

Election Protocols for Incumbent Elected Members



Approved by:	Chief Executive
Date Approved:	June 2025

Introduction

Local government elections are held every three years. In 2025, the elections will be held on Saturday 11 October. The period leading up to an election is a time of high interest from parties including the media, members of the public, and electoral candidates.

As an incumbent elected member seeking re-election, you have two roles. You will continue to make the decisions of your council as members of the Council or its community boards, while at the same time campaigning for re-election as a candidate.

These protocols provide guidance for you to balance your dual role as elected members and candidates seeking re-election. For further guidance or for clarification, please contact the Electoral or Deputy Electoral Officer.

Definitions

- **Council officers** include all employees of the chief executive of a council, including:
 - any employees who may be on leave;
 - employees who are consultants, contractors, or temporary employees;
 - any employees who are on secondment to (or from) their council from (or to) another organisation.
- **Council resources** include, but are not limited to:
 - Council's officers;
 - Budgets;
 - Council-owned or Council-controlled property and other resources, including the council logo and branding, all council marketing and communication channels (including social media), council-supplied business cards, stationery, computers, email, mobile phones, photocopiers, cars, council venues (other than those available for hire to the general public).
- **Electoral Candidates** are individuals contesting an election (including for their council and its community boards, or their regional council or licensing trust).
- **Pre-Election period** – defined as three months before the election and including election day. In 2025, this begins Friday 11 July.
- **Political activity** refers to both:
 - the activities that elected members undertake, including their right to make policy decisions;
 - the activities that individuals undertake during election year, including their right to stand for office and research electoral candidates.

- **Politically neutral** means respecting the right of elected members to make political decisions by acting impartially when providing advice or implementing council decisions.

Summary

1. If you are standing for re-election, you must clearly and transparently differentiate between activities conducted as an incumbent elected member (e.g., business-as-usual activities) and activities conducted while campaigning for re-election.
2. Resources owned by the Council and made available to you should only be used for Council purposes. The use of Council resources for election purposes is unacceptable. This includes social media channels, email addresses and publications. An exception is made for technology devices such as mobile phones, iPads, laptops or computers (See clarification under Protocol 2), but where these are used responses must be via a private email address (e.g. xxx@gmail.com) and not use your elected member email address (should you have one).
3. Council-run social media accounts are considered Council resources and must remain politically neutral during the election. You must comply with any social media guidelines for candidates at all times.
4. You will continue to have access to the information you need to do your job as an incumbent elected member. Council officers will not provide assistance with electioneering activities. Your role does not stop three months before polling day - you should be able to fulfil your "business as usual" duties on behalf of the council up until polling day.
5. These protocols have general application at all times, but are especially relevant in the three months before the local election (Friday 11 July – Saturday 11 October) which is the 'pre-election period'. It is your responsibility to ensure your behaviour falls within these guidelines.

Protocol 1: Continuation of Council business

The normal business of Council continues during the pre-election period. Incumbents seeking re-election must balance and differentiate between these two roles.

Leading up to the election, elected members continue to have the right and responsibility to govern and to make decisions.

In the context of the recently released Taituara guidelines for "Communications in the pre-election period", it would be reasonable to require that elected members stop using Council-funded slots, although common sense has to prevail. For example, an elected member invited to write a newspaper column or speak on a radio slot, not funded by the local authority, cannot reasonably be seen to be receiving an "electoral advantage at ratepayers' expense".

Similarly, whether or not a mayoral column in a council newsletter represents a form of electioneering needs to be judged on the nature of the content and how it is presented. Elected members' roles do not stop three months before polling day - they should be able to fulfil their "business as usual" duties on behalf of the council up until polling day. There is no lacuna or gap in an elected member's three-year term.

However, you should be mindful of an increased level of media and public scrutiny during this period and make a clear and transparent distinction between your activities as an elected member and your activities as a candidate.

All staff are expected to act with political neutrality. This does not mean the work of council is disrupted. Staff will continue to support elected members in their roles. During an election year and particularly during the pre-election period, additional care must be taken to ensure that activities are not seen, in any way to support or a preference to one candidate over another.

Governance staff who provide dedicated support to Chairpersons and Elected Members will continue this support for the purpose of assisting elected members in their current role. However, Council staff will not provide any assistance relating to electioneering activities.

The Chief Executive will also issue appropriate Election protocols for staff.

Protocol 2: Use of Council resources

A local authority must not promote, nor be perceived to promote, the re-election prospects of a sitting member. The use of Council resources for re-election purposes is unacceptable.

Council would be directly promoting a member's re-election prospects if it allows incumbent elected members to use Council resources explicitly for campaign purposes. This includes all Council communications facilities (such as Council branding, stationery and postage and social media channels).

Council communications will be restricted during the pre-election period, to remove any perception that the Council is helping incumbents to promote their re-election prospects over other candidates.

Therefore, during the pre-election period:

- Council resources must not be used for campaigning purposes (including for positions not at your Council) (see clarification below)
- Elected members' columns in Council publications will be suspended.
- Elected members' radio slots will be suspended
- Elected members will be required to comply with any Council social media guidelines for candidates in all aspects of their role.
- Support for writing speeches, media releases etc. for elected members by TDC staff or contractors will be restricted to TDC supported activities or events.
- Access to Council resources for members to issue media releases will be limited to what is strictly necessary to communicate current Council business. Comments or quotations from the Mayor, chairpersons, and portfolio leaders will continue to be used in media releases setting out the Council's position on an issue (for example, where a decision has been made at a committee meeting). Officers will comment on or issue media releases as required. Journalistic use of information that may raise the profile of a member will be discontinued.

For clarification:

- You can use council-provided technology devices but must use a private email address (e.g. xxx@gmail.com)
- You can use the mobile phone provided that the Council is not meeting the cost of calls relating to campaigning as part of the Council monthly reimbursement
- You must not link your own Facebook page and social media channels (if they are used for campaigning purposes) to the Council's Facebook page and social media channels, and must ensure that they have the appropriate authorisation at all times on these pages.

- If you choose to use your mobile phone for campaign related calls, you need to review your monthly bill to identify calls that related to your campaign, to ensure that your Council paid allowance is not used to cover them. In other words, the onus is on you to satisfy yourself that the allowance you get from council is for Council-related business, and not for campaigning. If it is not, then please advise the Executive Support Manager so that they can ensure that the correct council allowance is paid.
- If you prefer not to have to review your mobile accounts in this way, then it is recommended you use a different mobile phone/number for campaign purposes
- You may refer to your mobile phone number in campaign related materials as long as it is not identified with the Council; for example, it would be inappropriate to use text such as “call me on my TDC mobile number xxx”
- You may not use the main Council office address as your business address for the purpose of campaign advertisements in terms of the Local Electoral Act.
- Where information is supplied to a candidate for campaign purposes, the information will be made available to other candidates (See Appendix 2 for procedure).

Your Council contact information will still be available (for example on the Council website or in the Annual Report) so your constituents can contact you about Council business. However, you should not be using your Council-supplied email address for electioneering purposes. If someone contacts you regarding the election on either of these channels, you should reply from your personal email address.

During the election period, election candidates generally may be invited to some Council events.

Protocol 3: Social media

Council’s social media channels are Council resources and must remain politically neutral during the election. Elected members seeking re-election must follow any Council social media guidelines for candidates at all times, and not comment on, share, or otherwise use Council social media channels for electioneering.

Council have produced a set of social media guidelines for candidates, attached as Appendix 1 to this protocol. You should comply with these guidelines at all times.

Council’s social media channels will remain neutral at all times. Council will promote elections and the importance of voting, but will not associate these posts with any candidates.

Please note that for the period of the election:

- Council’s social media channels must not be used by anyone for campaigning purposes. Any campaign-related material (including posts related to nominations and candidacy) will be removed.
- Council social media accounts will not follow any candidates. This may result in your account being unfollowed.
- You may not reply to comments or posts on Council’s social media channels encouraging people to like or follow your social media accounts.
- You may not rate, review, check-in or tag the Council’s social media channels in your own posts or comments.

Protocol 4: Availability of information

Elected members will have access to the information they need to discharge their roles as incumbents and their Council contact information will still be publicly available. However, Council officers will not provide assistance with electioneering activities.

You will continue to be supported in your role as an incumbent elected member. However, information requests should be clearly related to Council business and not for re-election purposes.

Information requests for election purposes are welcome. These should be made to the Executive Operations Coordinator and will be carried out in accordance with the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987. Appendix 2 outlines the process by which these information requests will be treated.

Where the Council supplies information that is not already in the public domain to a candidate, the Council may consider any broader interest in this information alongside the requirement that Council resources are not used to give an electoral advantage to any candidate, and at its discretion make this information available to all other candidates.

Protocol 5: Use of Mayoral resources

Council resources provided for mayoral use should not be used for any electioneering activities associated with any candidate.

If an incumbent mayor is seeking re-election a clear and transparent distinction will be made between that mayor's business-as-usual activities and the mayor's campaigning activities. An incumbent mayor seeking re-election will establish a separate office, with separate staff, for any campaigning activities at their own expense.

The incumbent mayor's office will establish systems and protocols to ensure that any information or other requests from the public, media, other elected members or council employees during the pre-election period are identified as either business as usual or campaign related, and to ensure that these are kept separate and responded to appropriately.

Application of protocols

As an elected member seeking re-election, it is ultimately your responsibility to ensure that your behaviour falls within these guidelines.

If you are unsure as to whether a particular action or request is in breach of these protocols, you should seek advice from the Electoral Officer or Deputy Electoral Officer as soon as possible.

Contact details

Electoral Officer: Anthony Morton; amorton@electionz.com; 021 326 021

Deputy Electoral Officer: Stephen Doran; stephen.doran@timdc.govt.nz; 03 687 7200

References and Revision History					
References					
Title					Document Reference
N/A					
Revision History					
Revision #	Owner	Date Approved	Approval by	Date of next review	Document Reference
1.0	Electoral Officer	July 2016	Management Team	2019	#986187
2.0	Electoral Officer	April 2019	Chief Executive	2022	#1240334
3.0	Electoral Officer	April 2022	Chief Executive	2025	#1500152
4.0	Deputy Electoral Officer	June 2025	Chief Executive	2028	#1749478

Appendix 1: Timaru District Council Social Media Guidelines for Candidates

Candidates must comply with the following guidelines for social media use and presence related to campaigning:

Things to be aware of

- Election advertising, using any media, including social media, must identify the person under whose authority they have been produced, as per sections 113-115 of the Local Electoral Act 2001. This means in your profile photo/bio, you must have a statement saying that all content/images on your social media channel are authorised by you or your agent. You must include a physical address in the authorisation statement.

The Local Electoral Act was amended in 2022 to allow the **address** requirements of an advertisement authorisation statement to be met by providing—

- a residential or business address; or
- an email address; or
- a post office box number; or
- a phone number; or
- a link to a page on an Internet site (if the page contains 1 or more of the above).

The requirement to list the authorising party remains. There must be a reasonable expectation that anyone wishing to respond to the campaigning material can do so with the candidate or their agent from the contact details listed in the authorisation statement. The use of a council building address is not permitted in the authorisation address.

- The Council's social media accounts (listed below), including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Neighbourly, are not permitted to be used as a communications channel by anyone (candidates or members of the public) for promotion, electioneering or campaigning. This also applies to all social media accounts owned by Council-controlled organisations.
- The Council's social media accounts are constantly monitored and any campaign related or electioneering content will be removed immediately.
- If Council already follows your public social media accounts, please note you will be unfollowed three months prior to the election date. This protocol is in line with the Local Electoral Act 2001.
- Any social media post – positive or negative – made by any individual specifically relating to their own – or someone else's – nomination, intention to run for Council, or election campaign, will be removed immediately.
- Candidates cannot reply to the Council's social media posts or share with a comment encouraging people to like or follow their own social media accounts or any other electioneering tool. Any posts that do this will be removed immediately.

- Candidates must not link their own social media accounts (if they are used for campaigning purposes) to the Council's social media accounts.
- Candidates cannot rate, review, check-in or tag the Council's social media channels.
- The Council's social media accounts will remain neutral. Timaru District Council will promote elections and the importance of voting but will not associate these posts with any candidates.

For the sake of clarity, Timaru District Council's and CCO web and social media accounts are listed below.

Social media channel list

Facebook	
Timaru District Council	https://www.facebook.com/TimaruDC/
South Canterbury Museum	https://www.facebook.com/SCMuseum/
Caroline Bay Trust Aoraki Centre (CBay)	https://www.facebook.com/CBayAquaticCentre/
CBay Fitness	https://www.facebook.com/CBayFitness/
Timaru District Libraries	https://www.facebook.com/timarudistrictlibraries/
Aigantighe Art Gallery	https://www.facebook.com/aigantigheartgallery/
Venture Timaru Development	https://www.facebook.com/venturetimaru
Venture Timaru Tourism	https://www.facebook.com/welovetimaru/
Instagram	
Timaru District Council	https://www.instagram.com/timarudistrict/
Aigantighe Art Gallery	https://www.instagram.com/aigantigheartgallery/
Venture Timaru Tourism	https://www.instagram.com/venture_timaru_tourism/
YouTube	
Timaru District Council	https://www.youtube.com/user/TimaruDC/
Linked In	
Timaru District Council	https://www.linkedin.com/company/timaru-district-council

Appendix 2: Procedure for candidates to request Council information

Where Council information is requested by and supplied to a registered candidate (including a current elected member), it should be assumed that the information may be used for campaign purposes. The information will also be made available to other registered candidates as well, if it is not already publicly available.

Information requests from candidates are to be coordinated through the Executive Operations Coordinator. Contact: meghan.taylor@timdc.govt.nz.

The process is:

1. Candidate requests information from Executive Operations Coordinator ^{1 2}
2. Executive Operations Coordinator determines answer to question(s) from relevant staff. Note: it may be treated as a request for information under the LGOIMA depending on the nature of the request.
3. Executive Operations Coordinator replies to request, and if the information was not publicly available also forwards copy to Deputy Electoral Officer.
4. Deputy Electoral Officer publishes the question and answer under the Candidate Information section on www.timaru.govt.nz/elections (only if information was not publicly available prior).

The Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 and the Privacy Act 2020 will apply to all requests for Council information.

¹ If Executive Operations Coordinator is unavailable, please follow the instructions in their out-of-office reply

² Information requests not sent directly to the Executive Operations Coordinator will be forwarded to them by Council staff, but please note that this may cause a delay in responding to your request