

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, the Local Government Act 1986 and the 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 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.

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 councillor or as a Wiltshire Council councillor, 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 explaining council policies and services, as agreed by the leader and chief executive;
 - 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 chief executive;
 - 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. 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:

- Co-ordinate regular cabinet media briefings and other briefings to present papers to the media and give an opportunity for questions and answers, as appropriate;
- Notify group leaders of media briefings and what will be covered;
- 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 chief executive;
- 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. General Media Enquiries

- 7.1 (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.

8. Press Relations

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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 data protection legislation.
- 8.3 All press releases will be written and issued by the communications team in conjunction with members and/or the relevant officers. Links to media releases will be emailed to all members and copies of full media releases will be circulated to the relevant members. Contact details of the relevant Cabinet Member/Portfolio Holder will be included on all press releases, along with those of the nominated representative of the Opposition.
- 8.4 Audio and video recording and the taking of photographs are not permitted during any meeting of the Cabinet, Council or their committees without the prior consent of the chairman of the meeting, although these are welcomed in principle where appropriate.

9. Embargoes

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 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.

10. Contacts and Emergency Out of Hours

- 10.1 The communications mobile number (07747007340) is always available for the media out of hours. The designated media relations officer will determine whether an immediate response is required, contacting the relevant officer(s) or members as necessary.
- 10.2 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.