persons to anywhere with a view to obtaining publicity in connection with a referendum campaign
 - Rallies and other events, including public meetings.
- Expenses also include any notional expenses, where property, services or facilities are provided free of charge or at a discount.

Campaigning groups are encouraged to register with and submit a statement of expenses to the Counting Officer (elections@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

It is an offence for a campaign organiser to exceed the referendum expenses limits and if found guilty would be liable to a fine of up to £5000 and/or imprisonment of up to 12 months.