



# Purdah Workshop

Rotherhithe by-election 2008

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WORKSHOP

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Slide 1

# Contents of the workshop

- Key principles
- Applying the principles
- Particular problem areas
- Case studies

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# Key principles

- Officer neutrality
- Treating candidates fairly
- No pro-active publicity
- Business as normal BUT no political advantage

# But it's only a by-election?

- Publicity and political issues that are borough wide still matter
- BUT anything that is geographically distinct from Rotherhithe OK
- Beware neighbouring wards

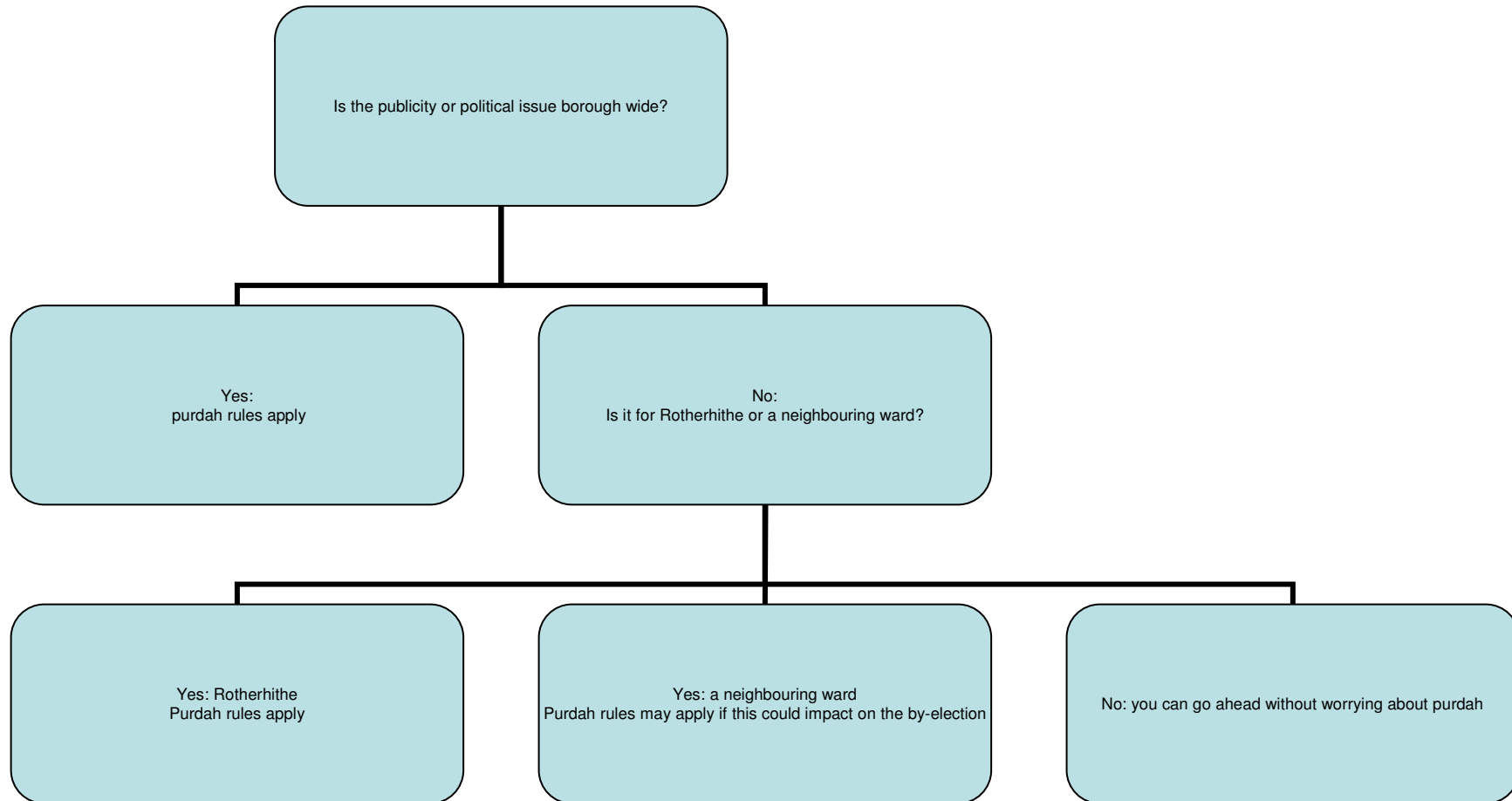
# Why does this matter?

- Breach of principles on officer neutrality is a disciplinary matter for officers
- Members who attempt to compromise officer impartiality are in breach of the member code of conduct
- Usual rules on treating with respect and bullying also apply

# Officers: private v official life

- Officer neutrality applies to everyone in relation to their council role
- BUT restrictions on private life apply only to those in politically restricted posts

# Applying the principles: geography



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# Applying the principles: publications (1)

- No pro-active publicity
- Officer neutrality
  - Publicity for council and its services OK, not councillors
  - Great care needed in relation to Executive members
  - No political commentary



# Applying the principles publications (2)

- Quotes from Executive members: a more flexible approach
  - Quotes for local matters away from Rotherhithe OK
  - Quotes in relation to Rotherhithe matters not OK
  - Borough wide portfolio matters: possible BUT must be objective, factual and politically neutral

# Applying the principles: events (1)

- No pro-active publicity
- Officer neutrality and fairness between parties
- Business as usual
  - Will your event produce publicity for candidates or their parties that could be used in the by-election?
  - NB not just Council publicity, also includes press opportunities

# Applying the principles: events (2)

- Photos: Council photos are not to be shared with political parties
- Parties v parties !

# Applying the principles: events (3)

- Cancelling or postponing is a last resort!!
- Consider:
  - Making it fair: inviting representatives from all parties
  - Stopping publicity: no Council photos and press releases at all or until after purdah
  - Sharing out the main roles or giving them to officers or Council partners
  - Stopping or vetting speeches

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# Applying the principles: meetings (1)

- Business as normal
- But no political advantage
- Officer neutrality
  - Check agendas and forthcoming decisions for politically controversial issues borough wide or relevant to Rotherhithe
  - Even if controversial, do we need to bring forward to meet eg statutory duty?
  - Rare for issues of bias to arise

# Applying the principles: meetings (2)

- What is politically controversial?
  - NOT an excuse for ducking every difficult issue: must be genuine political advantage
  - Could one party or another make political advantage out of this issue in the by-election?
  - Does this offer an opportunity for one party to promote itself or criticise another party?

# Applying the principles: meetings (3)

- Officers should not be identified with political position of one or other of the candidates
- For some meetings therefore, even if it can go ahead consider officer attendance.

# Paul Masterman

## Interim Head of Communications

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# Some final words

- Behaviours to watch
- Principles are clear: applying is the difficult bit
- Important to think about what is happening in the real political world and use common sense
- But if you're stuck, we are here to help