

# Policy on the council publicly supporting social issues and campaigns

1. This policy sets out the social issues, national days of celebration and other public events that South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils will publicly support through our corporate communications channels.

## BACKGROUND

2. As organisations that represent the local community, residents sometimes look to us to show leadership and solidarity on local, national and international issues, particularly on social media.
3. Social issues can often be sensitive, divisive, and changeable over a short space of time, which can sometimes make taking a corporate stance on issues arising out of current affairs quite complicated and open to misinterpretation.
4. Councils are sometimes criticised for speaking out on issues while also being criticised by others for not speaking out enough on the same issue.
5. Despite the challenges faced by getting involved in public debate about current affairs, it's very important for the councils to show leadership on issues that are important to members of their communities.
6. To avoid criticism for what we are and aren't taking a public position on, this policy sets out the key social issues, days and events we'll mark throughout the year.
7. Naturally, it wouldn't be practical to mark every issue, day or event as there are so many, and so the ones identified in this policy have been chosen in line with the councils' corporate priorities.
8. While an annual calendar of events to be marked could be established in advance, the council needs to be flexible enough to adapt its procedures to react to breaking news and changing situations.

## THE POLICY

### Annual campaigns the council will support

9. The councils will aim to provide some public support online and through other communications channels to the campaigns listed in the calendar available on the councils' websites:

- [www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/diversitycalendar](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/diversitycalendar)
- [www.southoxon.gov.uk/diversitycalendar](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/diversitycalendar)

10. The choice of communications channel and how much support the councils provide will depend on a number of criteria, including: professional judgement from the Communications team on what level of support is appropriate, how high-profile the campaign is, how long it runs for, compatibility with other communications campaigns the councils are running at the time, resources, and other priorities.

### The difference between corporate support and councillor support.

11. This policy sets out how we will respond to social issues corporately using communications channels managed and co-ordinated by the Communications team like the corporate social media accounts or the official council websites, and by other teams in the council.

12. Councillors are free to use their personal social media accounts to comment on current affairs and social issues in line with the Councillors' Code of Conduct. Exceptions and changes to the calendar of events.

13. There might sometimes be a high-profile current affairs issue that arises, which isn't included in this policy.

14. On occasions, it might be a significant enough issue to require being permanently added to the calendar. This can be achieved with written agreement from the council Leader and the Head of Corporate Services

15. If it's an issue that just requires some one-off council support, then on request of the council Leaders and with agreement of the Head of Corporate Services, an exception can be made. The preferred method for making an exception is for Communications to draft some wording for approval by the Head of Corporate Services. Once agreed, the council Leaders can issue it on their personal accounts and/or it can be published on the councils' corporate communications channels if presented as "message/statement/letter from Cllr XXXXXXX on behalf of the district council."

16. There may be occasions it is necessary to postpone or abort plans to support any of the events in the calendar. For example, a breaking news story or a separate ongoing sensitive issue that would conflict with the messaging around a scheduled campaign, or a major event causing a capacity issue within the Communications team. In these instances, the Communications team will identify and flag any issues and, where time allows, will seek support from the Head of Corporate Services and relevant Cabinet Members.

## **Reviewing the calendar of dates**

17. The calendar will be reviewed annually by the council's equalities officers to ensure the dates continue to reflect the councils' priorities and the diversity within our district. It will also be reviewed periodically when new data about the district's demographic is published, to ensure our communities are accurately and appropriately represented.