The Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn
NHS Foundation Trust

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (IN PUBLIC)

SUBMITTED BY:	REPORT FOR:		IMPACT:		
Laura Skaife-Knight, Deputy CEO	Decision		High	Med	Low
CONSULTATION:	Information	✓		✓	
	REPORT TYPE:		RELATED WORK:		
	Strategic				
	Operational	✓			
	Governance	✓			

Meeting Date: **26 November 2019**

Report Title: **General Election Guidance - Purdah**

Purpose: To inform the Board of the General Election Guidance– known as Purdah – and what this means for QEH.

Financial Implications / Efficiency Savings / Quality Improvement:

None as a direct result of this report.

Risk Assessment:

Strategic / External	Operational/ Organisational	Financial	Clinical	Legal/ Regulatory	Reputational / Patient Experience
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Recommendations: The Board is invited to note how Purdah will affect QEH in the run up to the General Election and the actions taken to date to ensure compliance with the guidance.

General Election Guidance - Purdah

General election guidance (known as Purdah guidance), always applies to the NHS in the run-up to a General Election. This guidance will remain in place 6 November - 13 December 2019 or the date at which a new Government is formed.

The principles underpinning the guidance are that:

- the day-to-day operations of the NHS must continue unimpeded;
- as always, the NHS must act and be seen to act with political impartiality, and its resources must not be used for party political purposes; and
- during the election period, democratic debate between candidates and parties should not be overshadowed by public controversy originating from NHS bodies themselves.

The Purdah guidance means that specific restrictions are placed on the use of public resources and the communication activities of public bodies, civil servants and local Government officials. The pre-election period is designed to avoid the actions of public bodies detracting from or influencing election campaigns.

<u>What does this mean for QEH?</u>

- **The Trust and staff must behave impartially towards all candidates and political parties**, to avoid influencing the election outcomes, whether inadvertently or intentionally. For example; if we have a visit or request for information from a prospective parliamentary candidate, we should invite all candidates and make the same information available to all candidates.
- **Briefing and meeting prospective parliamentary candidates and ministers:** Once Parliament is dissolved, every seat in the House of Commons becomes vacant. All business in the House comes to an end and MPs stop representing their constituencies so there will be no MPs until after the general election. Any briefing provided to former MPs should be available to all prospective parliamentary candidates. During an election, the Government retains its responsibility to govern, and ministers remain in charge of their departments. Essential business must carry on. Any briefings for ministers should be handled as per the usual process, ensuring any information shared is factual and provided promptly.
- **No new decisions or announcements of policy or strategy;**
- **No decisions on large and/or contentious procurement contracts;**
- **No participation in debates and events that may be politically controversial, whether at national or local level;**
- **No consultations**
- **We will avoid proactive media work on issues that may be contentious.** Reactive lines, website and social media posts by the Trust will be factual and, where possible, in line with previous lines shared externally. Any appearances on local or national media (TV, radio) should follow the same principles.

- **Events:** we will avoid attending events where we may be asked to respond to questions about policy or on matters of public controversy. This may mean withdrawing from previously agreed engagements during this period.
- **Board meetings**: Board meetings should be confined to discussing matters that need a Board decision or require Board oversight. Matters of future strategy should be deferred.
- **Appointments of Board members and Non-Executive Directors:** Appointments can continue as per the usual process unless you are concerned appointments may result in local political sensitivities, in which case, you may wish to postpone until after the elections. Exercise sensitivity over the timing of any announcements.
- **Foundation Trust Governor elections:** There is nothing to prevent Foundation Trust Governor elections taking place, though we are advised to exercise caution if there are concerns that these may become political (see below advice given to QEH on forthcoming Governor elections)

These restrictions apply in all cases other than where postponement would be detrimental to the effective running of the local NHS, or wasteful of public money.

Actions taken:

- We have proactively communicated the requirements of Purdah across the organisation
- We have made the Cabinet Office guidance (below) available to staff (which NHS England/Improvement and NHS Trusts are obliged to follow)
- We have sought advice from our independent Returning Officer (ERS) and the NHS Providers' Governance Lead regarding continuing with our forthcoming Governor elections
- Further information and advice on Purdah is available from the QEH Communications Team who are the leads on this subject

Further information:

NHS Employers: https://www.nhsemployers.org/news/2019/11/pre-election-purdah

Cabinet Office: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/844380/General_Election_Guidance_2019.pdf