



Case Report

Gladstone's Library (701399)

About the charity

The charity was registered on 6 April 1989 with the object of the promotion of religion and education and the promotion of divine learning in connection with Church of England and Church in Wales as historical branches of the Catholic Church and in conformity to the living spirit of the Church of England and the Church in Wales.

In 2015, the objects were extended to include the encouragement of research, writing and debate on Gladstone's core subjects: theology and spirituality, history, current affairs and contemporary and classical literary culture.

The charity fulfils its objects by operating Gladstone's Library a residential library in Hawarden, Flintshire, Wales which contains a collection bequeathed by the 19th Century Prime Minister William Gladstone. It also awards scholarships for use of the library.

Why the Charity Commission got involved

The warden (an employee of the charity) emailed to inform us that the UK Independence Party (UKIP) had used a picture of Gladstone's Library and of the statue of Gladstone that stands in front of the library in their Welsh Assembly Manifesto. This was followed by a tweet from a UKIP candidate claiming that Gladstone's Library was supporting UKIP.

A press release was written by the charity, saying that the charity had not given permission for the use of the library building and the statue of its founder William Gladstone. The press release also included a quote that "The policies and principles on which UKIP is based are far from the ideals of William Gladstone".

Following the publication of the press release there was a substantial reaction via social media with 22,000 tweets, and 7,438 Facebook comments made on the topic. The press release was covered by local media outlets and the charity requested our advice.

The action we took

We contacted the warden the next day, and explained that the first part of the press release where the charity asserted a lack of permission for the use of the photograph was correct. However, the expression of a view of UKIP in the press release made it a political statement and unintentionally drew the charity into a party political debate.

We gave regulatory advice to the charity on campaigning and political activity and we recommended that the charity take legal advice. We asked that they inform the commission on the steps they intended to take to resolve the situation.

What we found

Following our regulatory advice, the charity removed the press and a factual statement was published in its place on the charity's website which clarified their position. This was also reflected in their social media postings.

The charity proposed to discuss the commission's guidance on campaigning and political activity at their next AGM. The warden felt this was particularly necessary given the addition of the charity's new object of the encouragement of research, writing and debate on Gladstone's core subjects.

Impact of our involvement

We were able to ensure that the charity was protected from being inadvertently drawn further into a political debate. The commission has a duty to uphold one of the principles of charity law that charities are non-party political.

The charity is to explore how it can deliver its new additional charitable objectives while following the commission's guidance on political campaigning.

Lessons for other charities

A charity must always guard its independence and ensure that any involvement it has with political parties is balanced.

This is especially important during the time of an election.

The guiding principle of charity law in terms of elections is that charities must be, and be seen to be, independent from party politics. A charity must steer clear of explicitly comparing its views (favourably or otherwise) with those of the political parties or candidates.

For more see our guidance '[Speaking out: guidance on campaigning and political activity by charities](#)' and '[Charities, Elections and Referendums](#)'.