

REPORT

Cllr Culver: Deputy Cabinet Member for Resources

Report to present a proposed communications strategy and supporting communications policy for the council, and also to recommend a revised media protocol.

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To seek approval for the council's first communications strategy and supporting communications policy.
- 1.2 To seek approval for the council's revised media protocol

2. Introduction and background

- 2.1 The existence of a communications strategy, clearly stating the council's commitment to communicate clearly with both external and internal audiences, strengthens the profile of communications and demonstrates support for the core values of 'communicating with the public', 'providing excellent service' and 'being a progressive employer'.
- 2.2 The strengthening of the corporate communications team over the past 12 months has led to significant progress being made in respect of developing a corporate approach to communications. The dedicated PR officer post, the introduction of a publications protocol, the establishment of a corporate identity 'gatekeeper', tighter editorial discipline for the web site and the team's pro-active involvement in communicating key corporate initiatives - the CPA process and the on-going integrated change programme, for example - has helped raise the profile and quality of communication, and increase the council's expectation for communications that is clear and consistent.

3. The Communications Strategy

- 3.1 Fundamental to the development of successful communications across the council is the need to develop a communications strategy which sets out the direction for the council's communications as well as stating key values underpinning all aspects of internal and external communication. Furthermore the strategy would stipulate and facilitate a corporate approach to communications, without compromising the operational needs of service units.
- 3.2 The strategy has been written following consultation with the communication and consultation group, and wider research of best practice among other authorities within the council's national benchmarking group.
- 3.3 The document presented to Cabinet is in the form of an 'executive summary' strategy which focuses on **some** background, four strategic objectives and associated action plans. A more

comprehensive communication strategy with more background information and more operational guidance will be made available to service unit heads and anyone else who demands a wider appreciation of the council's communication objectives.

- 3.4 The day-to-day ownership of the strategy lies with the Head of Marketing, Economic Development and Tourism, through the Corporate Marketing and Communications Manager. Linked to the strategy is a series of action plans, summarising all communications needs as identified in the portfolio plans. This would be updated annually and be treated as the basis for the annual work plan of the corporate marketing and communications team.
- 3.5 The strategy has been written to cover all aspects of external and internal communication and covers a three year period 2004-7.
- 3.6 It is planned that a series of 'how to...' guides will be developed to support service units in their communication activities and these will sit alongside the strategy as an operational resource.

4. The Communications Policy

- 4.1 As a preface to the strategy sits a one-page communications policy which attempts to distil the communication values the council holds into a short, succinct policy statement.
- 4.2 The policy is a way of endorsing a corporate approach to communications and a mandate to the corporate and communications team to request particular work practices from their colleagues across the council.

5. The Media Protocol

- 5.1 The current media protocol was approved by the Policy and Resources Committee at a time when the council had no dedicated PR officer with a sole remit in media relations. Since August 2003 there has been a PR Officer in post and the capacity for both reactive and pro-active media relations work has increased significantly.
- 5.2 The media protocol has been re-written to reflect this increased resource in the corporate marketing and communications team and to more tightly define the responsibilities of officers and members.
- 5.3 The protocol requires officers to direct all media relations through the council's PR Officer, who is responsible for finalising, approving and issuing **all press releases**. This will ensure a corporate approach to handling and following-up media enquiries, monitoring successful coverage and highlight all PR opportunities to the corporate communications team for inclusion on the web site and further promotion as appropriate.
- 5.4 Portfolio holders and lead members from other committees, panels and working groups continue to be named as spokespersons on **policy issues**. Service unit heads and other key technical officers are expected to be able to contribute comment about aspects of service delivery and projects to the media in conjunction with the PR Officer. For specific details please refer to the protocol itself.
- 5.5 The protocol now includes an editorial policy for the South Wilts Citizen.
- 5.6 Group Leaders have been consulted on the media protocol and have requested some changes be made. These are listed in appendix I. The majority of the suggested changes are recommended for incorporation within the final media protocol. It is not considered appropriate or necessary, however, for two of the changes to be included for the reasons given. Please note the reference to publicity during election periods on page 5, which has been added since the consultation period, and reflects common practice. During the general consultation process on the media protocol, the Labour Group Leader has expressed a view that the editorial policy of the Citizen

does not permit political debate within its pages and that the opportunity to celebrate such diversity in democracy is lost.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 That the communications strategy be adopted as part of the council's corporate suite of strategies from July 2004.
- 6.2 That the supporting communications policy be agreed.
- 6.3 That the changes proposed by the group leaders as shown in appendix 1, table 1 be incorporated into the final media protocol.
- 6.4 That the changes proposed by the group leaders as shown in appendix 1, table 2 are not incorporated into the final media protocol.
- 6.5 That the Corporate Marketing and Communications Manager makes the necessary amendments as per recommendations 6.3 and publishes the protocol with immediate effect.

Background papers: Best Value Review into Customer Care and Communication - improvement plan
Mori consultation on the 2004/05 budget.
Feedback relating to communication from Peer Review, Peer Challenge and CPA inspection
Portfolio Plans - 2004-5

Implications:

Financial:	All costs associated with the recommendations to be met from within existing budgets.
Legal:	The Council should not allow publicity which: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotes or opposes a point of view which is identifiable as the view of one political party and not of another• Is part of a wider campaign which appears to be designed to affect support for a political party, as to do so may be illegal
Human Rights:	None
Personnel:	None
Community safety:	None
Environmental:	None
Council's Core Values:	Providing excellent service; Communicating with the public; Being a progressive employer.
Wards affected:	All
Consultation undertaken:	Management Team (communications strategy and media protocol), all service unit heads (communications strategy), Heads of Legal and Property Services and Head of Personnel (media protocol) and all group leaders (media protocol only)

**Salisbury District Council - Communications Strategy - 2004-07
Executive Summary**

**SALISBURY DISTRICT COUNCIL
Communications Policy**

Salisbury District Council recognises the importance of communication. For everything it does, the council will make sure that clear communication plans are in place to maximise public information and minimise confusion.

We will communicate clearly, openly, accurately and regularly with the public, with our professional partners, and with each other, in order to promote mutual understanding, and facilitate a better service to the people of South Wiltshire.

All our communication will be produced in 'plain English', written for its intended audience and be unambiguous, timely and to an appropriate quality.

All communication and promotional material issued by the council will be branded and therefore clearly identifiable as having come from the council and will include key contact details.

All council communication, whether it is internal or external, will show respect for those with whom we are communicating. It will be prepared in line with other appropriate council policies concerning freedom of information, data protection, fairness and equality, customer care and environmental sustainability.

Table of Contents

Preface: Salisbury District Council communication policy statement

1.	Introduction	page 4
2.	Key principles of good communications	page 4
3.	Challenges we face	page 5
4.	Communication - a shared responsibility	page 5
5.	Strategic objectives	page 6
5.1	Strategic Objective 1: External Communication	page 6
5.2	Strategic Objective 2: E-Communication	page 7
5.3	Strategic Objective 3: Corporate Identity	page 7
5.4	Strategic Objective 4: Internal Communication	page 8
6.	Delivering the Strategy and action plans	page 8
followed by: Appendix I: Communication Strategy Action Plans:		
	Action Plan: external communication	A1-A3
	Action Plan: e-communication	A4
	Action Plan: corporate identity	A5
	Action Plan: internal communication	A6-A7

1. Introduction

The Audit Commission has assessed Salisbury District Council as a 'good' council with solid foundations to become excellent at its next assessment in 2007. This task is reflected in the council's long-held ambition to be a nationally recognised, high performing council with a strong emphasis on partnership working and engaging the community.

Excellent communication will be key in helping the council meet this target and therefore, the objectives and detailed action plans outlined in this strategy will become critical parts of the council's overall improvement plan for the next three years.

This document is an executive summary communications strategy, giving **some** background information, but focussing primarily upon four strategic objectives regarding communication and their accompanying action plans.

A more comprehensive communications strategy document giving more background information and some wider detail about how we communicate has been written as a working strategy document for service units and will be circulated to service unit heads. It is available to others, on request, from the Corporate Marketing and Communications Manager.

2. Key principles of good communication

The council is committed to providing excellent communications to all its audiences and therefore embraces some key principles which it expects anyone communicating as its representative to also recognise and follow.

- Honest and open, two-way communication
- Strong, accurate and easily accessible communication
- All communication – spoken, written (whether presented on paper or electronically) - should be clear, easily understood, timely and kept up to date.
- All published material should adhere to our accepted corporate style and be easily and instantly identifiable as originating from Salisbury District Council.
- All communication should be accessible to all those who would benefit from it, including groups we recognise to be hard to engage, whether through the traditional definition of being 'hard to reach' or increasingly because of 'lifestyle reasons' - e.g. service families, travellers, ethnic groups, the young, working adults. Consequently the words and images used in communication should demonstrate inclusivity and be appealing to all appropriate audiences.

When communicating as part of a partnership, care must be taken to ensure all parties are happy with communication plans - the message, the tools and the timings must be agreed in advance.

3. Challenges we face

While there have been significant improvements to its communication over the past few years the council continues to face new and fresh challenges which increase the need for clear, innovative communication delivered to all audiences.

- Nationally, local government has the poorest image and reputation of all the public services. Communications plays a key role since it is accepted that residents who feel informed are far more likely to be satisfied than residents who do not feel informed.
- Locally the council has difficult budgetary issues to address in the short term and tough government targets to meet.
- Internally there are major changes planned on service delivery that will impact on traditional methods of working. Examples include: customer access, e-government and strategic partnerships. This will require a change in organisational culture and ethos and impact on many traditional communication methods.
- Feedback from staff focus groups and surveys has identified blockages in internal communications that prevent clear messages getting through.

4. A shared responsibility for the communications strategy

The **chief executive** and the **policy directors** will be responsible for driving the communications strategy by actively, and demonstrably, applying its principles to all aspects of their work. All **service unit heads** will take particular responsibility for ensuring the successful implementation of the communications strategy within their areas of responsibility.

- Each service unit will assess its own commitment to the communications strategy and designate one or more 'key communicator(s)'. As part of the corporate communications and consultation group, the key communicators will, amongst other things, be responsible for ensuring that their particular service unit contributes news to the South Wilts Citizen, the council's web site and other corporate sources of information as appropriate.
- The **Corporate marketing and communications team** provides advice and guidance to members and officers on the communications aspects of major issues facing the council and, through its diverse activities supports the council's core values and political priorities. It has a key role to play in all areas of communication:
 - External communications
 - Internal communications
 - New media – internet/intranet
 - Media relations

- Corporate identity
- Marketing and promotion

Day-to-day responsibility for the delivery of the actions in support of the strategy's objectives lies with the corporate marketing and communications manager and the detailed action plans that follow form the basis of the wider team's annual work programme.

5. Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives of the communications strategy are four-fold:

- Through **external communication**, to seek continued improvement in public perception and understanding of the council and its services
- Through **e-communication**, to maximise the opportunities to communicate creatively and effectively through the use of new technology
- To strengthen the council's visual profile locally, regionally and nationally through consistent use of a strong **corporate identity**
- Through **internal communication**, to increase staff understanding of the aims and objectives of the council and promote ways of improving communication between service units

The strategy will be continually updated and a rolling three-year action plan will be produced annually. It will be comprehensively reviewed in 2007.

5.1 Strategic Objective 1: External communication

To seek continued improvement in public perception and understanding of the council and its services

- We will protect and enhance the reputation of Salisbury District Council
- We will earn understanding and support for the organisation, while at the same time influencing opinion and behaviour
- We will actively educate and inform the public about the council, its practices and its services
- We will take a targeted, high profile approach to major local issues
- We will give equal support and attention to all geographical areas covered by Salisbury district

It is accepted that there is a direct correlation between the amount of information residents have about their local council and the amount of confidence and support they have in that council. In late 2003 MORI carried out a BVPI General Survey in the Salisbury District Council area. In line with national experience this survey showed a correlation between the extent that residents feel informed about the

council and their overall satisfaction with the council. For example, nearly 80% of informed residents are satisfied with Salisbury District Council's performance whereas for uninformed residents the satisfaction level falls to less than 40%. Residents can feel informed about the council and about what the council does in a number of ways, many of which rely on mature communication processes. This points to the importance of having a wide variety of external communication tools available.

The media is one of the primary external sources of information about the council for many residents. So on-going improvements and developments to the council's media relations approach are suggested in the strategy's action plan. There is also a separate media relations protocol giving information on the issuing of press releases and appropriate spokespeople.

5.2 Strategic Objective 2: E-Communication

To maximise the opportunities to communicate creatively and effectively through the use of new technology

- We will continually seek out and exploit the opportunities presented by electronic communication, internally and externally, to benefit the council and the communities it serves.
- We will support the use of e-communication by training our staff and elected members in its use.
- We will use the council's website to promote the council and its services and to facilitate channels of communication that the public can use to speak to us.
- We will use a redeveloped intranet site to communicate fully with our staff and elected members, and actively encourage its use.

5.3 Strategic objective 3: Corporate Identity

To strengthen the council's visual profile locally, regionally and nationally through consistent use of a strong corporate identity

- We will provide information in a clearly branded, concise fashion to both internal and external audiences
- We will promote the individual services provided by the council, but always be mindful of their contribution to the corporate body as a whole
- We will always adhere to the guidelines laid out in the publications and printed material protocol and any corporate identity protocol and style guide there may be

Communication, especially printed material, is not simply about how it looks – but about whether it is easily understood. So some suggested actions look at cementing

the improvements to the corporate identity through language - the use of plain English and the establishment of reader panels as well as the introduction of a council-wide style guide.

5.4 Strategic Objective 4: Internal Communication

To increase staff understanding of the aims and objectives of the council and promote ways of improving communication between service units

- We will maintain a strong two-way flow of information within the council that supports and encourages teamwork, trust and loyalty.
- We will inform all our staff and members of issues and events that affect the council and the impact it will have upon them.
- We will consult our staff through formal and informal channels about the development of policies, practice and procedures.
- We will listen as well as talk in our daily dealings with colleagues and elected members.

It is envisaged that a separate strategy outlining developments in internal communications over the next three years will be a direct outcome of this wider strategy.

6. Delivering the strategy and action plans

The following pages show how we will achieve this, and when. Resource implications are included, however most of the expenditure will be met from existing budgets.

The four strategic objectives are extremely far-reaching and rely upon efficient and consistent use of a number of communications tools. Please refer to the action plans that can be found in the pages that follow.

We will periodically measure the success of the strategy and establish information regarding the council's reputation and levels of customer and staff satisfaction through formal surveys (external and internal) and mystery shoppers, focus groups, established forums (tenant's panel, People's Voice, Tomorrow's Voice), the South Wilts Citizen and the website.

Appendix I: Communications Strategy – Action Plan 2004 - 2007

Strategic objective 1. External Communications: (PMS ID 169, 822)		To seek continued improvement in public perception and understanding of the council and its services			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
Press releases, media briefings	Continue to issue press releases in support of corporate and service unit activities		Ongoing	Ongoing	PR Officer
Media Monitoring	Carry out benchmarking exercise to set current status		Complete monthly and annual report	Complete monthly and annual report	PR Officer
	Develop process of media monitoring/targets	198			PR Officer
Proactive support to Journalists	Survey targeted journalists and establish their requirements		Carry out annual survey	Carry out annual survey	PR officer
	Establish 'media resource centre' on web site		Keep resource centre updated	Keep resource centre updated	PR Officer/web team
Facilitate a corporate approach to media relations	Revise the media relations protocol	197 ongoing	Keep under review and amend if required	Keep under review and amend if required	CMCMgr/PR Officer
	Develop and implement appropriate training sessions for service units and members		Ongoing as required	Ongoing as required	PR Officer

Strategic objective 1. External Communications:		To seek continued Improvement in public perception and understanding of the council and its services			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
	Work with members of corporate communications and consultation working group to develop annual PR plan		Produce annual PR plan from portfolio plans	Ongoing	PR Officer/CMCMgr
Raise the national profile of the council through PR	Target local government media. Develop use of trade press		Ongoing	Ongoing	PR Officer
Corporate campaign	Define and implement a 'value for money' focussed campaign Sept-May	823	Identify and implement annual campaign – Sept – May	Identify and implement annual campaign – Sept – May	CMCTeam
External recognition for communications work			Enter for 'comms team of the year award' and council magazine of the year award	Enter for industry award with a community promotional campaign	CMCTeam
Promote community leadership role	Profile community planning work, SWSA, other partnerships		Ongoing	Ongoing	PR Officer
Service unit campaigns	Implement PR strategies for identified projects from annual PR plan		Ongoing	Ongoing	PR Officer
Raise council's profile via civic PR	Develop annual PR plan from Chairman's charity/cause		Implement annual Chairman's PR plan	Ongoing	PR Officer

Strategic objective 1. External Communications:		To seek continued Improvement in public perception and understanding of the council and its services			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
Key messages – corporate	Develop key messages		Evolve key messages	Evolve key messages	CMCMgr
Service unit communication strategies			Consider the development of unit strategies	Ongoing implementation of strategies	CMCTeam with Service Units
Support to service units in promoting their service	Develop series of 'how to' guides covering all aspects of communication		Commission corporate support material		
Corporate caravan			Review and update the caravan and its use		CMCMgr with Parks service
The South Wilts Citizen	Publish three editions - July, October, February		Publish four editions - depending upon advertising revenue	Publish four editions - dependent upon advertising revenue	PR Officer
The Corporate Plan	Publish full and short version - July (staff and stakeholders)		Publish full and staff version - July	Publish full and staff version - July	CMCTeam
Best Value Performance Plan (county wide)	Publish annually (March)		Publish annually (March)	Publish annually (March)	CMCTeam
Letters	Start to re-write all standard letters (with CC)				CMCMgr/CCMgr
Gatekeeper - <i>also see corporate identity action plan</i>	Establish reader panel				Comms Officer
Communications charter	Write and publish charter (based on policy)				CMCMgr/CCMgr

Strategic objective 2. E-Communications:		To maximise the opportunities to communicate creatively and effectively through the use of new technology			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
Web site	Identify and write missing text and implement process to sustain up-to-date web site	762			CMCTeam
Email	Publish email policy and develop corporate standard for look, salutation and sign off				CMCTeam
Style guidelines	Publish editorial and 'SDC specific' style guide				CMCTeam
Members pages			Develop interactive pages for use by members		e-gov officer/DSU
Media centre			Develop interactive resource pages for media		e-gov officer/ PR Officer
External sites' policy	Write policy	765			CMCMgr/e-gov officer
Marketing and Communications strategy	Define and implement a PR and advertising campaign to promote the web site and its services	763	ongoing	ongoing	e-gov officer/CMCMgr

Strategic objective 3. Corporate identity:		To strengthen the council's visual profile locally, regionally and nationally through consistent use of a strong corporate identity			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
Corporate identity and logo	Carry out a review of the corporate identity and start to implement recommendations	Includes 178			CMCTeam and working group
Establish templates	Stationery, external publications, presentation, email format, signage, notice boards etc	174 and 565	Apply template approach to internal communication		Comms Officer
SDC style guide	Publish guides to support resultant protocols - web related, wider council editorial	174			CMCTeam
Gatekeeper and publications and printed material protocol - incl. letters	Continue to work to the disciplines outlined in the protocol				Comms Officer
Graphic Design	Create framework agreements with preferred designers				CMCTeam
Plain English and crystal mark membership	Consider corporate membership, identify top 5 leaflets/forms for crystal mark	179			Comms officer
Advertising and sponsorship of corporate publications and locations		181	Identify scope and guidelines		CMCMgr

Strategic objective 4. Internal Communications: (PMS ID: 173)		To increase staff understanding of the aims and objectives of the council and promote ways of improving communication between service units			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
Audit of internal communications	As part of the corporate identity review, in part		Further work as defined	Further work as defined	CMCTeam
Internal communications strategy			Write strategy		CMCMgr/PPT
Intranet		764	Design and populate new intranet site		e-gov officer/CMCMgr
People Matter	Write clear editorial policy and production schedule - consider frequency				CMCMgr
The Bulletin	Write clear editorial policy and production schedule - consider distribution				DSU
Corporate identity	Consider 'internal branding' as part of the overall corporate identity review				CMCMgr
'we're proud of' campaign			Implement 'pride in staff' campaign to reflect successes		CMCTeam
Member handbook	Write and publish				Working group

Strategic objective 4. Internal Communications: (PMS ID: 173)		To increase staff understanding of the aims and objectives of the council and promote ways of improving communication between service units			
Activity	Yr. 1 2004-05	PMS ID	Yr. 2 2005-06	Yr. 3 2006-07	Lead
'Year Book'			Produce annual compilation of people-related successes	ongoing	People Matter editors
CPA improvement plan	Incorporate into corporate plan, issue email updates internally				PD/Working group
Office centralisation	Develop comprehensive communication plans to ensure staff and members feel well informed		ongoing	ongoing	PD/CMCMgr
Improving customer services	Develop comprehensive communication plans to ensure staff and members feel well informed		ongoing	ongoing	PD/CCMgr/CMC Mgr

Where abbreviations occur:

PD= Policy Director

CMCMgr= Corporate Marketing and Communications Manager

CMCTeam= Corporate Marketing and Communications Team

CCMgr= Customer Care Manager

PMS= Performance Management System

Media Protocol

**(Including editorial policy for the
South Wilts Citizen and external publications)**

**Produced by the
Corporate Marketing and Communications Team
Marketing, Economic Development & Tourism**



Proposed issue 2 July 2004

Contents

1	Introduction	3
	1.1 Our strategic aim	
	1.2 Our policy statement	
2	The role of the Marketing and Communications Team	3
3	Media Relations Policy	4-8
	3.1 Working with the Media	
	3.2 Who deals with the enquiry	
	3.3 Who should speak to the media on behalf of the council	
	3.4 Partnerships	
	3.5 Use of embargoes	
	3.6 No comment	
	3.7 Emergencies	
	3.8 Bad news stories	
	3.9 Negative media coverage	
	3.10 Respecting confidentiality	
	3.11 Complaints about media coverage	
4	Press Briefings	8
	4.1 Media launches	
5	Identifying and preparing information for the media	8-9
	5.1 Pro-active public relations	
	5.2 Identifying potential stories	
6	Press Releases	8-11
	6.1 Press release content	
	6.2 Who writes press releases	
	6.3 Stages of press release approval	
	6.4 Court cases	
	6.5 Press release distribution	
	6.6 Media records	
	Appendices	
	Appendix I - Editorial policy for South Wiltshire Citizen and other publications	12-13
	<i>Note: A nationally published code of recommended practice on local authority publicity covers all aspects of communication, including media relations and is available from the Corporate Marketing and Communications Team</i>	

I Introduction

This is a protocol for Salisbury District Council officers and councillors who may come into contact with the media. It covers procedures and protocols on:

- media relations;
- the writing and issuing of press releases;
- procedures for releasing information to the media; and
- policies relating to the council's own magazine, The South Wilts Citizen.

1.1 Our strategic aim

To recognise the value of the media in the council's core value of communicating information to the public, and to use the media effectively to communicate with key audiences about council services and policies.

1.2 Our policy statement

Salisbury District Council recognises the value of the media as a means of communicating information and messages to the public. The council is committed to open government and a positive working relationship with the media. We will always be open, honest and proactive in our dealings with them. We appreciate that they have their job to do and respect the right of the media to report all views on any given topic. Salisbury District Council values the media as one of its key partners in communication and will forge strong professional links with local, regional and national media.

2 The role of the Marketing and Communications Team

The Marketing and Communications team promotes and leads on all aspects of the council's corporate marketing, communications and PR activities. It also provides advice and support to service units on promoting their individual services. (see also specific reference to the role of the PR Officer throughout this document)

3 Media Relations Policy

3.1 Working with the Media

The council's media relations and press release service is managed by the Public Relations (PR) Officer and, in their absence, the Marketing and Communications Manager.

Every media enquiry must be used as a positive opportunity to get our message across to the public.

3.2 Who deals with the enquiry?

Most media enquiries come directly to the PR Officer. It is the role of the PR Officer to deal with that enquiry and decide what is the best method of response. The response can sometimes be handled with a written statement but often a council spokesman is needed to speak to the media.

The PR Officer will contact the relevant officer and/or councillor to decide the best method of response. It is imperative that officers and councillors respond swiftly to the PR Officer's request to ensure a quick response to any media enquiry.

The media may contact officers or councillors directly. If the nature of the enquiry is straightforward, for example if the reporter is asking a question which only requires a factual answer, to ensure a swift response, the officer or councillor should answer it there and then. The PR Officer must be kept informed. (*reference: amendment I, Table I*)

However, if the enquiry is likely to be contentious, for example when the council is being criticised, the officer and or councillor should take the details of the journalist, the full nature of their enquiry and pass this on to the PR Officer who will liaise with the relevant officer and/or lead councillor in order to give the media an appropriate response.

(*reference: amendment I, Table I*)

3.3 Who should speak to the media on behalf of the council?

Councillors

Members of the Cabinet will be required to speak to the media to explain policy decisions. The leader and deputy leader will be called on to speak on corporate and major issues. Portfolio holders and their deputies will be required to speak on issues that come under their remit.

Chairmen and vice-chairmen of area committees and the planning and regulatory committee will be required to speak to the media on committee decisions. For

example, if the media contact the PR Officer asking to speak to someone from the council on a recent decision a committee has taken, the PR Officer will expect the chairman of that committee to be available to the media (or in their absence the vice-chairman). Chairmen and vice-chairmen are encouraged to discuss any arranged media interview, with the PR Officer and other relevant technical officer(s).

The chairmen and vice-chairmen of Scrutiny Panels will speak to the media on issues that they raise and reviews that they are working on.

Group leaders will be required to speak on issues that supersede politics, for example obituaries.

Note: *Nothing in this protocol precludes councillors or political groups from speaking or contacting the media (this would include letters, faxes and e-mails). Councillors **must**, however, make it clear to the media whether they are speaking: (reference amendment 2, Table 2)*

- (a) *officially on behalf of the district council - in this case the PR Officer should be kept informed- ; or*
- (b) *officially on behalf of their particular political group (stating the name of that political group); or*
- (c) *personally as a ward councillor. (reference amendment 3, Table 1)*

***During elections, all publicity referring to a political party or anyone standing for election will be suspended between the publication of a notice of election and polling day. Councillors will not be quoted in press releases during this period unless it is a councillor holding a key political or civic position commenting on an emergency or an important event outside of the council's control and where there is a genuine need for a response by a Councillor*

Officers

Officers will be required to speak to the media on projects and initiatives they have had a direct involvement in. This will be to answer questions of fact, technical information and their areas of expertise. Officers who have not received media training will not be expected to do live on-air interviews.

Service unit heads and senior management members may be required to speak to the media on major and corporate issues – particularly if a quick response is needed and a leading councillor is not available.

Note: *With a small council such as Salisbury it is possible that anyone could end up dealing with a media enquiry. It is important that the nature, priority and deadline of the enquiry be established in the first instance, together with all contact details of the journalist and that the PR Officer is informed; the PR Officer will then liaise with officers and/or leading councillors on an appropriate response.*

3.4 Partnerships

Elected councillors and officers involved in partnership organisations may be required to speak to the media on behalf of the partnership. This should be led by the partnership but the Salisbury District Council PR Officer must be kept informed. The

appropriate portfolio holder and/or leader of the council can also comment on the district council's involvement.

3.5 Use of embargoes

Embargoes will only be used when considered essential:

- When news releases are linked to a launch event;
- When an issue of confidentiality requires it; or
- When it is required by a third party (e.g. Stonehenge Master Plan partners).

Note: Embargoes are not legally enforceable and are adhered to by general local agreement.

Please inform the PR Officer of any instances of an embargo being broken.

3.6 'No comment'

Whilst we should avoid being 'unavailable for comment' there are some occasions when it is inappropriate to comment. For example, when legal action is pending, where an issue relates to the personal affairs of an individual or where there is a need to respect the privacy of a complainant or someone being complained about.

Please advise the PR Officer when deciding if a 'no comment' stance is the most appropriate.

3.7 Emergencies

When Salisbury District Council is working in an emergency situation, arrangements are put in place with the other agencies involved. A press officer from one or more of the agencies will be put in place to deal with the media. During an emergency clear guidance on who the media contacts are will be issued to officers and councillors.

Out of office hours contact

The PR Officer's work mobile number will be available with the control centre in case any member of the media contacts the council in the evenings or at weekends. The PR Officer will decide if the media needs a response. If a response is required she will contact the relevant Service Unit Head and/or lead councillor.

3.8 Bad news stories

Our policy is for mistakes to be acknowledged and apologised for 'on behalf of the council' where appropriate and where we are able to do so. Any pro-active statements, or answers to media questions such as these, should be discussed and agreed with the relevant policy director, portfolio holder and the PR Officer.

(reference amendment 4 Table 1)

3.9 Negative media coverage

There are occasions where the media coverage of a particular issue is negative. After discussion with PR Officer, lead councillor and relevant policy director, contact should be made with the media concerned to redress the balance. If we still believe subsequent reports are unfair or not based on fact a complaint should be made to the appropriate authority. **(reference amendment 5, Table 1)**

3.10 Respecting Confidentiality

Occasionally issues come to the notice of the media that involve staff or councillors and aspects of their private lives or employment contracts. It is not the council's policy to comment upon such issues. Factual responses are permitted, for example - 'I can confirm that the employee is no longer in employment with Salisbury District Council, but am not prepared to discuss the situation in any greater detail'.

Staff responsibility to protect the council's reputation

Leaking of confidential information, exempt agenda items and minutes to the media – or public criticism of the council or individual officers or associates – is viewed seriously by the council. However it is recognised that there will be occasions where the employee unions wish to communicate particular comment to the media in relation to issues rather than individual cases, on behalf of itself and its members.

There are mechanisms for complaining about issues or situations arising in the workplace and individual employees should refer to the procedures laid out in the appropriate policies (e.g. grievance, dignity at work/harassment and appeals procedure, whistle blowing) available from Personnel. If in doubt about how to raise concerns or which policy would be most appropriate for their needs, employees should seek advice and guidance from the Personnel Unit.

(reference amendment 6 - Table 1)

3.11 Complaints about media coverage

Complaints about media reporting should be referred to the Service Unit Head, Policy Director and PR Officer to discuss appropriate action.

When a letter in the press requires a response, there should be a discussion between lead councillor, lead officer and the PR Officer and a suitable reply sent in the name of the lead councillor, if thought appropriate.

Where the issue is more wide-ranging, corporate, or serious, it will be appropriate for the Leader and Chief Executive to work together on a suitable response.

4 Press Briefings

Press briefings have three main purposes:

- To help explain a complex issue that will aid the media's understanding of the subject and more accurate reporting.
- To communicate an important story (good and bad news) that will attract media attention.
- To 'launch' an initiative, service or event.

Officers and lead councillors should liaise with the PR Officer on the organisation of a press briefing, who should attend and what topics should be covered.

Note: Press briefings do not preclude the media from approaching other council representatives for comment.

4.1 Media Launches

Media launches are a very effective way of publicising major new initiatives or events and to attract as much press interest as possible. If a media launch is being planned the PR Officer should be brought into discussions at the earliest opportunity. The PR Officer can assist with ideas likely to attract the media, ensure that all of the relevant officers and councillors are fully involved and that any proposed launch date is suitable for both the council and the media.

5 Identifying and preparing information for the media

5.1 Pro-active public relations

Positive media coverage comes from positive pro-active media communications and the recognition of a good news story. It is essential that councillors and officers share all newsworthy issues (be they good or bad) with the PR Officer.

5.2 Identifying potential stories

To help the council communicate and create a stronger identity with local residents it is vital that it takes every opportunity to communicate to them what it is doing especially good news stories. An excellent way of doing this is by issuing press releases.

6 Press Releases

6.1 Press release content

The main purpose of a council press release is to:

- Increase public awareness of services provided by the council and the functions it performs;
- Explain to residents and council tax payers the reasons for particular policies and priorities;

- Improve local accountability; and
- Publicise forthcoming events.

6.2 Who writes press releases?

The PR Officer is responsible for writing and issuing **all** district council press releases, including press releases issued as a result of an official meeting of the district council. An official meeting of the council is any meeting, which has been set up to discuss or carry out business of the council.

Any service units, which need to promote a new initiative or event or need to issue a statement via a press release **must** contact the PR Officer who will do this for them.

Officers are encouraged to present a draft press release to the PR Officer who will ensure that the press release is approved by all relevant parties and issue it to the media. The PR Officer may re-write any draft that comes to her to ensure it fits with the corporate style of the council and suits the requirements of the media.

Issues arising from Scrutiny Panel decisions that require a press release will be written by the council's PR Officer. If it contradicts a Cabinet decision, the PR Officer will be required to also state the Cabinet's point of view.

No Salisbury District Council press release should be issued to the media without coming through the Marketing and Communications team first.

Note to councillors: Councillors and political groups may issue their own press releases **but** they must not use the council's official press release headed paper and must clearly state that the views expressed, are their personal views. **(reference amendment 7, Table 1)**

It would be helpful if the PR Officer is sent a copy of all press releases from councillors and political groups as the media may contact the PR Officer asking for a district council response.

6.2.1 Who should be quoted in a press release?

Quotes are effective devices to make the press release more interesting to read and to back up the information in the press release.

In most cases the officer directly involved in the press release subject and the relevant portfolio holder will both be quoted. This gives the press both an operational and background viewpoint as well as the viewpoint of the council's ruling Cabinet.

In some cases it may be appropriate for just an officer or just a councillor to be quoted – and in a few instances where the press release is only aiming to provide a brief announcement or statement no quote is needed.

It is the PR Officer's role to decide which is the most appropriate.

6.2.2 Contact details on press releases

There must be contact details on the press release to enable the media to go to someone for more information. This should include anyone quoted in the press release, however, it is essential that the officer and/or councillor let the PR Officer know if they are not going to be around at the time of the issuing of the press release. All contacts **must** make themselves available to the media for the first point of contact and let the PR Officer know when the media contacts them, and what the nature of the call was. *(reference amendment 8, Table 2)*

6.3 Stages of press release approval

Before issuing a press release to the media the PR Officer will seek the approval from:

- Any quoted councillor/officers;
- Service Unit Head; and
- Originating officer (where there is one).

6.4 Court cases

Salisbury District Council will occasionally launch prosecutions and will want to use successful outcomes of court cases to deliver a message to the public. The best way of doing this is by releasing the information to the media via a press release. It is imperative that all press releases about court cases are issued to the media at the earliest opportunity.

The PR Officer should be informed when court cases are coming up and the result of the court case as soon as possible - preferably the same day.

6.5 Press release distribution

All news releases leaving the authority will be copied by the PR Officer to the:

- Leader of the Council;
- Deputy Leader of the Council;
- Other Group Leaders;
- Relevant portfolio holder;
- PA to the Chief Executive (on behalf of Management Team);
- Relevant SUH;
- Lead officer; and
- The web site.

6.6 Media records

Monitoring the effectiveness of media communication

Records of press releases issued and press cuttings are kept by the Marketing and Communications team who also ensure they feature on the council's website.

It is the PR Officer's role to record the number of instances press releases are covered and to follow up, if necessary, any press reports.

A monitoring report of the media coverage of press releases will be made available in the members' room and a copy sent to the Management Team. A copy will also be available with the Corporate Marketing and Communications team for anyone else in the council who would wish to see it.

(reference amendment 9, Table 1)

Editorial policy for South Wiltshire Citizen and other publications

The South Wiltshire Citizen

The PR Officer is the editor of the Citizen and is responsible for writing the articles that feature in the magazine. The Citizen is designed to feature more in-depth, human interest and behind the scenes articles about council services, council staff and the residents who benefit from those services. Although major policy decisions may still be reported in the Citizen, its main purpose is to provide balanced information about the council and not political propaganda. Articles may also feature about partner organisations and groups and organisations the council works closely with.

The PR Officer will work closely with service units on developing articles and article ideas. For each edition the PR Officer will issue an 'articles ideas list' to Service Unit Heads and Team Leaders who must circulate that list to their staff and come back to the PR Officer with article ideas. The PR Officer will then decide which of those ideas to include in the Citizen and arrange interviews and photographs. The PR Officer's editorial decision will ensure that there are a good mixture of articles that reflect most, if not all of, the council's six priorities: Improving customer service; delivering more affordable homes; maintaining our housing stock; improving transportation; improving waste management; and improving community safety. The council's core values will also be reflected in many of the articles. The Citizen will also reflect the urban and rural nature of the district.

When each article has been written the PR Officer will send it to the officers who lead on the particular project that is featured and the relevant Service Unit Head. If the article is about a councillor, or a councillor is quoted in the article, they too will get to see the article for their approval (Note: if the article is another version of an already approved press release this will not be sent to anyone for approval in the writing stages). The PR Officer will send all approved articles to the designers of the South Wilts Citizen.

Finished pages will be proof read by the PR Officer. Final approval of all articles is by the Chief Executive. Finished, designed pages will be sent to the Chief Executive a week before they are due to go to the printers and any changes he requests must be made.

The final approved pages will then be sent to the leader of the council and group leaders two days before the final print deadline for their information. However if the councillors spot any glaring errors or omissions then they must let the PR Officer know and the necessary changes will be made.

Editorial for external publications

The PR Officer **must** see articles written by council officers or councillors that are destined to feature in external publications, if these articles relate to the council or the work of the council. This is to ensure that a consistent approach is taken towards the council's corporate identity.

Any publications, both external and internal, that feature articles on Salisbury District Council must be forwarded to the PR Officer. This is because the media may pick up on these publications and may wish to follow up an article about the council. If the PR Officer has the publication she can more easily help the media if they require assistance.

MEDIA PROTOCOL: OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION WITH GROUP LEADERS**Table 1: Amendments to be incorporated**

Amendment No. (chronological order)	Paragraph No.	Nature of amendment
1.	3.2	Para 3: Councillors should not be expected to contact the PR officer with details of EVERY media enquiry. Para 4: opposition councillors respond to enquiries without informing PR Officer
3.	3.3.1	(c) personally as a ward councillor or personally as a district councillor, when talking about more global issues
4.	3.8agreed with the relevant policy director, leader or deputy leader and/or portfolio holder
5.	3.9	Insert name of Press Complaints Commission
6.	3.10	Insert section relating to councillors responsibility and make reference to opposition councillors being able to comment on particular issues
7.	6.2councillors....clearly state the views expressed are their personal views or those of their political party
9.	6.6	Monitoring reports to be sent to all group leaders

Table 2: Amendments not to be incorporated

Amendment No.	Paragraph No.	Nature of amendment	Reason
2.	3.3.1	Suggestion: 'councillors SHOULD, however, make it clear....	Retain the word 'MUST' , since it is imperative that councillors make the media aware on whose behalf they speak
8.	6.2.2	Include opposition contact details on all press releases	There is no formal 'shadow' Cabinet - administration and officer contact details are sufficient. Reporters have their own up-to-date contacts.