

## **PARLIAMENTARY NEWSLETTERS**

### **Executive summary**

1. A complaint has been received about the content of a Member's newsletter which alleges that it is not in accordance with the SPCB's guidance on parliamentary publications. The newsletter has been produced using parliamentary resources. The SPCB is invited to consider whether the complaint should be progressed.

### **Issues and Options**

2. The specific complaint that has been made is that a newsletter issued in the run up to the local authority elections in May of this year contained photographs of local authority councillors. The complainant considers that the newsletter was in breach of the guidance and has invited the SPCB to consider this matter.

3. The SPCB will be aware that an e-mail was issued to all Members on 7 March informing them that any publications produced using parliamentary resources should not include photographs or named references to local authority councillors so close to the proximity of a local government election. While the newsletter made no references to local authority councillors by name, a photograph contained in the newsletter does show some councillors.

4. A draft version of the newsletter was seen in advance by the Allowances Office on 15 February 2012 and we made a number of comments about the format and content, including removal of any named references to councillors in the area. No advice was offered on the use of photographs. The Member took on board all the comments made to him and submitted a revised version which was cleared on 21 February by the Allowances Office. This clearance was given in advance of the SPCB's decision on references to councillors and the notice which issued to Members.

5. While the newsletter does contain photographs showing councillors we can confirm that the newsletter was cleared in good faith by the Allowances Office in February and before the e-mail on the use of such references not being permitted was circulated to Members. The convention in the past has been that, if a publication is cleared in advance by the Allowances Office, the SPCB will generally take it as evidence that the Member has taken the appropriate steps to ensure that he or she is acting within the guidelines.

6. Notwithstanding the advance clearance by the Allowances Office, responsibility for all publications using parliamentary resources lies with the Member concerned and the SPCB is being asked to determine whether the complaint should be investigated further.

### **Resource Implications**

7. Should the SPCB consider that this complaint requires further investigation we will calculate the costs involved in the publication and distribution.

### **Governance issues**

8. The use of parliamentary resources is covered by the guidance issued to all Members on these matters.

### **Publication Scheme**

9. Should the SPCB consider that this complaint requires further investigation then any future paper should be published in accordance with the SPCB's publication scheme.

### **Next Steps**

10. Should the SPCB consider that this complaint requires further investigation, we will contact the Member concerned for their comments on the complaint and revert back to the SPCB in the near future. If the SPCB considers that the complaint is not justified, we will advise the complainant accordingly.

### **Decision**

11. The SPCB is invited to consider whether this complaint requires further investigation.

Allowances Office  
September 2012