

Factsheet for political parties: Imprints at Scottish Parliamentary elections and council elections in Scotland

Under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, there are rules about putting imprints on printed election material. We regulate compliance with those rules.

Election material is published material that can reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters to vote for or against one or more political parties or a category of candidates.

Whenever printed or digital election material is produced, it must contain certain details (which we refer to as an 'imprint') to show who is responsible for the material. This helps to ensure there is

transparency about who is campaigning.

The rules on imprints apply to all registered political parties contesting Scottish Parliamentary elections and council elections in Scotland. They apply whenever you produce material promoting your party at the election.

This factsheet explains the rules you must follow.

For the imprint rules for parties campaigning in other elections, please see our separate [factsheet](#).

What is election material?

Election material is published material such as leaflets and adverts that promotes the party, its candidates or its policies, or criticise other parties, at an election.

What must you include?

On printed material such as leaflets and posters, you must include the name and address of:

- the printer
- the promoter
- any person on behalf of whom the material is being published (and who is not the promoter)

On digital election material containing text distributed via the internet, you must include the name and address of:

- the promoter
- any person on behalf of whom the material is being published (and who is not the promoter)

The promoter is whoever has caused the material to be published.

You must use an address where you can be contacted. It can be a home address or an office or business address. You can also use a PO Box address, or other mailbox service.

If you are putting an advert in a print newspaper, your advert does not need to include the printer's name and address, but the name and address of the printer of the newspaper must appear on the first

or last page of the newspaper. The advert must include the other details as usual.

If you are being paid to publish election material, the material must include an imprint which includes the details of whoever is paying you. This is because either they are the promoter, or you are publishing the material on their behalf.

In all cases, you must make sure that the imprint lists all the organisations involved in publishing and promoting the material.

It is an offence for a printer or promoter to publish printed election material or digital election material containing text without an imprint.

Does everyone have to include an imprint?

For printed material such as leaflets and posters, anyone who promotes or prints election material must include an imprint by law.

For digital material, you do not have to include an imprint on your election material if you are expressing your personal opinion in material published on your own behalf and on a non-commercial basis.

Some people cannot use the personal opinion exemption due to their legal responsibilities under electoral law.

If you are one of these people, you must include an imprint on any digital election material containing text even if it is your personal opinion.

These people are:

- A candidate at the election
- An election agent or deputy election agent at a Scottish Parliamentary election, Scottish council election, or certain other elections
- A holder of elective office:
 - a member of the House of Commons
 - a member of the Scottish Parliament
 - a member of the Senedd
 - a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - a Police and Crime Commissioner
 - a member of any local authority in the UK, excluding parish or community councils
 - a member of the Greater London Authority
 - the Mayor of London or any other elected mayor
- A registered officer of a political party or one of its accounting units:
 - party leader
 - treasurer
 - deputy treasurer
 - nominating officer
 - campaigns officer
 - deputy campaigns officer
 - accounting unit treasurer
 - accounting unit second officer
- A responsible person for a registered non-party campaigner

An organisation cannot use the personal opinion exemption.

Examples of how to apply the personal opinion exemption

Example 1

A party activist posts campaign messages from the party's social media accounts as part of their volunteer work for the party. Although they are not being paid, they are acting on behalf of the party.

This is not their personal opinion, and the material must bear the party's imprint.

Example 2

A supporter of the party posts their own thoughts on social media to encourage people to vote for their party.

They are acting independently, not on behalf of the party, and there is no commercial basis for their post.

This is their personal opinion, and no imprint is required.

Example 3

A supporter of the party pays for independent adverts promoting the party to be shown to social media users in their area.

The supporter is acting independently, not on behalf of the party. They are a non-party campaigner (see our [guidance](#)). Since they are paying for the adverts, they do not count as an expression of their personal opinion.

The adverts must carry an imprint. Since they were not done on behalf of the party, they do not need the party's details. They must contain the person's own details.

Example 4

A local councillor tweets their views on who people should vote for at the Scottish Parliamentary election.

Although this is their personal opinion and they are acting on their own behalf, they are a holder of elective office.

The personal opinion exemption does not apply, and they must include an imprint in their tweet or their Twitter bio.

Examples of an imprint

The promoter may be the party Treasurer, another officer of the party, or the party itself.

A standard imprint on printed party election material should look like this:

Printed by Armadillo Printing Ltd, 22 Thornfields Avenue, Glasgow.

Promoted by the Yellow Party, 110 High Street, Airdrie.

If the material is digital there is no printer, so a digital imprint on campaign material should look like this:

Promoted by J. Smith on behalf of the Yellow Party, both of 110 High Street, Airdrie.

Where do you put the imprint?

If your material is a single-sided printed document – such as a window poster – or where most of the information is on one side, you must put the imprint on that side of the document.

If it is a multi-sided printed document, you must put it on the first or last page.

Websites and other electronic material

Any election material published on the internet that contains text, such as websites and social media posts, must include an imprint. The imprint must include the name and address of the promoter and any organisation or individual on whose behalf it has been published.

We recommend that you include the imprint where the material appears – for example, in the footer of the relevant webpage.

In some cases, the imprint may appear somewhere closely and clearly linked.

Social media

You must display the full imprint details, including the details of anyone else on whose behalf you are publishing the material.

We recommend that you include the imprint in the post itself.

In some cases where there is a strong clear link between your post and somewhere else in the platform, the imprint may appear there.

For example, on Twitter your imprint can be included prominently on your profile. For paid adverts on Facebook, you can include the imprint in the disclaimer text which accompanies the advert.

You can also add the imprint as an image.

Remember that the imprint must include the details of both the promoter and anyone else on whose behalf the material has been produced. This means that your own details will not always be enough to meet the imprint requirements.

Sharing material

If you share material that has already been posted, without your own commentary or other additions or modifications, you do not need to include your own imprint. You should check that the material includes its original imprint.

If you include your own additions when you share material, then if the additional material is election material, it must include an imprint as usual.

If your additional material expresses your personal opinion, published on your own behalf on a non-commercial basis, it does not need an imprint.

Crowdfunding

If your crowdfunding page contains election material as well as asking for donations, it must contain an imprint. Whether or not this is the case, you should ensure that it is clear on the page who the money is being donated to.

You can find out more information in our [crowdfunding factsheet](#).

Images and cartoons

If your digital election material contains text, or appears within material containing text, it must carry an imprint. We expect that this will apply to most election material images.

We recommend that you include the imprint in the image itself.

If it is posted on social media, you can include the imprint in the same way as you would for any social media post.

If an image containing no text is used as election material, you should include the imprint as best practice.

Videos

If your video election material contains text, or appears within material containing text, it must carry an imprint. We expect that this will apply to most video election material.

We recommend that you include the imprint in the video itself. The imprint must be legible and appear for long enough for voters to read it.

If the video is posted on social media, you can include the imprint in the same way as you would for any social media post.

Posters for downloading

Any posters that are available for download from a website must carry a digital imprint.

If the posters are printed out and displayed as printed material, they must carry a full printed imprint including the printer's details. If you intend people to do this, you should leave a space for them to include their details as the printer.

Online discussion forums

If you use the forums to promote your party, then this will be election material and must contain an imprint. This can appear in the post itself or, if there is a strong clear link, in your signature.

Where you can find more information

In addition to the rules about imprints, there are also rules on fundraising and spending that political parties must follow in the run-up to elections.

We publish a suite of guidance for political parties that explains these rules, which you can find on our [website](#).

We also offer an advice service and you can contact us here:

infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk

0333 103 1928

Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Electoral Commission:

publications@electoralcommission.org.uk

020 7271 0500