



## DRAFT\* Election Guidelines 2026

Election Campaigns for:  
The Scottish Parliament  
The Senedd – the Welsh Parliament  
Local Government in parts of England

Polling Day: 7th May 2026

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## **1. The Election Period**

### **1.1 The Election Period and when the Election Guidelines and Appendices (“the Guidelines”) come into effect**

These guidelines take effect from the first day of the election periods for UK-wide output, which is

**Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2026 at 00.01** (to be confirmed by Ofcom in Scotland & Wales)

However, election campaigning is likely to begin before the formal election periods and content producers should be sensitive to the need for particular care running up to the Election Period. Advice is available from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

**The Guidelines remain in effect for all elections until the close of polls at 22.00 on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May.**

There is no formal distinction during the election periods between the days before and after the close of nominations. The close of nominations are not the same for all the elections:

1<sup>st</sup> April in Scotland

9<sup>th</sup> April in England and Wales.

There are no scheduled elections in Northern Ireland.

### **1.2 Elections**

#### **The Scottish Parliament**

The Election is contested on the basis of the Additional Member System, with 73 single member constituencies combined with eight regions each electing seven additional MSPs through a party list.

#### **The Senedd – the Welsh Parliament**

The Election is being contested with a new electoral system and an increase in membership of the Senedd: 96 MSs will be elected across 16 constituencies using the “closed proportional list system”.

#### **Local Government in England**

Elections will be contested by First Past the Post in the following:

- 32 London boroughs
- 32 Metropolitan councils
- 25 District Councils
- 15 Unitary authorities

- 2 County councils
- Plus:
- 6 Single authority Mayors

For further information specific to each election, please refer to the [Appendices](#).

### 1.3 The Guidelines

There is no area of broadcasting where the BBC's commitment to due impartiality is more closely scrutinised than in reporting election campaigns.

These Guidelines are intended to offer a framework within which journalists:

- can operate in as free and creative an environment as possible,
- deliver to audiences impartial and independent reporting of the campaign, giving them fair coverage and rigorous scrutiny of the policies and campaigns of all parties.

**The BBC is also legally obliged to adopt a Code of Practice with respect to “the participation of candidates at a parliamentary or local government election in items about the constituency or electoral area in question which are included in relevant services during the election period”. This obligation is fulfilled by Section 4 of these Guidelines.**

The BBC is also required, under the terms of its Charter and Agreement to ensure that political issues are covered with due accuracy and due impartiality. These Election Guidelines supplement the Editorial Guidelines (Section 2, “Impartiality” and Section 10, “Politics and Public Policy”).

They should, in particular, be read in conjunction with Section 10 of the Editorial Guidelines: This includes the following:

#### ***Coverage of Political Parties, Government and Devolution in the UK***

**10.4.1** *The BBC should make, and be able to defend, editorial decisions regarding coverage of political parties on the basis that they are reasonable and carefully reached, with due impartiality. News judgements should drive editorial decision making in news-based programmes, ensuring due weight is given to conveying, examining and challenging the views and policies of all relevant parties in the UK over time.*

*The way in which due impartiality is achieved among parties will vary, depending on the format, platform and how the output relates to different parts of the UK. Deciding respective levels of coverage for different political parties, who have varying levels of political support, requires – primarily – good and impartial editorial judgement, rather than mathematical formulae. Evidence of past electoral support and of current electoral support should be taken into account in making judgements about appropriate levels of coverage and prominence.*

*Content producers must take responsibility for achieving due impartiality in their own output without necessarily relying on other BBC content or services.*

**10.4.2** *The UK has diverse political cultures in the different nations; so, achieving appropriate coverage for political parties, especially for UK-wide output, means assessing relative political strength in this devolved structure. Achieving due impartiality involves taking account of the different parties in each nation, as well as those with electoral support across the UK.*

### **UK Elections and Referendums**

**10.4.22** *News judgements must continue to drive editorial decision making in news-based programmes and those judgements, during elections or referendums, should be made within a framework of democratic debate. During the election period, due weight should be given to conveying, examining and challenging the views and policies of all relevant parties and candidates, including, where appropriate, independent candidates.*

*Some output will need extra care and consideration in terms of scheduling during election periods and in the run-up to election campaigns. Content makers should consult Chief Adviser Politics at an early stage when there may be a risk to impartiality, for instance, from one-off dramas, even if of a historical nature, appearances by politicians in non-political output, or programmes intending to achieve impartiality over time.*

*Some elections, such as executive mayoral contests, may have a long lead-in time, where campaigning with a particular focus on individuals can begin a year or more before polling day. All output, including non-political, will need to give consideration over this period to the need for impartiality and fairness to candidates and those seeking nomination.*

**The Guidelines are publicly available and the BBC can expect to be held accountable for their implementation during the campaign.**

**BBC output with regard to the election period is also subject to Sections 5 and 6 of the Ofcom Code (except 6.8 – 6.12) and the associated Guidance Notes which is consistent with adherence to these Guidelines.**

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/section-five-due-impartiality-accuracy>

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/section-six-elections-referendums>

### **1.4 Who the Guidelines apply to**

It is the responsibility of each editor to ensure that their content producers are aware of how the Guidelines apply to their output.

Any programme which does not usually cover political subjects or normally invite politicians to participate must consult the Chief Adviser Politics in advance before inviting a politician, candidate or anyone who has taken a prominent political stance to take part in their output, or before accepting a request to participate. This is irrespective of whether their proposed contribution is itself regarded as 'political'.

The Appendices set out information specific to the different elections and different parts of the UK.

Each programme, strand, website, podcast or channel must bear in mind the location of its intended audience in applying these Guidelines.

These Guidelines apply to any content intended for audiences in Great Britain, covering any aspect of the elections.

## **2. Summary of Mandatory issues and referrals**

### **2.1 During the Election Period:**

- **Where content would not normally include politicians, political opinions or 'controversial issues' – such as sport, music, quiz or panel shows, entertainment and lifestyle output – producers must consult Chief Adviser Politics in advance before inviting a politician to take part in their output, or before accepting a request to participate. This referral applies to all political figures such as MPs, councillors, mayors and PCCs, and is irrespective of whether the proposed contribution is itself 'political'. \*(10.3.1)**
- **All bids for interviews or proposals to profile UK party leaders or leaders in nations holding elections must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics before parties are approached. Bids for party leaders in the nations should also be referred to the appropriate Heads of News in the nations. Offers of such interviews should also be referred before being accepted or declined.**
- **Any proposal to use a contribution from a candidate without an opportunity for comment or response from any other parties or candidates must be referred to a senior editorial figure and the Chief Adviser Politics. (see context 3.5).**
- **The BBC will not commission voting intention polls for publication during the campaign.**
- **Any proposal to commission an opinion poll or any sort of survey, vote or focus group on matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or on 'controversial subjects' in any other area, must be referred to Chief Adviser Politics in advance. \*(10.3.8)**
- **There will be no votes (online, SMS/text or social media) attempting to quantify support for a party, a candidate or a party political policy issue.**
- **Any proposal to conduct a vote (online, text or social media) on any political issue that could have a bearing on any of the elections must be discussed with the Chief Adviser, Politics, as well as being referred to the relevant departmental senior editorial figure and ITACU.**

- The BBC will not broadcast or publish numbers of e-mails, texts or other communications received on either side of any issue connected to the campaign.
- Any proposal to report voting intention using research methods other than polling must be referred to Chief Adviser Politics.\*(11.4.37)

\* referral is also mandatory outside election periods.

## 2.2 Polling day (until 22.00)

- No opinion poll on any issue relating to the election may be published.
- There will be no coverage of any issues directly pertinent to the election campaigns on any BBC outlet or social media between 06.00 – 22.00 (any such coverage before 06.00 must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics).
- Whilst the polls are open, it is a criminal offence to publish anything about the way in which people have voted in that election, based on information from voters after they have voted.

## 3. Due Impartiality

### 3.1 Coverage of Parties and Candidates

To achieve due impartiality, each bulletin, programme or programme strand, as well as online and interactive services, for each election covered, must ensure that the parties (and, where relevant, independent candidates) are covered proportionately over an appropriate period.

Determining appropriate levels of coverage should take into account levels of past and current electoral support (see [Appendices](#) and [Ofcom Digest \[https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\\_file/0026/213992/electoral-digest-local-elections.pdf\]\(https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\_file/0026/213992/electoral-digest-local-elections.pdf\)](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0026/213992/electoral-digest-local-elections.pdf)

Electoral support in each of the previous equivalent elections is the starting point for making those judgements. However, other factors should be taken into account where appropriate, including evidence of variation in levels of support in more recent elections, changed political circumstances (e.g. new parties or party splits) as well as other evidence of current support, including robust trends in legitimate opinion polls. The number of candidates a party is standing may also be a factor.

### 3.2 Impartiality in Programmes and Online Content

Daily news magazine programmes and podcasts should normally achieve proportional and appropriate coverage within the course of each week of the campaign.

This means that each strand (e.g. a drive time show on radio) is responsible for achieving appropriate impartiality itself within the week and cannot rely on other

outlets at different times of day (e.g. the breakfast show) to do so for it. This does not preclude programmes, in specific circumstances, from co-operating to organise joint coverage, thereby achieving due impartiality across the station or channel. Nor does it preclude such output running a series of features which achieve impartiality across the whole campaign. Both such arrangements need explicit sign-posting.

Programme strands should avoid individual editions getting substantially out of kilter. There may be days when inevitably one party dominates the news agenda, e.g. when party campaigns are launched, but in that case care must be taken to ensure that appropriate coverage is given to other such launches, from parties or candidates on the relevant days and that there is appropriate signposting forwards and backwards.

Weekly or periodic programmes and podcasts, or running series within daily sequence programmes, which focus on one party or candidate, should signpost both forward and backwards so that it is clear to the audience that due impartiality is built in over time. In these instances, due impartiality should be achieved over the course of the campaign.

The same guidelines as those for programmes will apply to BBC Editorial content on all [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) sites. These will apply to audio and video content as well as text content, e.g. blogs, podcasts and downloads, as well as any social media channels that are associated with the BBC, including material that appears on sites operated by third parties (see section 5 below).

Editorial Guidelines **(2.4.17)** say *“It should not be assumed that contributors to BBC output are unbiased or impartial. For those from organisations such as charities, think-tanks or universities, it may be necessary, when relevant, to give appropriate information about affiliations, funding or particular viewpoints. The same applies to individual researchers, journalists, scientists or other experts and, on occasion, to contributors who may be relating their own experiences. The key test is to consider whether the audience would be misled if such information was not made available. It may also be necessary to consider whether such affiliations might risk undermining trust in the contributor’s professional credentials or in the perceived authenticity of their experiences”*.

In the context of these elections, content producers will need to take all reasonable steps to be sure that contributors are appropriately described, and that they have taken account, for instance, of comments made by them on social media, how their organisations are funded and the nature and sources of quoted research or polling. In reporting, in particular, on other media coverage of the campaign, for instance, in newspaper reviews, they should also take account of any relevant subjective editorial stance.

Any programme or content giving coverage to any of the elections must achieve due impartiality overall among parties during the course of the whole campaign.

Anyone who is in doubt as to how this applies to their own content should contact the Chief Adviser, Politics, for advice.

### **3.3 Coverage of other political issues and other elected bodies during the Election Period**

The elections do not happen in isolation and other elected bodies will continue their normal activity during the campaign. Content producers need to comply with the general requirement of due accuracy and due impartiality, aware of the possible influence of any other political coverage on the election campaigns.

This applies to all parliamentary reportage during the campaigns; some council business will also continue during the election period. These should continue to be covered in the normal way, though any issues relating to any of the elections across Great Britain which are discussed in Parliament or councils must be reported with care to maintain due impartiality.

All content producers need to bear in mind which issues are within the remit of the different bodies and ensure it is clear to the audience when stories have a bearing on an election. They also should be alert to other party politicians, MPs at Westminster, including ministers, shadow ministers and other party spokespeople or supporters, who are not involved directly in the elections, intervening in issues relevant to any of the elections and ensure that due impartiality is maintained. Some members of other elected bodies may also be candidates in these elections; care should be taken to ensure that unfair advantage in the election campaigns is not derived from their other political roles.

Where there are other major news stories, care is needed to ensure that any political element is covered comprehensively, but also reflects the fact that it is an election period. How this is achieved will depend on the particular circumstances of each case. For example, where there are major stories which fall outside inter-party rivalry, due impartiality may be achieved by allowing more time to those politicians most closely involved, reporting statements giving the audience factual information and, on occasion, where editorially justified, reflecting internal debates within parties.

### **3.4 Order of Parties or Candidates**

The order in which parties or candidates appear in packages or are introduced in discussions should normally be editorially driven. However, over time, programme makers should consider varying this order, where appropriate, so that no fixed pattern emerges in the course of the campaign. Fairness may sometimes be best achieved – for instance, in debates - simply by drawing straws.

### **3.5 Items which may not require contributions from other parties or candidates**

In exceptional circumstances, comments from candidates can stand alone, without any other political contribution, where to use one might appear insensitive or risk the appearance of a media circus. This might include interviews about a personal tragedy, a public disaster, or where the person concerned is an eyewitness to a news incident. Any proposal to use a comment in this way must be referred to a senior editorial figure and the Chief Adviser, Politics.

#### **4. Fairness to Candidates - Code of Practice**

Please note: With regard to the definition of “candidates” and also in relation to “empty-chairing”, Ofcom re-issued guidance on 4 March 2024:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/about-ofcom/bulletins/broadcast-bulletins/2024/issue-493/election-note-to-broadcasters-2024?v=331056>

##### **4.1 Reports and debates in specific Electoral Areas (Constituencies, Regions or Wards)**

**The intention of these guidelines is to encourage vigorous debate and to give a higher profile to candidates in general, without giving unfair advantage to one candidate or party over another.**

Candidates or parties declining to take part in electoral area reports or debates cannot, by doing so, effectively exercise a veto over such coverage.

However, this does not weaken in any way the BBC’s obligations of fairness in ensuring the audience is informed of all main strands of argument: further advice should be sought, in such circumstances, from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

Programmes and other output may decide to use either candidates or their representatives in items. But if a candidate is invited to take part, the other participants should, where at all possible, also be candidates. In exceptional circumstances, if a candidate is genuinely unavailable, the opportunity may be offered instead to a suitable party representative or a substitute from within the electoral area (e.g. party official or agent) but it should normally be made clear to the audience that the missing candidate was invited and why they were unable to take part. If a party or candidate declines to put forward a representative or nominates someone in a way which risks unfairness to other candidates, the item/programme may go ahead without them.

Reports or debates about a specific electoral area should give due weight to candidates who have demonstrated substantial electoral support in that area (either through their own candidacy - for example, independents - or their party’s). This means that if any candidate takes part in an item about a specific electoral area, then these other candidates should also be offered the opportunity to take part, or be given a similar opportunity across a series of reports.

Candidates or parties who have not demonstrated that they have substantial electoral support in that area must still be offered proportionate coverage. How that is achieved will be a matter for editorial judgment, but the following should be regarded as a minimum:

Any reports, items, (including online), programmes (such as debates) or any other content which refer to only some of the candidates in an electoral area (or areas) should include, in sound and/or vision, a list of all candidates standing and their party (where applicable), or, as a minimum, should refer to an online list of all candidates and parties standing if and when available. If such a report is being broadcast several times on the same channel or station, a list of candidates and parties should be referred to on each occasion.

Content producers should take particular care before the close of nominations in featuring those who might possibly become an election candidate. They must ensure generally that candidates are not given an unfair advantage (for instance, taking care where a candidate's name is featured prominently through depicting posters or rosettes etc).

Once the Election Period has begun, programmes not normally covering politics should not arrange and broadcast new appearances by candidates (see Ofcom Rule 6.7). <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-standards/section-six-elections-referendums>

Where candidates have other roles – political or non-political - care should be taken to ensure that they do not gain an unfair advantage in the election campaign over other candidates.

Before the close of nominations, content producers need to ensure due impartiality in regard to any contributor who is expected to stand as a candidate.

#### **4.2 Use of Candidates in issue based packages, wider debates and phone-ins**

As well as debates or other items using candidates within electoral areas (and subject to relevant mandatory referrals), all types of content may use an appropriate range of candidates from different electoral areas or to discuss together election issues. There may also be circumstances in which it is appropriate to use both candidates and non-candidates (for instance, where a party spokesperson is not standing, or for debates between party leaders.)

Reasonable references to local illustrations within an electoral area, for instance, to local hospitals, schools, examples of crime, etc, are allowed, providing it does not result in any unfairness to a candidate who is not taking part.

In order to maintain due impartiality, the choice of candidates or parties represented should be appropriate to the item. Who takes part and in what format, for instance, in debates, is a matter for editorial judgement, so long as that is exercised with due impartiality in the context of the election period.

The choice of individual to represent a party will be made on editorial grounds, but care must be taken over the course of the campaign to ensure that one candidate is not unduly favoured at the expense of others. A candidate taking part as a national spokesperson should not gain an unfair advantage over other candidates while discussing issues directly relevant to their own electoral area. This may mean advising them in advance of the BBC's due impartiality obligations, or swift intervention by the presenter of a live programme, or editing before broadcast, as necessary.

Candidates may be encouraged to take part in phone-ins about the election or election issues. However, callers must be checked to see if they are candidates and it must be clear to the audience that they are speaking not as ordinary members of the public but as contributors with a political agenda. Care must be taken that over time programmes and other output are not giving undue prominence to one party or undue preference to one candidate over others in the same electoral area. Care should also be taken – and advice sought - with

regard to any contribution from a candidate during a phone-in or similar programme which is not about the elections or political issues more generally.

Further advice on use of candidates can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

### **4.3 Welsh and Gaelic Language Services**

Some politicians in Wales are not Welsh language speakers. In the event that a candidate is not a Welsh speaker, Radio Cymru and BBC Wales programmes for S4C may draw on both candidates and other party representatives or appropriate substitutes, including in programmes about specific electoral areas.

Few politicians are Gaelic speakers. In the event that a party is unable to find a Gaelic speaking candidate, BBC Radio nan Gàidheal and BBC ALBA programmes may draw on both candidates and other party representatives or appropriate substitutes, including in programmes about specific electoral areas.

## **5. Online, Social Media and Audience Contributions**

The same guidelines as those for programmes (see section 1.3 above) will apply to BBC editorial content on all bbc.co.uk sites. These will apply to audio and video content as well as text content, e.g. blogs, podcasts and downloads, as well as any social media identified with the BBC, including material that appears on sites operated by third parties.

### **5.1 Disinformation**

Social and digital campaigning is now often a major battleground during elections and the threat of disinformation playing a part in the outcome is significant. Central to the BBC's approach to the election will be working to inform audiences about the democratic process and exposing disinformation, so they can make choices based on evidence they can trust.

### **5.2 Use of Social Media**

BBC editorial staff and anyone involved in producing election-related content must avoid compromising the BBC's impartiality or bringing the BBC into disrepute by their activities, such as by expressing their own views (or endorsing/contesting the views of others) on matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or on 'controversial subjects' in any other area, either on personal websites or social media accounts. See Personal Use of Social Media guidance.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidance/personal-use-of-social-media/>

### **5.3 Audience contributors**

Audience contributions offer immediacy and interactivity to the BBC's output both broadcast and digitally. These contributions are an expression of opinion and are not an indication of the weight of opinion on one side or another of a question. The range selected for inclusion must be chosen to achieve due impartiality, not just by the weight of audience activity. However, the BBC should

not seek to achieve what might be considered “artificial” balance by giving a misleading account of the weight of opinion.

Audience contributions may come by text, social media message or email, or some other interactivity mechanism, including “vox pops”. They may be unsolicited, or they may arise from calls to participate, in either broadcast output or online. However, they are received, content producers should be rigorous about establishing the origins of materials offered as audience contributions and take responsibility for their authenticity. It may be necessary to verify that a contribution apparently from an individual in the public eye is genuine. Where such contributions come from candidates, that must be clearly identified.

All web pages prompting debate on the election will be properly moderated to encourage a wide range of views. Those parts of the BBC’s online presence which do not normally engage in political issues must seek advice from the Chief Adviser, Politics, before doing so.

Unless specifically hosting election discussions, non-news sites should direct users who want to discuss the election to appropriate areas of the news site such as political blogs or relevant news articles. All election-related discussion areas on [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) must have appropriate moderation, filtering and escalation in place.

Journalists and moderators will sometimes have to make fine judgements between remarks that constitute robust debate and personal abuse. The general rule of thumb should be if the BBC would not broadcast it on radio or TV, it should not be online. Filters for harm and offence and personal abuse will operate as usual, but they should not be relied on as a substitute for effective moderation.

During the Election Period, the numbers of contributions received on any campaign issue must not be used to estimate support for any side or party.

If contributions are edited for length, care should be taken to ensure that the contributor’s opinions are fairly and accurately represented.

#### **5.4 Vox Pops**

The value of vox pops is to allow different sides of an issue in question to be expressed through the voices of the public. But the context should always make it clear that they are an expression of an argument, not an indication of the weight of opinion on either side. Special care must be taken with vox pops during an election campaign, for instance, to give consideration to the location in which they are recorded and to edit them, when appropriate, in such a way as to ensure a range of views is reflected.

Vox pops expressing how individuals in the electorate intend voting should normally be avoided or advice sought from Chief Adviser, Politics.

[See Editorial Guidelines 11.4.46](#)

#### **5.5 Audience Programmes**

Any programme covering the election and planning to use a live audience (either in studio or online) should consult the Chief Adviser Politics to discuss the selection of the audience and how to achieve due impartiality. All such procedures must stand up to public scrutiny.

## **5.6 Material from parties or candidates**

BBC News Online will not normally link directly to election-related material on the websites either of political parties or individual candidates, unless there is an editorial justification (e.g. a row caused by a prominent figure publishing policy on his/her website contradicting the manifesto on the party's website) and then it will be linked only for a limited period and mindful of any impartiality issues.

BBC News Online may list links to relevant sites of parties or candidates, provided that they do not give strong grounds for concern that this breaches the BBC Harm and Offence guidelines, the Ofcom Code, or the law e.g. defamation or incitement to racial hatred.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/harm-and-offence/>

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-standards/section-two-harm-offence>

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-standards/section-three-crime-disorder-hatred-abuse>

Any speeches or other material published or contributed by candidates or parties which are carried in full or in part must be selected on news value, while bearing in mind that due impartiality requires that an appropriate range of such material is carried.

Content producers should be particularly alert to organised campaigns or lobbying by parties, pressure groups, candidates or people acting on their behalf. If mass mailings or other organised lobbying is suspected during the Election Period, contributors may be asked to provide contact details for verification purposes. The [bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk) escalation strategy must be activated immediately, and it may be necessary, for example, to put a message board into pre-moderation or read only mode.

## **6. Polls and other tests of opinion**

This section should, where appropriate, be read in conjunction with Section 11 of Editorial Guidelines ("Statistics, Data, Polls and Surveys") and the Editorial Policy Guidance "[Opinion Polls, Surveys, Questionnaires, Votes, Straw Polls](#)", available on the Editorial Policy website.

### **6.1 Reporting Polls**

During the campaign, the BBC's reporting of voting intention opinion polls should take into account several key factors:

- they may be part of the story of the campaign and audiences should, where appropriate, be informed about them.

- context is essential, and it is important to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the language used in reporting them.
- polls can be wrong - there are real dangers in only reporting the most “newsworthy” polls – i.e. those which, on a one-off basis, show dramatic movement. For that reason, a news story should not normally be based solely on a single voting intention poll, unless its impact has caused a separately newsworthy story.
- there may be particular issues around more informal referencing of polls, for instance, in presenters’ questions or correspondents’ 2-ways, when due accuracy and scepticism are as important as in more formally scripted reporting.
- care should be taken to ensure that assumptions about polling are not unduly driving the direction of broader editorial judgements.
- particular care should be taken with newspaper reviews. The result of a poll should not be the lead item in a newspaper review and should always be reported with a sentence of context (e.g: “that’s rather out of line with other polls this week”).
- no opinion poll on any subject relating to the election may be published on polling day until after the polls have closed.

The general rules and guidance about reporting polls (Editorial Guidelines **11.4.35**) need to be followed with particular care during the election period. They are:

*When reporting the findings of any opinion poll, whether commissioned by the BBC or others:*

*language should not give greater credibility to polls than they merit; for example, polls 'suggest' and 'indicate', but do not 'prove', 'show' or 'reveal'*

*language used to report the findings of an opinion poll should accurately reflect the meaning of the questions asked in the original research*

*small differences within the margin of error of a given poll should not, normally, be reported as a substantive difference*

*the BBC should not rely only on the interpretation given to a poll's results by the organisation or publication which commissioned it*

*the BBC should report the methodology used (for instance, online, telephone or face to face), the sample size, the organisation which carried out the poll and the organisation or publication which commissioned it*

*where editorially relevant, dates of the fieldwork and subsequent events which may have shifted opinion should be reported*

*where there are doubts about the methodology of a poll or the bona fides of those carrying it out, appropriate qualifying language is essential. Advice is available from the Political Research Unit. Content makers must*

*consider whether the findings from polls are sufficiently credible to report; advice is available from the Political Research Unit*

*polls commissioned by the BBC should not normally be described as 'a BBC poll', but as 'a poll for the BBC'. Relevant details, including the questions, results and underlying data, should where possible be made available (for instance via a link to the polling company website) so the audience has access to the methodology and full results.*

### **Reporting Voting Intention Polls (11.4.36)**

*The result, on its own, of a single voting intention poll (or any other method of assessing support for political parties or referendum questions) must not be the lead or be headlined in any output.*

*When reporting voting intention polls:*

- *in the UK they should, normally, have been conducted by a member of the British Polling Council*
- *the findings of voting intention polls must be reported in the context of trend, which may consist of the results of all major polls over a period or may be limited to changes in a single pollster's findings. Poll results which are out of step without convincing explanation should be treated with particular care.*

**Mandatory Referral (11.4.37): Any proposal to report voting intention using research methods other than polling must be referred to Chief Adviser Politics.**

## **6.2 Commissioning Polls**

The BBC does not commission voting intention opinion polls for publication during election periods. Editorial Guidelines **(11.4.30)** say: *“Any proposal to commission an opinion poll on matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or on 'controversial subjects' in any other area, must be referred to Chief Adviser Politics in advance”.*

Care must be taken to ensure that any poll commissioned by the BBC is not used to suggest a BBC view on a particular policy or issue. A poll may be commissioned to help inform the audience's understanding of a current controversy, but it should not be used to imply BBC intervention in a current controversy.

## **6.3 SMS/Online Voting**

There will be no SMS/text or online votes attempting to quantify support for a party, politician or a party political policy issue during the election period, nor should other quantitative methods, such as a count of the number of texts or social media contributions, be used to assess the level of support.

Producers must ensure that votes are not translated into anything that could be construed either as a representation of public opinion as a whole, or the perception of a BBC opinion. Any proposal to conduct text or online voting on

any political issue that could have a bearing on the election must be discussed with the Chief Adviser, Politics, as well as being referred to the relevant departmental senior editorial figure and ITACU.

## **7. Party Leader Interviews**

Any proposal to interview or profile party leaders must be referred in advance (i.e. before any approach) to the Chief Adviser, Politics. For BBC Scotland and BBC Wales, referral should also be made to the relevant Head of News and Current Affairs with regard to party leaders in those nations. Offers of such interviews from the parties must also be referred before being accepted or declined. This is in conjunction with the mandatory referral set out in the Editorial Guidelines **(10.3.2)** and is particularly important during these election campaigns.

## **8. Polling Day**

There will be no coverage of any of the election campaigns on polling day, from 06.00 until polls close at 22.00 on TV, radio, bbc.co.uk or official BBC channels on social media and other websites (any such coverage before 06.00 must be referred to the Chief Adviser Politics). Online sites will not have to remove archive reports, but should not republish them.

The Editorial Guidelines **(10.4.23)** say: *“Coverage will be restricted to uncontroversial factual accounts, such as the appearance of politicians at polling stations or the weather. Subjects which have been at issue or part of the campaign, or other controversial matters relating to the election, must not receive coverage before the polls close, to ensure that nothing in the BBC’s output can be construed as unduly influencing the ballot.”*

Particular care should also be taken with any material published on social media accounts – including those of individuals – while the polls are open.

Stories about the mechanics of the vote (such as incidents which may have occurred at polling stations) can be reported with appropriate impartiality. Advice is available from the Chief Adviser Politics.

No opinion poll on any issue relating to the election may be published until after the polls have closed.

Whilst the polls are open, it is a criminal offence to publish anything about the way in which people have voted in that election, based on information from voters after they have voted.

## **9. Complaints**

Complaints will be handled at the appropriate level from programme editors upwards. The aim is to ensure that whether a complaint has come via BBC Audience Services, direct to a programme or to a correspondent or individual journalist, from a politician or member of the public (who may or may not be a political activist), from a senior party official or an individual candidate, the BBC’s response is consistent, robust and swift.

For that reason, normally, on receiving a formal complaint, details should be taken and referred to the appropriate person (normally the relevant editor)

before any initial response – other than acknowledgement and timescale – is given to the complainant.

Complaints regarding the election, including those involving impartiality and accuracy, may be subject to an expedited process which could culminate with Ofcom, so it is imperative that they are referred without delay.

**Anyone requiring further advice on the application of these Guidelines should consult the Chief Adviser Politics.**

**Ric Bailey**

**Chief Adviser Politics**

**Email: [ric.bailey@bbc.co.uk](mailto:ric.bailey@bbc.co.uk)**

## Appendices – Guidance on Coverage of Parties and Candidates

**Each section is specific to output in the relevant nation – all sections apply to all UK-wide output, except where stated.**

### A1. Introduction

Deciding respective levels of coverage for different candidates and parties in elections, with varying levels of political support, requires, primarily, good and impartial editorial judgement. There will be legitimate differences in interpretation and application for different programmes and formats. The following guidance is aimed at ensuring there are appropriate levels of coverage, with some minimum level for smaller parties and independent candidates – it does not set any maximum. Advice is available, on a case by case basis, from the Chief Adviser, Politics, both before and throughout the campaign.

So although each outlet must ensure its coverage is proportionate with regard to parties and candidates, that should be treated as a guide rather than as a set mathematical formula. However, there must be good editorial reasons for any significant variation and these cannot supersede the over-riding obligation for due impartiality and fairness.

The relative amount of coverage given to political parties and independent candidates in each electoral area (for instance, within individual constituencies, wards, regions or across councils) should reflect levels of past and/or current electoral support in that electoral area. In considering this, bearing in mind the location of the intended audience, performance in terms of representation and share of the vote at the last equivalent elections, over at least two electoral cycles, is taken as the starting point; the following factors must also be given due weight:

- performance in other elections, where relevant
- other relevant evidence of current electoral support, including robust and consistent patterns in relevant opinion polls.
- the number of candidates a party fields in the election
- other relevant editorial issues, such as electoral pacts, new parties, coalition agreements etc.

**This Guidance will remain open to amendment due to any new relevant evidence of current political support until the day after the close of nominations. However, such relevant evidence should continue to be taken into account throughout the election period.**

#### A1.1 OFCOM

This Appendix is subject (except for 6.8 – 6.12) to Section 6 of the Ofcom Code (updated February 2024) and the associated Guidance Notes (22nd March 2017) and takes account of relevant evidence of electoral support as set out in the Ofcom Digest.

[https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/213992/electoral-digest-local-elections.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0026/213992/electoral-digest-local-elections.pdf)

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/section-six-elections-referendums>

Ofcom takes into account the following factors when considering election related complaints and as such, this provides helpful guidance to programme makers when making editorial decisions based on parties' electoral support:

- *“we place greater weight on the actual performance of a political party in elections over opinion poll data. This reflects the fact that electoral performance is a measure of how voters have actually exercised their democratic choice. This compares with the greater uncertainty associated with support in opinion polls, which may not translate into votes or seats at an election;*

- *in considering past electoral support, we take into account factors such as the electoral performance of parties (including the numbers of elected candidates and overall percentage of vote received) in the previous set of corresponding elections over at least two electoral cycles;*

- *we also take into account performance in other relevant past elections being contested at the same time, as well as performance in past elections not being contested at a given time;*

- *we take into account the electoral performance of parties over at least two electoral cycles when considering performance in any given type of elections. However, we place less weight on the evidence of electoral performance two or more electoral cycles ago given the historical nature of this evidence;*

- *where relevant we consider evidence in relation to the different devolved nations of the UK;*

- *whilst putting less weight on levels of current support as opposed to actual performance, we put weight on evidence of current support that is objective and measurable. One type of objective and measurable evidence of current support is opinion poll data, where it is available. There may be other types of evidence of current support but in considering such evidence we would take into account the consistency and objectivity of each type of evidence;*

- *our intention is always to undertake a balanced assessment having regard to the totality of relevant evidence”.*

## **Appendix 2. Scotland**

Please note: **The first day of the Election Period in Scotland is yet to be confirmed.**

### **A2.1 Coverage**

This Appendix applies to content intended for broadcast in Scotland (including UK-wide and online material) when there is any coverage of the Scottish parliamentary elections: as a whole, of an individual constituency or region, or a group of constituencies or regions.

Appropriate network news content\* (UK-wide) should have regard to the prominence of the Scottish Parliamentary election particularly to their audience in Scotland in relation to the other elections taking place at the same time.

\*see Appendix 5

Content producers should have regard to which policy areas are reserved and which are in the domain of the Scottish Parliament and, therefore, directly at issue in this election.

## **A2.2 Larger Parties in Scotland**

Parties with evidence of substantial electoral support across Scotland at the 2021 and 2016 Parliamentary elections, or over subsequent elections in Scotland, or through robust and consistent evidence of current support, are:

The Scottish National Party, the Conservatives, Labour, the Scottish Green Party, the Liberal Democrats and Reform UK.

These parties should receive broadly similar levels of coverage.

## **A2.3 Smaller Parties in Scotland**

Any party that is standing in at least one sixth of the total seats up for election in Scotland (i.e. 22 constituency seats) or fielding at least 4 candidates in all 8 regional lists should have, as a minimum, the launch of their manifesto (or an equivalent event) covered by Reporting Scotland and An Là on television and Radio Scotland Breakfast and Aithris an Fheasgair on radio, as well as online.

In deciding what coverage is appropriate for Smaller Parties, as well as bearing in mind how the electorate voted in the last two Scottish parliamentary elections and at subsequent different elections, content producers should also take note of current evidence, such as a consistent trend in opinion polls.

In addition, there may be circumstances – for example, in the potential context of “coalition-building” – which mean that it is editorially appropriate for any one or more Smaller Party to receive additional coverage. Other changes in relevant political circumstances may also be taken into account.

The principles applied to coverage of the Smaller Parties at a Scotland-wide level should also be applied in any items which are based on a particular region and use list candidates. The relative strengths of the parties may vary from region to region and again advice can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics, who will be working with BBC Scotland to help in making this judgement.

The audience will be referred, as appropriate, to the full list of parties standing on BBC News Online Scotland (see 4.1 above).

## **A2.4 Independents**

All constituency or regional reports will refer to the online list, where all Independent candidates will be included. This reference is a minimum for Independent candidates, who should receive proportionate coverage in electoral areas where they have:

- significant previous electoral support or incumbency.
- evidence of significant current electoral support

Relevant output should take into account the political context in which candidates are standing: for instance, where an independent candidate subscribes to a political party, or where a group of independents are acting together, whether or not on a common manifesto; the objective will be to ensure the audience is given clear and accurate information and that due weight is applied to the various political perspectives.

Further advice on coverage of smaller parties and independents can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

**A2.5 Context of electoral support in Scotland** (please see Ofcom digest)  
[https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/213992/electoral-digest-local-elections.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0026/213992/electoral-digest-local-elections.pdf)

### **Appendix 3. Wales**

The election period in Wales begins at 00.01 on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March. (to be confirmed)

#### **A3.1 Coverage**

This Appendix applies to content intended for broadcast in Wales (including UK-wide and online material) when there is any coverage of the Senedd elections: as a whole, of an individual constituency, or a group of constituencies.

Appropriate network news content\* (UK-wide) should have regard to the prominence of the Senedd, the Welsh Parliament election particularly to their audience in Wales in relation to the other elections taking place at the same time.

\*see Appendix 5

Content producers should have regard to which policy areas are reserved and which are in the domain of the Senedd – the Welsh Parliament and, therefore, directly at issue in this election.

#### **A3.2 Larger Parties in Wales**

Parties with evidence of substantial electoral support across Wales at the Senedd election in 2021 and the Welsh Assembly election in 2016, or over subsequent elections in Wales, or through robust and consistent evidence of current support, are:

Labour, the Conservatives, Plaid Cymru, the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party of England and Wales and Reform UK.

These parties should receive broadly similar levels of coverage.

#### **A3.3 Smaller Parties in Wales**

Any party standing at least one candidate in all 16 constituencies, OR standing a total of 32 candidates across at least 4 constituencies should have, as a minimum, the launch of their manifesto (or an equivalent event) covered by Wales Today and Newyddion on television and Radio Wales Breakfast and Dros Frecwast' on radio as well as online.

In deciding what additional coverage is appropriate for Smaller Parties, as well as bearing in mind how the electorate voted in the 2021 Senedd election and the 2016 Assembly election in Wales and at subsequent different elections, content-makers should also take note of current evidence, such as a consistent trend in opinion polls.

In addition, there may be circumstances – for example, in the potential context of “coalition-building” – which mean that it is editorially appropriate for any one or more Smaller Party to receive additional coverage. Other changes in relevant political circumstances since 2021 may also be taken into account.

The principles applied to coverage of the Smaller Parties across Wales should also be applied in any programme items or content based on a particular constituency, or group of constituencies. The relative strengths of the parties may vary from constituency to constituency and again advice can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics, who will be working with BBC Wales to help in making this judgement.

The audience will be referred, as appropriate, to the full list of parties standing on BBC News Online Wales and BBC Cymru Fyw (see 4.1 above).

### **A3.4 Independents**

All constituency reports will refer to the online list, where all Independent candidates will be included. This reference is a minimum for Independent candidates, who should receive proportionate coverage in electoral areas where they have:

- significant previous electoral support or incumbency.
- evidence of significant current electoral support

Relevant output should take into account the political context in which candidates are standing: for instance, where an independent candidate subscribes to a political party, or where a group of independents are acting together, whether or not on a common manifesto; the objective will be to ensure the audience is given clear and accurate information and that due weight is applied to the various political perspectives.

Further advice on coverage of smaller parties and independents can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

**A3.5 Context of Electoral support in Wales** – please see Ofcom Digest. [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/213992/electoral-digest-local-elections.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0026/213992/electoral-digest-local-elections.pdf)

## **Appendix 4. Local Government in parts of England**

The election period in England begins at 00.01 on Monday 30th March.

Elections take place in the following:

32 London boroughs

32 Metropolitan councils

25 District Councils

15 Unitary authorities

2 County councils

Plus:

- 6 Single authority Mayors

The current estimate for total number of seats to be contested is approximately: **4,350**.

### **A4.1 Coverage**

This Appendix applies to content intended for England (including UK-wide and online material) when there is any coverage of the elections (during the Election Period): as a whole, of an individual ward or any electoral area.

Content producers should have regard to which policy areas are within the remit of local government, including mayors and therefore directly at issue in these elections.

The audience will be referred, as appropriate and where possible, to a full list of parties and candidates standing, for instance, on council websites. For reports on individual wards where not all candidates are included, a full list of candidates and parties must be given, either as part of the report, or compiled online and directly referenced.

### **A4.2 Larger parties in England**

Parties with evidence of substantial electoral support across England at past local elections, or other elections in England, or through robust and consistent evidence of current support, are:

Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Green Party of England and Wales and Reform UK.

These parties should receive broadly similar levels of coverage.

Local and regional output covering the elections should take account of any different patterns of past/current electoral support and the number of candidates parties field in their areas.

### **A4.3 Smaller parties in England**

For UK-wide coverage and online, all other parties fielding candidates in at least one-sixth of the seats available in England (i.e. approx 725 candidates) should receive some coverage proportionate to the largest parties, where the elections are covered, including online.

Local and regional output should give coverage to smaller parties which may have insufficient candidates to reach the threshold for England as a whole, but are fielding candidates in more than one-sixth of seats in a relevant electoral area.

#### **A4.4 Independents**

Independent candidates attract significant levels of electoral support in many local elections and the audience will expect that to be reflected in relevant coverage. Independent candidates should receive proportionate coverage in electoral areas where they have:

- significant previous electoral support or incumbency.
- evidence of significant current electoral support

Relevant output should take into account the political context in which candidates are standing: for instance, where an independent candidate subscribes to a political party, or where a group of independents are acting together, whether or not on a common manifesto; the objective will be to ensure the audience is given clear and accurate information and that due weight is applied to the various political perspectives.

Further advice on coverage of smaller parties and independents can be sought from the Chief Adviser, Politics.

#### **A4.5 Context of Electoral support in England – please see Ofcom digest.**

[https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/213992/electoral-digest-local-elections.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0026/213992/electoral-digest-local-elections.pdf)

#### **\*Appendix 5. Appropriate Network Content for Nations' coverage**

This specific network content must include minimum election coverage of parties in the Nations, as referenced in the Appendices:

- at least two of the main bulletins on BBC One (ie One, Six, Ten)
- The News Channel, **to be confirmed.**
- Radio 4 1800.
- 5 Live Drive
- BBC Online
- Radio 2 summaries
- Newsbeat