



LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL
Promoting City, Coast & Countryside

Appendix A

COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT FOR MEMBERS

**July 2006
Communications Team**

Welcome to communications for newly elected Members

Research by MORI shows the majority of people do not know much about Members. However, this is not because they are disinterested, but because few of them have had any communications with their Member – unless something has gone wrong.

Many Members, established and new, may already feel skilled and effective communicators. However, this may be a new arena for some Members and this toolkit, based on best practice from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), offers practical advice and case studies to help you communicate effectively with residents and effectively represent their views to the Council.

This guide is intended to be a general and basic guide to communications and Members will wish to be mindful in appropriate circumstances of the Protocols contained in the Council's Constitution, such as the Protocol on Planning, Protocol on Member/Officer Relations and the Press and Media Guidelines. If necessary, further advice can be sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer.

Communicating with the community

There are many ways to promote your work locally and keep residents informed. You may well be doing some of these already. Best practice includes:

1. Surgeries

Holding a surgery is usually a given part of the Member role. Even with modern communications, such as email, the principle of open access to an elected Member is important. Details of surgeries should be included in your section on the Council's website by supplying the information to Member Services. (Members are responsible for organising their own surgeries, but these can be advertised via your website or on the Member information section of the Council's website. Assistance with this can be provided by Members' Services.

Below are some pointers for effective surgeries:

- do not be over ambitious – be realistic and increase the number of surgeries you hold gradually or hold one occasionally
- choose a suitable venue and consider factors, ie, access and accessibility for constituents, local transport links, privacy, communication facilities, building safety

How to Advertise and Promote your Surgery

Once you have considered the above factors, you will need to advertise and promote your surgery, such as displaying posters in your ward. Check the information on your poster is correct and ensure a clearly laid out poster is fixed to the door of the venue or displayed prominently. Local community groups, schools or GP surgeries may also display it.

If you have to cancel or postpone an attendance, make sure that this is clearly posted on the door of the venue with as much notice as possible. One impromptu cancelled surgery can easily damage your reputation.

How to Manage your Surgery

Think carefully about surgery timings. Ensure you can stick to the times you decide for your four-year term. If you advertise an end time to your surgery, you will have to stay until then, so it is easier to advertise a start time only.

You will sometimes have constituents who regularly attend your surgery. It may suit both of you to deal with each other face-to-face. Sometimes, it can be useful to ring or email a constituent if you know you will not have a response to their case by the time of the surgery. A quick call will save them the trouble of attending and wasting their time and it will save you time too. Also, it is advisable to check that a visitor to your surgery is actually your constituent and not from another ward – it would be useful to have contact numbers for Members from neighbouring wards to pass on to visitors to your surgery who are not your constituents.

As well as traditional surgeries, you should have a telephone number (it is advisable to have an answer machine) and email address where constituents can reach you or leave messages. Not everyone is able to attend a surgery, so enquiries and casework by phone and letter is equally important.

However, it is important to always remember never to compromise your safety or leave yourself vulnerable when meeting Members of the public.

Health and safety advice is available for Members. Please contact Democratic Services for further details.

2. Working in wards

To build relationships with residents, many Members leaflet-drop to houses in their ward on a regular basis, inviting their constituents to meet with them. Sessions are often informal and take place either in a local community venue, at their regular surgery or even in their home.

Sometimes sessions are held in partnership with County and Parish Members, with the local MP and with community representatives. Where other partners are asked to participate, it is good practice to ask residents to RSVP to ensure a reasonable turnout. Whilst it is an individual Member's responsibility to organise such an event, **assistance with contacting third parties can be provided by Members' Services.**

3. Walkabouts

Walkabouts can be useful for improving your awareness of local issues, as well as raising your profile, or that of the particular place you are visiting.

How to Organise Successful Walkabouts

As in any professional situation, knowledge and preparation are the key to a successful outcome. Walkabouts may help you to get to know your ward and see situations at first-hand. They may seem time consuming, but could save time in the long run. **Requests for Officer attendance should be made via the relevant Service Head.**

If your walkabout is about a particular issue, you may want to advise residents in advance. If you are visiting a housing estate, for instance, you may want to contact the tenants association beforehand. You will get more out of the visit if you have a resident who knows the issues present and with you. Remember that you should give good notice. If the local tenant leader cannot meet you on the day, then you can always speak to them before the visit.

Try and follow up the pre-walkabout letter with one to residents afterwards – explaining what you found and what you can do as a result in terms of raising issues within the Council or elsewhere and pressing for action. **Support in preparing such letters can be provided by Members' Services, although you will have to pay for any printing costs or make your own arrangements for printing elsewhere.**

Officer involvement

You may want to have regular walkabouts with Officers at pre-arranged venues. It may be useful and will certainly be more cost effective of Officers' time, if other Ward Members are invited at the same time. You can easily contact other Ward Members by email or through the Council's distribution system.

Walkabouts without the relevant Officer present can also be very useful. Make notes as you walk about - you can then use these notes to contact (or ask Member Services to do this for you) to the relevant Services.

If there is a big issue in your ward you may want to invite the Leading Members, relevant Officer(s) or Police representatives to view it for themselves. This is added value that you as a local Member can bring and it asserts your role as a key local link on the issues. Rules regarding matters such as licensing and planning are complex and Members should be mindful of the Protocol on Planning contained in the Council's Constitution and may wish to take

appropriate advice if dealing with such matters. **Please contact the Legal Services Manager on 582023 for more information.**

4. Establishing partnerships with community groups and associations

You have a unique role – acting as a link between the Council and community groups and associations.

How to Establish Good Partnerships

Soon after being elected it is good practice to research the local groups in your area, write to them and introduce yourself. Write to communities such as: faith groups; schools; known tenants and residents associations – you should be able to get addresses through the housing department; neighbourhood watch – the Police may be able to help or community groups and introduce yourself.

These relationships will keep you abreast of developments and feed back how Council services are working on the ground. Members' Services can provide secretarial support if required.

5. Engaging hard-to-reach communities

The hard-to-reach section covers a number of individuals and groups including:

- disabled people
- older people
- young people
- busy working people
- residents whose first language is not English
- parents of young children
- those with low literacy levels

These are all people whose interests and specific needs you will need to be aware of when deciding how to: work, run surgeries, organise meetings and provide information.

How to Engage 'Hard to Reach' Communities

The Council's Corporate Identity Guidelines, available under the Communications section of the intranet (link) recommends, on the advice of the Council's Access Officer, that correspondence should be typed in a 'sans serif typeface' such as Arial and in minimum font size: 11 point, without line justification.

All Councils have to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, but it is important you are aware of other needs of your constituents.

No Member is ever going to be able to have regular contact with all their constituents, but it is important you are aware of constituents' different needs and ensure none are unable to contact you.

Some communities will have obvious leaders through faith or community groups. You can use these people to help you reach constituents who may not easily reach you. If appropriate in your ward, you could offer to hold occasional surgeries for people with English as a second language with translators in place – however, you would be responsible for any costs for this type of service. Occasional visits or surgeries at older people's day centres or other groups can similarly help you reach people who find it physically difficult to reach you.

Further suggestions on how to engage with hard to reach groups can be found in the Council's Consultation Strategy and Toolkit which can be found at:

<http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/Documents/Corporate%20Strategy/ConsultationStrategyMarch2006.doc>

<http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/Documents/Corporate%20Strategy/ConsultationToolkitMarch2006.doc>

6. Using email and building a website

Lancaster City Council provides all Members with a Council lap top, broadband and access to the Council's email and other corporate systems, so long as you are signed up to the Members' Laptop and computer Usage Policy - link when available)

There are powerful reasons why more and more Members are using email, the internet and even text messaging to communicate.

By investing a little time in developing the skills, if you do not already have them, you will add a fast, easy to use and cost effective communications tool to those you already use. You will also increase your ability to engage young people who otherwise might show little interest in local issues.

As part of the Implementing Electronic Government programme, every Council in England has been obliged to provide Members with the option of having their own easy-to-manage web pages. Lancaster City Council is using the existing committee management system to provide this facility.

How to us IT Effectively

Training in the use of the system is available from Democratic Services. IT training on the use of computers generally is provided as part of your Member development programme. For more information contact the Council's Learning and Development Officer in Legal & Human Resources or Members' Services

This section provides some basic tips on:

- using email
- setting up your own website as part of Modern.gov

Electronic email is now an indispensable communications tool. Whether or not your residents have home internet access, increasing numbers will be able to access email accounts through their work, public libraries, internet cafes and community facilities.

Email

The main benefits of email are that it is:

- cost-effective – the overall cost is far less than for a postal address
- easy to respond to – because of its interactivity and ease of response, recipients are often more likely to take action
- interactive – you can include links to your website or to the Council's
- fast to implement – you do not have to wait for your document to return from the printers
- easy to time – to ensure your message is timed to hit on a specific date

- easy to customise – if you are sending a document to a group, where each person can choose whether they want to receive your publication
- trackable – easy to tell whether someone has received an email and opened it and archive the audit trail
- easy to detect mail that has not been delivered – if someone closes their email account, you will receive an automatic 'return' response

Good practice

Here are some tips to help make your email more effective:

- before sending an email consider whether the people you are addressing it to really need to see it. If you are sending them a regular publication such as a newsletter, give them the option of opting out of receiving it
- be brief and check your spelling and grammar
- use a meaningful heading in the subject box
- be careful before expressing dissatisfaction with someone in a personal email as the communication will be permanent
- always acknowledge or reply to personal emails you receive. If you are not going to be able to check you email for a few days, use the 'out of office auto reply'
- set up your personal stationery so your emails automatically sign off with your details ie, your name, address, contact numbers, fax or website
- You might find it useful to see the Council's Customer Service Guidelines for Officers, available under the Communications section of the intranet ([Link](#)) which have a section on emailing customers.

Setting up your own website

The Council, through its **Democratic Services, provides training to support individual Members to set up their own website through its committee management system (Modern.gov)**. This is subject to Members signing up to the Website [Acceptable Use Policy \(link\)](#)

Those Members who wish to can create and update their website themselves for publication by Members' Services or alternatively information can be provided to Members' Services in any format for inclusion on an individual Member's website on their behalf.

Because this website facility is funded by a Local Authority, Members may not use this to promote political campaigns or advocate political stances on any issues – you may however have a link to an external website of a political nature such as that of your political party or your own privately funded website.

7. Public meetings

If Officers are organising a public meeting on behalf of the Council, you may be asked for your views on a suitable venue in your Ward. Alternatively, you may wish to organise a public meeting yourself.

How to Organise and Run an Effective Meeting – Pointers

Is the location right for the topic in question?

- is the meeting near public transport, to attract people from a wide area?

Is the venue accessible?

- you should expect level access or a lift
- good acoustics – preferably with a loop system for people who are hearing impaired
- if the meeting is likely to attract or aimed at parents, you will need to consider a crèche
- it is not usually possible to provide for all eventualities but pre-meeting publicity should ask people with access issues to advise in advance
- occasionally information needs to be provided in another format such as to blind or partially sighted residents, or on issues that affect the local ethnic population

What time of day is the meeting?

- if you are trying to attract parents of young children, for example, evening meetings may not be the best time
- religious observance should also be considered such as Sabbath for Jewish and some Christian groups and Friday Prayers for Muslim groups
- if it is a regular meeting, you may want to change the day and or time of the meeting to accommodate different needs and balanced against the benefit of a regular time tabled slot

Is the venue appealing?

- moderate the temperature of the room
- refreshments should also be considered, with a break half-way through

Are you chairing the meeting?

- is the agenda manageable? – too long and it will put people off from attending
- lay out the ground rules at the beginning, such as the length of time people are allowed to speak

The principles apply to official Council meetings. You may also be invited to other meetings organised by local groups. If these exclude some people because they breach this good practice then you can raise this with the organisers. While they may have difficulties with the cost or choice of a venue, it is important you represent the interests of your constituents unable to access the meeting.

8. Speaking at public meetings

Through its member training programme Lancaster City Council provides Members with public speaking/ presentation training if you need it (Contact the Learning and Development Officer in Legal & Human Resources for more information, or request through Members' Services).

How to be Effective when Speaking at Public Meetings – Pointers

Before the speech

- talk to the chair - often you will be attending more than one meeting a night or day so it is critical you advise the chair of a meeting if you have to leave early or arrive late. This can help them organise a meeting so that the main item you are speaking on is scheduled for the right time.
- prepare - order your thoughts so that you can summarise your case in no more than four key points. However, avoid writing out a speech to read unless you are a keynote speaker because at most meetings you will have to react to what other speakers have said.. If you hear someone speak well, ask for some tips
- dress appropriately - your appearance will affect people's views about you.

During the speech

- keep your speech short – do not overrun, especially if there are people standing
- speak loudly and clearly – it may sound obvious but lots of people don't. Aim your voice at something on the back wall of the room you're in
- allow time for translation – if you are speaking through a translator speak in short bursts of about two sentences and allow time for translation. Remember that jokes don't always translate well!
- if you don't know the answer, say so – when responding to questions it is better to admit that you don't know the answer than display ignorance with a bad answer. You can always offer to check and get back to the individual concerned
- listen - public meetings are an opportunity for the public to air their views so listening is important.
- take notes – write down questions, with names attached wherever possible, so you can respond directly to them. You may find it easier to respond to a few points altogether
- believe in yourself – you have a duty to speak up for your residents. They expect it of you, use this to overcome any lack of confidence you may have. And if someone says something you don't understand don't be afraid to say so: you will probably be speaking for many in the audience
- ask for feedback – whether or not you are an experienced public speaker, it is always a good idea to get some honest feedback from someone who has heard you speak at a meeting such as a colleague Member, an Officer or even a resident you know well. Once people know you are prepared to hear honest feedback they will be pleased to be asked.

Speaking from the platform

If you are speaking from the platform you need to be well prepared. Take time to order your thoughts before making notes or writing a speech. Be on top of the issue you are talking about. However well you have prepared your speech, there will be issues which people are not sure about and will want to question you on.

Sometimes issues raised from the floor will be points rather than questions. Don't be afraid to agree with someone who has made a critical point as long as you can explain why the Council made a particular decision.

Remember that the more you speak the more confident and able you become. You were elected to speak up for local residents, it's an essential part of the job.

9. Starting a newsletter

Research by MORI has found that Council newsletters are one of the main ways in which residents like to be kept informed about their local authority. Newsletters can also be a useful and cost effective way for individual Members to communicate with their constituents and keep them informed about their work.

However, they are rarely a quick and easy option for getting your messages across, so before starting one, there are a number of factors you should consider. This section will help you think about whether a newsletter is the best of way of communicating with your constituents and if you decide to produce one, how to make sure it is effective It includes:

- are there more effective ways of communicating with your constituents
- planning the newsletter (including frequency and distribution)
- making your newsletter stand out.

Are there more effective ways of communicating with your constituents?

Even simple newsletters require planning, thought, time and resources to produce and distribute. In addition, written information is rarely as effective as face-to-face communication.

Think about how the newsletter will fit in with the other things you are doing to communicate with your constituents. Are you already attending events, doing walkabouts and speaking at community meetings in your constituency? Do you communicate with residents through the existing media such as the local press and other community publications like tenants newsletters?

Unless your answer to these questions is “yes,” think about doing these things, which can be more effective than producing your own newsletter and will undoubtedly take up less of your time and resources, before starting your own one.

How to Produce a Newsletter

Planning the newsletter

If you would like to publish your own newsletter the information below will help you make it an effective one.

- **Frequency and length**

It is a good idea to make the frequency and length as uniform as possible so readers know what to expect and when to expect it.

When deciding frequency and length, be realistic about the time and resources you can commit to producing and distributing the newsletter and how much news you will have to write about. Although there may be lots of things you want to communicate in the first issue, think about whether you will have anything new to say by the sixth edition.

It is far better to start with a short two-sided newsletter that you can produce two or three times a year throughout your term in office, than to publish a sixteen page one that you are unable to sustain. In the main, residents will prefer something that is two sides of A4 than a weighty tome.

- **Distribution**

There is no point in writing one unless you have an effective distribution method. The different ways you could distribute the newsletter include:

- by email: email is the cheapest and quickest way but relies on you having the email addresses of the people you want to receive it
- by hand through letterboxes: if your constituency is in a large urban area, there are likely to be local companies that distribute information such as take away menus for a fee
- through other local organisations: you will probably find that local organisations and community groups are more than happy to send out your newsletter to their Members with their own mail outs. If you are using this method of distribution, make sure that your publication dates coincide with the mail outs of the various groups that distribute your newsletter
- by post: keep a list of key local contacts, opinion-formers and organisations and make sure you send them their own individual copy of the newsletter
- through public buildings: ask community groups and businesses whether they are willing to display copies of your newsletter for people to pick up. **Note that Council buildings and groups funded by the Council are not allowed to display information that can**

be deemed to be party political or can promote individual Members. For more information on this, see [PR and the law](#)

- at public events: take a batch of newsletters along to public meetings and events that you attend.
- [Making your newsletter stand out](#)

Unless you are a skilled IT operator, you will probably find that a Microsoft Word document is the simplest type of newsletter to produce. The points below will help you make your publication interesting.

- be timely: it may seem obvious but there's no point in writing about old news. Be particularly careful when including dates of forthcoming public meetings and events – your constituents will be frustrated if they want to attend them but receive your publication once they have already taken place
- be relevant: think about who you are writing for. Your readers are likely to be a diverse group of people in terms of their ages, backgrounds and interests so try to write about issues that will interest as many of them as possible
- use plain English: few people understand jargon and acronyms.
- keep your articles short: you are far more likely to engage your audience if your articles are short and concise and made up of short simple sentences
- use colour: if you have access to a colour printer or photocopier, include colour in your newsletter. If not, think about printing it on coloured paper
- use columns and headings: columns and headings will help to break up the pages and define the articles, making your newsletter easier to read
- a picture is worth a thousand words: good quality pictures and photographs will encourage people to pick up and read your newsletter and help communicate things that words will not – use them if you can
- include your contact details: don't forget to tell people you have produced the newsletter and invite their comments on it by including your contact details.

The Communications Team, within Corporate Strategy, can provide advice on producing a newsletter.

10. The media

Whether you are promoting a viewpoint, or defending a reputation, this section will help you manage your contact with the media, as will the [Council's Media Guidelines \(link\)](#) In addition, the Council offers media training for Members (for more information contact the Learning & Development Officer in Legal & Human Resources or speak to Members' Services).

This section covers:

- Your political office
- The Council's Communications Team
- Conflicts of interest
- Using the media to promote positive stories
- What makes a news story
- How do I get my story in the media
- Reacting to bad news stories
- Writing a statement

[Role of your political group](#)

If you represent a political party, they will probably have regular contact with the media and will be able to provide advice, information and support on managing the media, such as writing

news releases and articles on your behalf. They may also have a protocol in place about who should talk to the media and about alerting the lead Member or the group office first. This is usually to ensure all statements are based on the full information. **Your Group Leader/Group Administrator will be able to advise you on this.**

The Council's Communications Team

The Communications Team is the first point of call for Council (as opposed to Member) media enquiries and the [Media Guidelines \(link\)](#) set out the procedures for Officers dealing with such enquiries.

It is our role to respond to media enquiries on behalf of the Council; protects its reputation; and promotes its public profile by encouraging positive media coverage of its work. We have regular contact with local journalists, issue news releases and statements on behalf of the Council and we have responsibility for producing the Council's community magazine – Your District Council Matters [\(link\)](#), in conjunction with a Member Editorial Team, comprising one representative from each of the five political groups on the Council.

When dealing with the media, Council officers operate within the legal framework set out in the Local Government Act 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. These ensure that Council publicity informs constituents rather than persuades them to hold a particular viewpoint. They also stipulate that local authorities should not publish material that affects public support for a particular party.

The code of practice on publicity, which has the force of law, states that it is inappropriate to publicise individual Members in a non-executive position except basic information such as contact details, their responsibilities and any proposals or recommendations that are relevant to their position. The Communications Team will give out agreed contact numbers for Members to the media, if requested, to enable the media to contact a Member direct in appropriate circumstances.

How to Deal with Conflicts of Interest

As a Ward Member you may well have legitimate views that do not correspond to the Council's position. It can be okay to voice these via the media, but reference should be made to the Media Guidelines. If you do promote views through the media that conflict with those of the Council, make sure that the journalist knows that you are not speaking on behalf of the Council. You should also check with your political group office if you have one.

How to Use the Media to Promote Positive Stories

There are a number of reasons why you may want to approach the media to communicate your messages. These are because

- by telling people about your work through the media, you will be more accountable
- it provides free publicity
- information conveyed in news stories has more credibility than advertising or that which you publish yourself
- you will be keeping up with the competition who are likely to be using the media.

What makes a news story?

All stories need an angle or hook to make them newsworthy. Most angles have been used many times before. The main ones include:-

- human interest – one of the most powerful and common ways of bringing a story to life is to give it a human face. Try to find a local person who illustrates your story by explaining how the issue affects them

- local angle to a national story – national events and stories can be used by giving them a local angle.
- surveys and reports – newspapers love a story that can be backed up by reports or surveys to add to its authenticity. If you have done some research or carried out a survey, work it into your story and release it to the media.
- something new and novel – by definition anything that is new is news; a new campaign, new public building, new policy or procedure, new discovery or a new managing director could all be of interest to the media
- anniversaries and special dates – keep a watch for special days during the year. The media will be keen to cover things like your twentieth anniversary as a Member
- first ever, last ever – the first ever Muslim Mayor or the last ever committee meeting to take place in the town hall would both be newsworthy because of their unique status
- winners and losers – everyone loves a competition. Even the most obscure awards will get coverage
- celebrities – the media are obsessed with celebrities. If a celebrity addresses your meeting, backs your campaign or opens a local fete, it will not be difficult to get the media to cover it
- photo opportunities or pictures – a good photo can carry a story. If you provide a picture or an opportunity for one, you double your chances of your story being published

How do I get my story in the media?

Journalists gather news from a number of sources including:

- contacts
- committee meetings and reports
- news releases

If you want to communicate through the media, all of these sources are likely to be important to you.

How to Develop Contacts with the Media

One of the best ways of getting a journalist to write about an issue, and in particular, if you want them to write a feature rather than just cover a short news story, is through personal contact. If you develop a successful working relationship with the journalists covering your constituency, over time, they are more likely to be receptive to your ideas for stories and to approach you for comments when local issues arise.

The Communications Team can supply details of contacts for the local and regional media.

How to Write a Press Release

A news release or press release is a circular sent to a journalist to generate media interest in a story or to react to an issue already being covered.

News releases should be written like news stories making them easy for journalists to use.

Given the high volume of news releases journalists receive, you should not expect everything you send the media to be published.

Once a news release has been issued, it is in the public domain and the journalist can deal with the story in any way he or she sees fit, including ignoring it completely. You do not have any say over the wording of the final article or who else the journalist will talk to while writing it. However, reporters are often busy and if given a good story that is well written, balanced and of interest to their audience they will usually pick it up.

News releases should only be issued when you have something to say. Most newsrooms receive dozens each day and they soon identify organisations and people who send them poor material.

Tips on writing and sending a news release

A guide to press release writing is available under the Communications section of the Council intranet (link to insert). A guide to local media deadlines is also available under the same section (link to insert). Training is also available. Contact the Learning & Development Officer on 582007 for further information.

How to Deal with Bad News Stories

One of the benefits of developing a relationship with the local media is that if a journalist is writing a story that could damage your reputation they will be more likely to approach you to put your point of view.

Unless you can 'kill' a potentially damaging story, because the journalist will write it whether or not you speak to them, it is almost always better to put across your point of view than not to respond. However, when responding to potentially damaging enquiries from journalists, you should stick to the following basic rules:

- check if you are the best person to comment. Should it be the lead Member, the leader or the Council's press office instead? Be wary of talking to a journalist if you don't have the full picture. Apart from getting it wrong and misleading people, you will simply become known as 'rent-a-quote'
- don't panic – the natural reaction to a journalist telling you that he or she is writing a story that could damage your reputation is to panic. Try not to
- what is the story? – do some digging. Ask the journalist about the story. Find out how much they know, what angle they are taking and who else they have talked to. Find out what the Council and your party's position is on the issue
- what is the deadline? – ask the journalist when they need your response by
- create a thinking space – never respond immediately. Tell the journalist that you will get back to them before their deadline. This will give you time to consider your options; talk to other people and if need be prepare a statement.
- stick to your statement – once you have decided on your statement, stick to it. Do not be drawn into further discussion or you might say something you hadn't intended to

How to Write a Statement

Statements are usually issued in response to bad news stories. If you know that a potentially damaging story could break, you might want to write one in advance so that you are prepared when it does so.

Statements should not be long, detailed explanations. They are far more likely to get your message across effectively if they are robust, well argued and concise.

When writing a statement, you should stick to the following basic rules:

- establish the facts - if you don't know all the facts about the story, it is important that you establish them before responding. If you don't, you may cause further damage to you and your Council's reputation when the true story emerges
- never lie - if you do, you are bound to be found out
- apologise – if the issue merits an apology, make sure you express regret in your statement

- follow the 'RAC' principle – whenever possible, make sure your statement reassures the reader; says what action you are going to take to put things right and puts the issue in context

Training

The City Council runs a Member Training Programme alongside the one for Officers and Members are consulted periodically on what training needs they have. For further information please contact the Council's Learning and Development Officer or Members' Services .

If you have any questions arising from this document please contact the Head of Democratic Services or Communications Manager, who will try to assist.