

Parkinson's UK policy statement: Politically impartial campaigning

What we believe

Campaigning activities play an important part in the work we do to achieve our goal of improving life for everyone affected by Parkinson's. It's important we speak out about policies that can affect the lives of people affected by the condition. But in doing so we must make sure that we act in a way that doesn't imply Parkinson's UK is for or against any one political party.

What we think should happen

- All of our activities must be in the best interests of people affected by Parkinson's.
- Our staff and Policy Panel members¹ must ensure that the impact on people affected by Parkinson's must be paramount and their personal political views and opinions should not influence their decision making.
- Our local groups must not appear too close to any one political party, whilst ensuring they have good relationships with local politicians.
- None of the charity's staff or volunteers should provide financial or any other type of support to political parties or for anyone standing for election if they could be seen to be representing the charity. This applies to elections to the UK and Scottish parliaments, the assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland, local and regional government elections and also European elections.
- The policies of all political parties will be monitored and we'll speak out in favour of, or against, specific policies based solely on their impact on people affected by Parkinson's.

Why we believe this

We need to influence policy across the whole of the UK, in the UK parliament, the devolved nations and regional and local authorities. At each of these levels of government, the balance of political power is different. In order to be able to influence those in power it's vital that the charity both acts impartially, and is seen to be impartial.

It's illegal for any registered charity in the UK to publicly or otherwise align itself to a political party, and they must remain neutral at all times.

There is substantial risk to the charity if we are found to have breached the law. This includes significant risk to our reputation, such as negative media coverage, and damage to relationships with our members and supporters, our staff and external partners.

¹ Our Policy Panel meets on a regular basis to help us form our official opinions on major public policy issues. More information at www.parkinsons.org.uk/policypanel

What's the evidence?

Legal guidance

In England and Wales, the Charity Commission sets out the rules on how charities operate. It states that: "In the political arena, a charity must stress its independence and ensure that any involvement it has with political parties is balanced. A charity must not give support or funding to a political party, nor to a candidate or politician."²

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland sets out the same guidance as the Charity Commission for England and Wales.³

In Scotland, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, sets out similar guidance.⁴

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland we can support a policy of any one party "so long as [we're] clear about [our] reasons for doing so"^{5,6} and in Scotland so long as it is to "further [our] charitable purposes."⁷

Transparency of Lobbying, Non Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act⁸

On 30 January 2014 the Transparency of Lobbying, Non Party campaigning and Trade Union Administration received Royal assent and has added further possible restrictions on Parkinson's UK campaigning in the run up to general election in 2015.

The new legislation means that a wider variety of activities an organisation undertakes will be regulated and Parkinson's UK will comply with all the relevant guidance and legislation.

Regardless of this legislation, we will continue to maintain political impartiality and focus our campaigning activities on improving services for people affected by Parkinson's.

Reputation

If a charity is seen to be too close to one particular political party, the charity and electoral regulators may take action. This could lead to negative headlines in the press about the charity.

² Charity Commission for England and Wales, Speaking out: Guidance on Campaigning and Political Activity by Charities <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/publications/cc9.aspx>

³ Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. Guidance on Campaigning and Political Activities http://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/Charity_requirements_guidance/Your_charitys_activities/Campaigning/Guidance_on_campaigning_and_political_activities.aspx

⁴ Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. Meeting the charity test. http://www.oscr.org.uk/media/32303/meeting_the_charity_test_full_guidance.pdf

⁵ Charity Commission for England and Wales, Speaking out: Guidance on Campaigning and Political Activity by Charities <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/publications/cc9.aspx>

⁶ Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. Guidance on Campaigning and Political Activities http://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/Charity_requirements_guidance/Your_charitys_activities/Campaigning/Guidance_on_campaigning_and_political_activities.aspx

⁷ Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. Meeting the charity test. http://www.oscr.org.uk/media/32303/meeting_the_charity_test_full_guidance.pdf

⁸ <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2013-14/transparencyoflobbyingnonpartycampaigningandtradeunionadministration.html>

For example, the Charity Commission investigated the Prince's Trust for links to a Conservative party member. This led to the following two headlines in the press: "Prince Charles's charity and a £10,000 'illegal donation' to Tory women"⁹ and "The Prince's Trust slammed for illegal fundraising."¹⁰

What Parkinson's UK is doing

Our policy positions and campaign priorities are consistently framed by the views and experiences of a broad range of people affected by Parkinson's, gathered through surveys, focus groups and service user feedback.

All policy position statements are shaped and reviewed by our Policy Panel, made up of people affected by Parkinson's. The position statements are informed by best available evidence, and are fully referenced.

Our Board of Trustees ensures that "the charity fully complies with all statutory requirements relating to it and its operations".¹¹

During elections we provide written advice to members and local groups on how they can work with political parties, while maintaining our political neutrality.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful for the advice and guidance of our Policy Panel in shaping this position paper on politically impartial campaigning. The Policy Panel consists of people with experience of Parkinson's who meet on a regular basis to help guide the charity's position on a range of policy issues.

Further information

Please contact the Policy and Campaigns team. Call 020 7963 9349 or email campaigns@parkinsons.org.uk

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⁹ Daily Mail <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1160302/Prince-Charles-8217-s-charity-10k-illegal-donation-Tory-women.html#>

¹⁰ PR week <http://www.prweek.com/uk/news/898953/the-princes-trust-slammed-illegal-fundraising/>

¹¹ Parkinson's UK's staff hand book

<https://staff.parkinsons.org.uk/docs/All%20Documents/Human%20Resources%20and%20Facilities/Employee%20Handbook.doc> (Only accessible by Parkinson's UK staff)