

November 2019

## General Election 2019 – How to host a pharmacy visit for general election candidates

This PSNC Briefing provides guidance for LPCs or contractors looking to organise visits to community pharmacies for General Election candidates. During the election, we will be calling on all candidates to back their local pharmacies, and a photo opportunity at a pharmacy during the campaign is an excellent way for them to demonstrate that support.

### Why organise a visit?

Community pharmacy has built a profile among local and national politicians in recent years, but there are many demands for the attention of MPs, and Brexit has dominated the political agenda for some time. Although much of the focus of this General Election will be on Brexit, many candidates will want to be seen to be supporting local issues, however in recent months, MPs have expressed an interest in how Brexit will affect medicines supply, so may want to discuss it in this light.

Election candidates always have busy campaign schedules, and that is particularly true in this year's snap election, but it is important for candidates to be seen engaging with their communities and meeting voters. Visiting a local pharmacy enables candidates to do this, and so should be an attractive option for them. A visit also provides an excellent photo opportunity and fuel for social media, perhaps using the hashtags [#VotePharmacy](#) and [#GE2019](#).

Candidates may not have time to get into the detail of policy, but a visit is an opportunity to offer them a snapshot of the range of services that pharmacies provide and their key role in improving the community's health and wellbeing. There will also be many new MPs following the election; and the earlier we can engage with them to get them interested in healthcare and pharmacy, the better. PSNC will provide further guidance to help you engage with new and returning MPs in the new year.

### Organising a visit: step by step guide

#### **Identify your candidates**

Political parties have already selected election candidates in many constituencies, and all candidates must be declared by 14<sup>th</sup> November, after which all candidates will be listed on the following website, if you search your postcode: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/your-election-information>

If it is feasible, LPCs may like to consider inviting the two or three candidates with the most realistic prospect of winning the seat to visit a pharmacy. It is important not to show favouritism to a particular party, even if the constituency is a safe seat. LPCs are advised to use their discretion when engaging with smaller or fringe parties. Please also bear in mind that candidates from different parties should not be invited to the same pharmacy on the same day. But LPCs should be transparent about engaging with other candidates and candidates should not be given the impression that they have an exclusive invitation to visit a pharmacy.

It is best to position your approach to the candidates as an LPC activity on behalf of all the pharmacies in your area, as they can be wary of appearing to favour one business over another.

### Do some digging on the candidates

Unless they are sitting MPs, there is often limited information available about Parliamentary candidates, but look out for Twitter accounts, campaign websites, leaflets and articles in the local press for any clues as to the candidates' background. You may be able to find information through web searches, but be wary of cases of mistaken identity. Look out for links to healthcare or community pharmacy that might provide a talking point or a hook for a visit.

### Choose the pharmacy for the visit

The pharmacy you choose needs to demonstrate community pharmacy's best assets. Whether this is because of its accessibility or because of the quality and range of services provided, choose a local pharmacy that shows the best of community pharmacy. It should also, of course, be within the prospective constituency of the candidate.

### Make the right approach

Unless the LPC has a personal relationship with the candidate, they are best reached by email. A template invitation email is included as **Appendix 1**. The visit should be billed as a campaign opportunity, emphasising the chance to have a photograph taken, meet voters and show support for a highly valued team of health professionals on the high street. It is not an opportunity to discuss detailed pharmacy policy or the funding settlement.

You will most likely work with the candidate's election agent to find a time that is convenient for them. Be aware that the visit may be very short, and the candidate may not have much time to talk or to learn about pharmacy. This visit is the start of a relationship, and there will be time to build closer links after the election.

Where LPCs do have a good relationship with a candidate, it may be best to offer to talk to them about pharmacy in the context of the election, for instance covering how pharmacy could help alleviate some of the pressures on the NHS or social care, and how pharmacies are working to safeguard access to medicines.

### Publicise the visit

A pharmacy visit is an ideal opportunity to generate local press coverage, and cement awareness of pharmacy's central role within the community. You can:

- Contact your local newspapers in advance of the visit, and make them aware of the date and time of the visit – they may want to send along a photographer.
- Take photographs of the visit, for you to use with social media, for a press release and to share with the candidate.
- Social media is particularly important during the election campaign, so make sure that a photograph of the visit is shared on Twitter and Facebook, as well as Instagram, LinkedIn and any other available channels, using the hashtags [#VotePharmacy](#) and [#GE2019](#). Encourage the candidate to share photos and use the [#VotePharmacy](#) hashtag as well.
- Prepare a press release in advance, to release the day after the visit. The release should be eye catching, without being sensational. Use it to fly the flag for the work of community pharmacists: give an overview of the purpose of the visit and detail the individuals present. A template press release is included as **Appendix 2**.
- Make sure you include a quote from the pharmacy owner, the candidate, and any other relevant attendees (e.g. commissioner representative). You can approach all of these people in advance of the visit about adding a quote to the release. Or, you can ask the candidate for a quote on the day itself. If you are organising visits with several candidates, bear in mind their sensitivities when publicising visits.
- Remember to keep an eye out for any coverage!

## Follow up

After the event do thank those involved in the visit, particularly the candidate and their election agent. Following the election, send all candidates who visited pharmacies your congratulations or commiserations. There may be an opportunity to provide them with a further briefing, and to ask them to join the All-Party Pharmacy Group (APPG). PSNC will provide guidance on this in the new year.

## Report back to local pharmacy contractors

Make sure you tell your contractors about the visit and any outcomes; it may inspire them to get involved in lobbying parliamentarians in the future. You can also let PSNC and the other pharmacy organisations know about the visit.

## The visit: tone, content and key messages

The purpose of a pharmacy visit is to create a positive impression of community pharmacy, demonstrating pharmacy's assets and potential, in terms of supporting both the health of local communities and other local health and care providers.

It is important to keep visits positive and grounded in local constituencies, as candidates will be focused on engaging with their potential constituents and learning about the pharmacy services available to them. During a campaign, candidates, even if they are former pharmacy ministers or opposition spokespeople, are first and foremost local politicians with local concerns.

Community pharmacy's core message is simply: **community pharmacy is extremely valuable; please support it**. We should frame this in the context of congestion in A&E departments and busy GP surgeries, pointing out that it is more important than ever that we use the valuable network of community pharmacies to keep people healthy and out of hospitals.

You may also want to discuss the recently agreed five-year Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework to explain where the sector is currently at. You could talk about the benefits the new services will bring but could also highlight how challenging it will be for many pharmacies, given the financial pressures on the sector.

- **The five-year settlement for community pharmacies**

In July 2019, PSNC, NHS England & NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) agreed to a five-year deal for community pharmacies, guaranteeing funding levels until 2023/24 and setting out how pharmacies will adapt to provide new services to help people stay healthy and prevent illness; to support and provide urgent care services; to support patients leaving hospital; and to help patients avoid unnecessary visits to GPs and hospitals.

- **The Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS)**

This service has been introduced as part of the new settlement and enables pharmacies to relieve pressure on the wider NHS by connecting patients with community pharmacies as a first port of call for minor illness or for the urgent supply of medicines. Pharmacies can offer patients a consultation to help them to manage minor illnesses or make an 'emergency' supply of medicine where a patient has previously been prescribed the medicine. The service takes referrals from NHS 111 (rather than those patients being directed to GPs or A&E) with referrals from other settings, such as GP practices and NHS 111 online, in future years.

A key question the candidates might have is: how can the next Government support community pharmacies? And you could use the following policy asks in response:

- **Commit to the further development of pharmacy services**

Commission more national public health services through community pharmacies – we would like stop smoking services and Emergency Hormonal Contraception to be available nationally among all community pharmacies in England, to improve choice and access for patients.

- **Make greater use of community pharmacies to help improve uptake rates of vaccinations**  
We would like to see a wider range of vaccinations made available in pharmacies, following the success of the flu vaccination programme, which has been successful.
- **Improve access to medicines**  
Abolish the prescription charge in England, in line with practice in Wales and Scotland – this would create a fairer system for patients and secure patient access to medicines.
- **Support community pharmacy contractors**  
Reimbursement of business rate costs for NHS pharmacies, recognising that these are healthcare premises and bringing pharmacies in line with General Practice.

**Remember – top tips for the visit are to:**

- Keep the visit positive
- Ask the candidate to back their local pharmacies
- Take a photo, if possible with a poster board
- Base the conversation around clear key messages
- Stay away from technical terms and policy detail
- Take time to prepare
- Don't be party-political
- Steer conversations away from complaints

## Other useful resources

- **[General Election Hub: Campaigning for pharmacy in GE2019](#)**  
The National Pharmacy Association (NPA), Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS), and Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC) have developed a website for those in community pharmacy to use, which contains resources for promoting pharmacy in the lead up to the 2019 General Election on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> December. This includes a shared manifesto for the pharmacy sector, which sets out how the pharmacy organisations hope any new Government will commit to investing in the sector.
- **[Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework 2019/20 – 2023/24: A Summary for External Stakeholders](#)**  
This briefing explains the five-year Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework. It is intended for external stakeholders – such as MPs and charities – and is written so that those outside of the sector can better understand the recent deal.

## More information

Candidates with a particular interest in pharmacy can be encouraged to join the [All-Party Pharmacy Group](#), if they are elected. Please do pass any useful intelligence about parliamentary candidates to PSNC.

If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information or have any questions about a candidate visit, please contact [Zoe Long, Director of Communications and Public Affairs](#) and [Jessica Ferguson, Public Affairs Officer](#).

## Appendix 1: Draft letter to invite a candidate to visit a community pharmacy

### GUIDANCE:

- You will need to replace all yellow highlights with local detail
- Use the name of the constituency, not the LPC area
- Estimate the number of pharmacies if necessary
- Include local detail where possible, but keep the email short
- Email the candidate's campaign address (available on their website – NOT an address ending @parliament.co.uk)
- Cc. The candidate's election agent if an address is available

Dear [Mr Johnson]

I am writing on behalf of [Uxbridge and South Ruislip's] [22] local community pharmacies to invite you to visit [name of pharmacy] for a photo opportunity during the general election campaign. There will be an opportunity to meet some of the thousands of patients who rely on our services and the dedicated health professionals who deliver them.

With increasing demand for social care places, pressure on GP surgeries and overcrowding in A&E, it is more important than ever that we support the job that community pharmacies do to keep people healthy and out of GP practices and hospital.

Please let me know if we can arrange a short visit at your convenience.

Kind regards

[X]

## Appendix 2: Draft press release following a candidate pharmacy visit

### [CANDIDATE] TRIES LOCAL PHARMACY OUT FOR SIZE

[PHOTO]

[Name of candidate] the [party] candidate for [constituency] visited [name of pharmacy] in [location] to learn more about the support the pharmacy is providing to local residents.

During the visit [name of candidate] [insert activity eg discussed a service with the pharmacy team/spoke to patients benefitting from a pharmacy service].

PLEASE AMEND ALL QUOTES – EXAMPLE QUOTES ARE FOR ILLUSTRATION ONLY

[Name of pharmacist] said: “Community pharmacies do more than dispense medicines – many can treat minor illnesses, provide healthy lifestyle advice, and guidance on how to take newly prescribed medicines.”

Request quote from local MP’s team – **do not use a quote unless permission granted**. Some will prefer a draft quote for them to sign off. If so, suggested wording follows:

[Name of candidate] said: “It was fantastic to visit [name of pharmacy] today to see the range of services available to local residents. Community pharmacies play a vital role in promoting health and wellbeing, and I encourage people in [constituency] to make the most of their local pharmacies.”

[ENDS]