

- 16.001 In 1996, we reported to the House our views on the desirability of guidelines for advertising and publicity by local authorities (along the lines of the *Guidelines for Government Advertising* adopted by the Cabinet in 1989).¹ The article in that report included suggested guidelines which represented what we believed to be good practice.
- 16.002 Those guidelines were accepted widely in local government. However, since then – and particularly during 1998 (local authority election year) – some advertising and publicity has taken forms that are outside the suggested guidelines. The result has been numerous complaints and requests from ratepayers and other members of the public for us to investigate the use of public money for this purpose.
- 16.003 A common theme of the complaints was that the material directly or indirectly promoted the re-election prospects of certain members of the authority to the disadvantage of other members, or of prospective candidates. This came about because the material featured individual members – pictorially and by quotation – giving the impression that what was being said represented their personal views rather than the views of the authority collectively. The issue came into sharp focus when the material dealt with “achievements” for which the member or members were apparently claiming personal credit.
- 16.004 Another development is in the means of communication. Many local authorities now make information available in electronic form – such as through an internet website or by e-mail. The suggested guidelines do not include reference to such means.
- 16.005 As a result, we have initiated – in consultation with local government representatives and the Department of Internal Affairs – a review of the guidelines to ensure that they remain appropriate to current conditions. When the interested parties reach agreement on what changes are needed we will publish a revised version of the guidelines. We expect to be in a position to do so later this year.

¹ Second Report for 1996, parliamentary paper B.29[99b], pages 99-112. See also Cabinet Office Manual, Appendix 2.