

Guidelines for Government Advertising

These guidelines were approved by Cabinet and issued on 20 November 1989.

Introduction

- 1 This document provides guidelines for Ministers and government departments for the preparation of and expenditure of public funds on government advertising and publicity. The guidelines may also be a useful reference point for other organisations which spend public funds on advertising and publicity.

Purpose

- 2 Governments may legitimately use public funds for advertising and publicity to explain their policies, and to inform the public of the government services available to them and of their rights and responsibilities. These guidelines recognise the public concern that government advertising should not be conducted in a manner that results in public funds being used to finance publicity for party political purposes.

Scope

- 3 Government advertising refers to any process for which payment is made from public funds for the purpose of publicising any policy, product, service, or activity provided at public expense by the government.
- 4 Government advertising should deal with matters in which the government has direct responsibility. The objective of the advertising may be to:
 - a. inform the public of proposed/new/revised/existing government policies;
 - b. inform the public of government services available to them;
 - c. advise the public of new/revised/existing entitlements or responsibilities;
 - d. encourage the public to adopt certain kinds of social behaviour generally regarded as being in the public interest (eg road safety advertising).

Presentation

- 5 Government advertising should be presented in a manner which is:
 - a. **Accurate, factual, truthful.** Factual information should be outlined clearly and accurately. Comment on and analysis of that information, to amplify its meaning, should be indicated as such.
 - b. **Fair, honest, impartial.** The material should be presented in unbiased and objective language, and in a manner free from partisan promotion of government policy and political argument.
 - c. **Lawful, proper.** The material should comply with the law.

Format and production

- 6 Government advertising may be in the form of:
 - a. printed matter such as parliamentary papers, discussion and consultative documents, booklets, pamphlets, and posters;
 - b. audio-visual material such as films and video-tapes;
 - c. advertisements and sponsored features in the press, on radio, and on television.
- 7 The preparation of well structured public relations strategies, involving one or more of the above forms of advertising, may be appropriate to guide the announcement and dissemination of information about major approved policy initiatives, particularly if the issue is relevant to a number of Ministerial portfolios.
- 8 The development of advertising material may involve the use of public relations consultants, market research agencies, advertising agencies, or other specialist consultants. In such cases reasonable and fair procedures for the tendering and employment of consultants should be followed. Only exceptional circumstances, such as extreme urgency, should necessitate a departure from reasonable and fair tendering procedures.

Distribution

- 9 Major policy proposals may be presented to Parliament as White or Green papers, or publicly released by way of discussion documents. Such publications should be deposited in the Parliamentary Library at the time of publication and may be sent unsolicited to media representatives and interested parties. They are not, as a rule, distributed unsolicited to the general public, although copies may be provided on request either free or at a price to cover publication and distribution costs. A period allowing for public submission and comment is often specified.
- 10 Brief factual information documents and leaflets informing the public of new policies or entitlements may be sent unsolicited to the public, particularly when forming one element of a wider advertising strategy on a major policy issue, as suggested in paragraph 7 above.

Justification and accountability

- 11 Governments are accountable to Parliament for the use they make of all public funds. Government advertising should be undertaken only where there is an identified and justifiable information need by the intended recipients. This is particularly important in the case of major publicity strategies requiring significant amounts of public funds. It is appropriate in such cases to designate one person as project manager to be responsible for implementation. In any event every piece of material disseminated should include a clear attribution as to its origin and the Minister/agency accountable for it.

Implementation

- 12 The onus is on Ministers and government departments to ensure that these guidelines are followed. They need to be read in association with other requirements that govern the expenditure of public monies such as the presence of an appropriation and other statutory provisions affecting such expenditures.

References

- 13 These guidelines have been formulated with reference to the following documents:
- a. The United Kingdom Cabinet Office Note on Central Government Conventions on Publicity and Advertising of 25 April 1985.
 - b. The Suggested Guidelines for a Convention on Publicly-Funded Government Advertising and Publicity, tabled in the House of Representatives by the Controller and Auditor-General on 2 May 1989.