

Media and Publicity Protocol

Introduction

1. This protocol will operate along with the Member/Officer Protocol.
2. The provisions of the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986 and the Code of Local Authority Publicity 2001 govern this protocol. All media and communications work done by the Council will comply with these Acts and the code.
3. A key paragraph of the code worth remembering is paragraph 12 which says "Any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanations or both". This principle will underpin our approach.

Role of the communications function

4. The communications function will continue to develop and promote the Council's reputation across the full range of its activities. It will provide objective professional advice to the whole Council, will remain non-party political and will support and advise both the executive and scrutiny functions. It will:
 - (a) promote corporate initiatives in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and officers, including media information, briefings, publications, events and other communications;
 - (b) promote agreed Cabinet initiatives in consultation with the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members, the Chief Executive and chief officers;
 - (c) promote agreed service initiatives as requested by senior managers in consultation with Cabinet Members and the Leader of the Council where appropriate; and
 - (d) promote the role of scrutiny as a key part of the democratic process in consultation with the Chief Executive and chief officers.

Political groups

5. The communications function will provide information on request to the political groups within the protocols and the Constitution of the Council. It will provide professional non-party political advice to Members on request within the existing publicity code.

6. Political groups will be responsible for issuing their own information and party political media releases. This is a legitimate part of the democratic process; however, this should not be done using Council resources.

Council meetings

7. The Communications Service will promote its role in the democratic process by:
 - (a) issuing factual media information before the meetings as appropriate to highlight key issues as agreed by the Leader, the Chairman and Chief Executive to explain and promote the Council's policies and services.
 - (b) issuing media materials as appropriate following the meeting describing the decisions to promote Council policies and services. These will quote the Leader of the Council or the appropriate Cabinet Member as agreed by the Leader, Chairman and the Chief Executive.
 - (c) responding to all media enquiries before and after the meeting, providing an objective, factual explanation of the issues to promote understanding and awareness of the Council and its services in consultation with the Leader, the Chairman and Chief Executive. This will include facilitating interviews and photo opportunities as appropriate.
 - (d) promoting the valuable democratic role of elected Members as appropriate in consultation with the Leader, the Chairman and the Chief Executive.
 - (e) referring all requests for political comment to the relevant group leader.
 - (f) arranging briefings on issues as appropriate in consultation with senior officers and the Leader of the Council or their nominee.

Cabinet

8. The Cabinet is a key focus of the Council and its decision-making process. We will proactively promote the work of the Cabinet as an important public face of the authority by:
 - (a) issuing media information/releases as appropriate with the agenda highlighting important issues and initiatives to explain and promote the Council, its policies and services. Where appropriate these will quote the Leader of the Council or the appropriate Cabinet Member as agreed by the Leader and the Chief Executive.
 - (b) issuing media materials as appropriate in consultation with the Leader or relevant member of the Cabinet and the Chief Executive following the meeting describing the decisions taken to promote Council policies and services. These will quote the Leader of the Council or the appropriate Cabinet Member as agreed by the Leader and the Chief Executive.

- (c) responding to any media enquiries prior to the meeting by providing a factual explanation of the issue. Where a matter of policy is in question, we will consult the appropriate chief officer and Cabinet Member in conjunction with the Leader.
- (d) responding to media enquiries following the meeting by providing a factual explanation of the decision. Where a matter of policy is in question, we will consult with the appropriate chief officer and Cabinet Member in conjunction with the Leader.
- (e) referring all requests for political comments to the appropriate group leader.

Scrutiny and monitoring

9. The scrutiny processes should be recognised publicly by the Council to help convey the legitimacy of the decision making processes. For that reason, the communications function will support the scrutiny role in the following ways:

- (a) issuing factual media material as appropriate at the request of the chairman and vice-chairman of a select committee and agreed by both, factually describing the outcome of the meeting and reflecting the majority view of the committee.
- (b) responding to any media enquiries prior to the meeting by providing a factual explanation of the issue. Where a matter of policy is in question, we will consult with the appropriate chief officer and Cabinet Member.
- (c) responding to media enquiries following the meeting by providing a factual explanation of the decision. Where a matter of policy is in question, we will consult with the appropriate chief officer and Cabinet Member.
- (d) referring all requests for political comments to the appropriate group leader.

General media enquiries

- 10. (a) media officers will continue to field general media enquiries and provide factual, objective information on the policies and decisions of the Council in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the relevant member of the Cabinet or chief officer.
- (b) any requests for political comments will be referred to the appropriate group spokesperson.