

**Wiltshire Council  
Constitution  
Protocol 7  
Media Relations**

# PROTOCOL 7

## MEDIA RELATIONS

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This protocol will operate along with the Member and Officers' Codes of Conduct, and applies explicitly whenever an individual is acting on behalf of the council.
- 1.2 The provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 – s100, admission of public and press to committee meetings, Local Government Act 1986 – s4, code of recommended practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011 (the Code of Publicity), annexed at Appendix A, govern this protocol. All media and communications work done by the council will comply with these Acts and the Code of Publicity.
- 1.3 The council's approach is based on the key principles set out in the Code, that publicity should:
  - be lawful
  - be cost effective
  - be objective
  - be even-handed
  - be appropriate
  - have regard to equality and diversity
  - be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

A key paragraph of the Code is Paragraph 16, "Any publicity describing the council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on the facts or explanation or both. Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy...."

### 2. Role of the Communications Team

- 2.1 The communications team's key role is to manage and protect the reputation of the council. The team adopts an open and transparent approach to all communication, acknowledging confidentiality and sensitivity. The team provides objective, professional advice to the whole council, including supporting and advising the cabinet and the scrutiny functions. The team is non party political.

Key areas of focus include;

- Communicating and promoting corporate policy and areas of activity in consultation with the leader of the council, cabinet, the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors and other senior officers. This is likely to include media releases, briefings, publications, events and other communications;

- Communicating and promoting the corporate priorities and the business plan in consultation with the leader of the council, cabinet members, and the corporate leadership team;
- Communicating and promoting agreed service activities in consultation with the leader of the council, cabinet members, and the corporate leadership team;
- Communicate, where appropriate, the role of scrutiny and their recommendations relating to council priorities or services;
- Promote the valuable democratic role of elected members, as appropriate.
- Publicity material must comply with the relevant restrictions on political publicity which are contained in section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986, as amended by section 27 of the Local Government Act 1988. This states councils shall not publish any material, which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect support for a political party

### 3. Political Groups

- 3.1 The communications team will provide information on request to the political groups within the constitution of the council. It will provide professional non-party political advice to members on request within the bounds of the Code of Publicity.
- 3.2 Political groups will be responsible for issuing their own information and party political media releases. Although this is a legitimate part of the democratic process - it is not appropriate to use council resources.
- 3.3 When speaking or issuing information to the media, members should make clear whether they are speaking:
- officially on behalf of Wiltshire Council (if this is the case the communications team should be kept informed and updated);
  - officially on behalf of their particular political group, stating the name of that group; or
  - personally as a local divisional Member or as a Wiltshire Council Member, when discussing wider issues.

### 4. Council Meetings

- 4.7 The communications team will;
- Issue factual information before meetings, as appropriate, in order to highlight key issues and to explain council policies and services, as agreed by the leader and Chief Executive and Corporate Directors.
  - Issue press releases and, if appropriate, photographs to update and inform decisions made at council meetings. These may include quotes from the leader of the council, the appropriate cabinet member, or another member

such as the chair of a meeting (such as area boards) - as agreed by the leader and relevant Chief Executive and Corporate Directors;

- Respond to all media enquiries before and after the meeting, providing an objective, factual explanation of the issues to promote understanding and awareness of council policies and services in consultation with the leader and Chief Executive and Corporate Directors. This will include facilitating interviews and photo opportunities, as appropriate;
- Refer all requests for political comment on council policies and decision to the relevant group leader.

## 5. Cabinet

### 5.1 The communications team will:

- Issue media releases pre and post meetings regarding issues for discussion and decisions. These may include quotes from the leader of the council, the appropriate cabinet member, as agreed by the leader and corporate leadership team
- Where appropriate co-ordinate cabinet media briefings and other briefings to present papers to the media and give an opportunity for questions and answers
- Notify group leaders of media briefings and what will be covered;
- Respond to any media enquiries either pre or post the meeting - providing factual information. Where council policy is in question, the information will be coordinated in consultation with the appropriate officer and cabinet member in conjunction with the leader;
- Refer all requests for political comments to the appropriate group leader.

## 6. Scrutiny

### 6.1 The communications team will support the scrutiny function by:

- Issuing factual information, as appropriate, at the request of the chairman and vice-chairman of a select committee and agreed by both, regarding the focus and outcome of the meeting and reflecting the majority view of the committee;
- Responding to any media enquiries pre or post the meeting by providing a factual explanation of the issue. Where a matter of policy is in question, the team will also consult with the appropriate officer and cabinet member;
- Refer all requests for political comments to the appropriate group leader.

## 7. Area Boards

### 7.1 The communications team will in consultation with the relevant Community Engagement Manager;

- Issue factual information before meetings, as appropriate, in order to highlight key issues as agreed with the Chairman of an Area Board and encourage public engagement and attendance;

- Issue press releases and, if appropriate, photographs to update and inform decisions made at Area Board meetings. These may include quotes from the chairman of an Area Board, appropriate cabinet member, or other appropriate member;
- Respond to all media enquiries before and after meetings, providing an objective, factual explanation of the issues to promote understanding and awareness of the business of an Area Board in consultation with the Chairman of an Area Board. This will include facilitating interviews and photo opportunities, as appropriate;
- Provide information as requested on the overall operation of Area Boards and on matters considered by an Area Board which have wider geographical implications following consultation with the Leader and corporate leadership team.
- Refer all requests for political comment on decisions made by Area Boards to the relevant group leader.

## 8. General Media Enquiries

- 8.1 (a) The communications team will manage all 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 other members, as appropriate, or the relevant senior officer.
- (b) Any requests for political comments will be referred to the appropriate group leader.

## 9. Press Relations

- 9.1 The communications team will adopt a proactive approach, wherever possible, to provide information and explain policy decisions. The appropriate cabinet member, portfolio holder or senior officer may be requested to speak to the media about such decisions.
- 9.2 Occasionally issues come to the notice of the media which involve staff or members and aspects of their private lives or employment contracts. It is not the council's policy to comment upon such issues and, as such, responses will be factual but respectful of the confidentiality of such issues and the individual's rights under The UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and Wiltshire Council's Data Protection Policy.
- 9.3 All press releases will be written and issued by the communications team in conjunction with members and/or the relevant officers. Copies of all media releases will be circulated to all members. Contact details of the relevant Cabinet Member/Portfolio Holder will be included on all press releases, along with those of the nominated representatives of the opposition groups.

## 10 Recording and Webcasting of Meetings

10.1 The council is committed to being open and transparent in the way it conducts its business. The press and members of the public are therefore welcome to film, photograph or record at any meeting that is open to the public and to use social media. The Council has also decided that some public meetings such as Cabinet and Full Council should be the subject of live web transmission ('webcasting'), or recorded for subsequent transmission.

10.2 Guidance on this subject is included at Appendix 1.

## 11. Use of Social Media

11.1 The council welcomes the use of social media to help the council to communicate effectively with the public; to consult and engage; and to be more transparent and accountable. Equally the council recognises the need to be aware of the responsibilities that come with the use of social media, and to ensure that the highest level of propriety is maintained.

11.2 Guidance on the use of social media **on behalf of the council** is contained in the council's social media and blogging policy, which may be found on the council's intranet at:

[http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/council/howthecouncilworks/plansstrategiespolicies/socialmediapolicy.htm#Social\\_media\\_policy\\_etiquette-Anchor](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/council/howthecouncilworks/plansstrategiespolicies/socialmediapolicy.htm#Social_media_policy_etiquette-Anchor)

11.3. Guidance for Members on the personal use of social media may be found on the council's intranet at:

<http://moderngov.wiltshire.council/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=Protocol%207%20%20Media%20Relations%20Protocol&ID=877&RPID=10498685&sch=doc&cat=13386&path=13386>

## 13. Embargoes

13.1 Wherever possible the communications team will avoid embargoed information. On the rare occasion where information is embargoed then agreement will be sought from group leaders on how the information is managed and shared with members.

13.2 If an embargo is unavoidable, it is proposed that agreement is sought from media representatives ahead of the release of the embargoed information regarding its publication.

## 14. Contacts and Emergency Out of Hours

- 14.1 The communications team operates an out of hours rota and in an emergency can be contacted by the media via email at [communications@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:communications@wiltshire.gov.uk). The designated on-call officer will determine whether an immediate response is required, contacting the relevant officer(s) or members as necessary.
- 14.2 Wiltshire Council has a key role to play in the Emergency Plan for Wiltshire. Arrangements are in place to ensure effective cooperation with the other agencies involved. A media relations officer from one or more of the agencies will be nominated to deal with media enquiries. During an emergency, clear guidance on the identity of media contacts will be issued to officers and members.

## Appendix 1

### Guidance on the recording and webcasting of meetings

1. Wiltshire Council is committed to being open and transparent in the way it conducts its business. The press and members of the public are therefore welcome to film, photograph or record at any meeting that is open to the public and to use social media such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs. The Council has also decided that some public meetings such as Cabinet and Full Council should be the subject of live web transmission ('webcasting'), or recorded for subsequent transmission.
2. This guidance aims to assist the conduct of webcast meetings and to ensure that in doing so the Council is compliant with its obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998. It also provides practical information to assist anyone considering recording meetings and anyone speaking at meetings which may be recorded.
3. Recording and filming of Council meetings is regulated under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014. These Regulations require the Council to allow use of communication methods such as filming and taking photographs.
4. The Council is a Data Controller under the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 for its own filming/recording

#### General

5. A notice will be included on the agenda and also be displayed on the door and inside the meeting room advising everyone who attends that the meeting may be webcast or recorded and that by attending the meeting they are consenting to the broadcast of their image.
6. The Chairman will make an announcement to attendees at the start of the meeting informing attendees that the meeting may be webcast or recorded. Anyone who remains at the meeting after the Chairman's announcement will be deemed to have consented to the broadcast of their image.
7. The chairman may suspend or terminate the webcast or recording if, after consulting the Monitoring Officer or their designated representative, he or she deems it necessary to ensure the proper conduct of the meeting and, in particular, safeguard the interests of vulnerable persons.
8. Recording must be non intrusive and the Chairman may order the removal of a member of the public from a meeting should that person, having been warned, continue to interrupt proceedings. The Chairman may also call for any part of the meeting room to be cleared in the event of a general disturbance.

[see Paragraph 24 of Part 4 of the Constitution – Disturbance by Public]



9. Any person or organisation choosing to record or broadcast any meeting is responsible for any claims or other liability arising from them so doing and by choosing to record or broadcast proceedings they accept that they are required to indemnify the Council, its members and officers in relation to any such claims or liabilities.
10. Public recording of the Council's meetings is also subject to the law and it is the responsibility of those individuals undertaking such actions to ensure compliance. This will include the Human Rights Act 1998, the UK General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection Act 2018.

### **Before the Meeting**

11. Anyone intending to record a meeting is advised to contact the Communications Team on 01225 713116 for advice and guidance. Reasonable advance notice will enable practical arrangements to be made and any special requirements to be discussed.
12. Flash photography, additional lighting or large equipment will *not* be permitted, unless agreed in advance and it can be accommodated without causing disruption to the proceedings. Requests to use equipment of this nature will be subject to consideration of the constraints of the meeting rooms.

### **During the Meeting**

13. Recording of meetings should:

- not interfere with the effective conduct of the meeting, nor should it be disruptive or distracting. The Chairman has discretion to suspend or stop recording at any time and to take appropriate action if the Chairman, after taking advice from the Monitoring Officer or their designated representative, considers that they are doing so in a disruptive manner.
- not seek to 'overview' sensitive information such as close ups of confidential papers or private notes.
- not obstruct others from observing and participating in the proceedings.
- cease immediately if and when the meeting agrees to formally exclude the press and public due to business of an exempt or confidential nature.
- not be edited in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings or the comments made, or that ridicules those being recorded.
- when published or broadcast, recordings should be accompanied by information including when and where the recording was made and the context in which the discussion took place.
- be overt (i.e. clearly visible to anyone at the meeting).
- cease, unless continued recording has been explicitly agreed by the Chairman, when the meeting is formally concluded.

14. It should be noted that Members will be accessing their meeting documentation ie agenda and reports electronically.

## **Exempt or confidential business**

15. No exempt or confidential agenda items shall be webcast, and no part of any Meeting will be webcast after the Committee has voted to support the exclusion of the public and press because there is likely to be disclosure of exempt or confidential information, as defined in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A and in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972. The Democratic Services officer will ensure that recording of the meeting has ceased and will confirm this to the Chairman before any discussion of exempt or confidential matters is commenced

## **Practical advice**

### **Speaking at a meeting**

16. Firstly and most importantly remember to speak into the microphone each time to ensure that your words can be clearly heard.
17. Try to avoid moving unduly whilst speaking and using expansive hand gestures; because the video stream is highly compressed all movement causes temporary pixilation and leads to a diminution of picture quality. In addition the camera operator will struggle to keep a moving person in shot. For the same reason if giving a presentation please try to stand in the same area rather than walking around the room.
18. When other people near you are speaking please bear in mind that you may still be on camera. Bear in mind that even when there is no audience in the room members of the public are nonetheless watching the meeting.

### **Microphone noise**

19. Microphone noise is an artificial sound that is introduced when an object touches the microphone; speakers should not tap pencils and rings against microphones or touch the cable. When speaking, do not place objects in-between yourself and the microphone as this may distort what you are saying.

### **Clothing**

20. It is advisable to avoid bright colours which tend to cause exposure problems when webcast. Stripes and checked clothes are best avoided as they can cause a strobe effect when webcast, especially when the subject is moving.