



Operational Compliance Report

London Cycling Campaign (1115789)

About the charity

The London Cycling Campaign promotes cycling for the benefit of the public by providing expert advocacy for improvements to cycling infrastructure and policy and encouraging people to cycle for health, fun, environmental, social and economic reasons.

Why we got involved

A member of the public raised concerns about a campaign run by the charity in the run-up to the London Mayoral election in 2012. The concerns revolved around materials the charity published before the election, which the complainant felt had encouraged support for two particular candidates.

Our regulatory concerns

Our guidance on *Charities, elections and referendums* and *Campaigning and political activity by charities* makes clear that charities may not give support to political parties or particular candidates. We needed to establish whether our guidance had been followed in this case.

What we found

We examined the material and found that a section had gone beyond what our guidance permits by including statements that could be interpreted as advocating support for particular candidates. We wrote to the trustees, telling them to ensure they comply with our guidance. We made clear that any further breaches by the charity that came to our attention would prompt us to consider taking regulatory action.

After writing to the trustees, a complainant raised further concerns with us about statements the charity had made or endorsed in its Twitter account. We found further statements in the charity's Twitter account which appeared to condone a comparison between one of the candidates in the 2012 Mayoral election and Hitler or Goebbels. We also found a comment made on the charity's blog by a member of the public which appeared to insult one of the candidates in the 2012 Mayoral election and could be seen as defamatory. These issues, coming so shortly after the issues in the charity's campaigning materials, caused serious regulatory concern and prompted us to take further action.

The action we took

We directed the trustees to explain, by a deadline we set:

- what action they had taken in response to our earlier letter to ensure they complied with our guidance on campaigning
- whether the charity had a policy and guidelines on tweets and re-tweets by the charity
- whether the trustees monitored the charity's Twitter account and blog to ensure that these are within Commission guidelines and would not damage the reputation of the charity
- whether they felt any of the comments were defamatory

The outcome

We were informed that the charity had recently appointed a new board of trustees. The new board answered our questions in full, explaining how they had responded to our initial letter. They confirmed that the charity's staff members had been trained as to the charity law issues around campaigning and that the chief executive would in future check all campaign materials taking legal advice into account. The trustees also responded to our additional concerns about social media, explaining that they had improved the charity's risk management procedures relating to new media including by producing new guidelines for staff members on using Twitter. They confirmed that they agreed the tweets in question were not acceptable. We accepted that the trustees had taken our concerns seriously and responded appropriately. However, before closing our case, we provided further regulatory advice, including by strongly recommending that the trustees develop a strategy and receive regular formal reports on the use of social media. We made very clear that we would deal decisively with any further breaches.