

Press and Media Guidelines

Aims and Objectives

1. The long-term aim of the Council's Communications Strategy is to build and maintain a positive reputation for Lancaster City Council in the eyes of the public, its Councillors and Officers as well as key partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors.
2. In order to achieve this aim a key area of our focus is on the local media.
3. Research carried out by MVA in the Lancaster District in 2002 found:
 - a. 71% of residents cited the local press as the main way in which they currently received information about the Council
 - b. 22% cited local radio.
4. When asked how they would like to receive information about the Council the local media was the most popular choice, followed closely by Council leaflets through the door and a Council newspaper
5. The media therefore plays a huge role in informing residents about what the Council does and how it spends their money. In return, it is important the City Council communicates effectively with this key provider of public information.
6. In doing so our objectives are to:-
 - a. enable the Council to be one which is open, accountable, accessible and which listens;
 - b. give information about the Council's policies and services and the democratic process so people feel more informed about the work of the Council;
 - c. build up the Council's role as community leader and advocate for the community;
 - d. handle negative issues clearly and decisively. Where we feel criticism of the Council is unfair we should use opportunities available to explain our case, either to the editors or to the readers/listeners. In cases where we are wrong we should hold our hands up and move the story forwards e.g. explain how we have already addressed the issues;
 - e. improve the Officers' view of the Council. Many Officers base their views of the Council on what they read in the paper. We recognise our staff can be our best ambassadors. Therefore, in addition to improvements in internal

communications, it is vital that all external communication regarding the Council bears this factor in mind.

7. Of course, this will require input on various fronts and ties in with the wider Communications Strategy as well as the Consultation Strategy.

8. This document sets out guidelines for:-

a. Dealing with media enquiries

b. Generating media interest

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c. Developing relationships with the local media

d. Managing negative issues

e. Monitoring and evaluating the media coverage of the Council

f. Providing media support to our partners

9. Co-ordinating Media Enquiries

1. The Council should ensure that local citizens are informed about the Council's policies, services and decisions. It must be open and transparent in its dealings with the press.

2. The Council receives approximately 1,200 enquiries from the media every year and issues approximately 500 press releases. It also organises dozens of press launches and photo opportunities. In order to co-ordinate and manage all of this activity it is important that it is all channelled through a central point, the Communications Office.

Media Enquiries – Officers

3. The Communications and Media Relations Manager and team will act as one-stop shop for all media enquiries. This will involve taking the enquiry, working with relevant Officers/Councillors to agree a response and then the Communications Team passing that response back to the relevant journalist.

4. Occasionally, the Communications Team will ask an Officer to talk directly with the media, for example to explain a technical issue or to give an in-depth background for a feature.

If you are approached for a comment by the media, other than on an occasion agreed with the Communications Team, please refer the journalist to the Communications and

Media Relations Manager.

Media Enquiries – Councillors

5. Where the journalist requires a quote from a politician, the Communications and Media Relations Manager will inform them of the appropriate Cabinet member/Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair, Task Group Chairs or Committee Chairs.

2. Generating Media Interest

There are a number of ways of generating media interest – press releases, press launches, photo opportunities etc. The most commonly used form is the press release.

(A) Press Releases

1. In co-operation with the Communications and Media Relations Manager, Services should adopt a proactive approach to issuing service-specific press releases.
2. Press release writers should follow the Press Release Writing Guide available on the intranet.
3. Other than in exceptional circumstances all press releases should include just one quote (see below for guidance on who to quote).
4. Other than in exceptional circumstances all press releases should be emailed to the Communications and Media Relations Manager who will place them on the corporate template and issue them to the relevant media via the Newsflash Media Monitoring Lancaster City Council

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system. The Communications and Media Relations Manager will also place them on the website and intranet.

5. All press releases, and any other form of communication with the media, should be cleared with the Communications and Media Relations Manager and, if appropriate, relevant Cabinet members. In the case of matters relating to the Overview and Scrutiny Function, Planning, Licensing and the Standards Committee, they should be cleared with the Communications and Media Relations Manager and relevant Chair.

6. All media enquiries relating to that press release should be channelled through the Communications Office who will work with the appropriate Officer to put together an agreed response.

Press Releases Ahead of Cabinet/Committee/Council Consideration

7. The media "pick up" many stories from agendas and reports ahead of meetings. Whilst it would be inappropriate to offer a "comment" by the Council ahead of quasi judicial meetings, such as Licensing and Planning, it is appropriate for:

8. A Cabinet member who has submitted a report for the public part of a Cabinet meeting to issue a release or statement ahead of that meeting as long as it does not prejudice the decision.

9. For the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Budget and Performance Panel and Task Groups to issue a release or statement ahead of one of these meetings as long as it does not prejudice the decision.

10. However, these comments should be limited to providing information rather than anticipating an outcome or expressing a view as to a preferred outcome from the meeting.

11. It is also appropriate for Officers to issue a statement outlining a summary of a report. In this way reporters will be more likely to use the readily provided Council statement which provides a brief and accurate summary of a report or clarification of an issue.

12. Of course, there is no reason why a political group or political representative should not make a comment, should they wish to do so, which will not be on Council headed paper.

13. The Communications and Media Relations Manager and Senior Leadership Team will liaise before agendas and reports are issued to the media to discuss whether such an approach is required regarding specific items.

14. Press Releases following Cabinet/Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Task Group/Committee and Council Meetings.

15. When relevant, Chief Officers, appropriate Cabinet members, Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Budget and Performance, Task Groups and Committees and the Communications and Media Relations Manager will liaise at the report deadline stage to discuss issuing positive press releases following a meeting. It is important that press releases are issued to the media as soon as possible after the conclusion of a meeting - not normally more than 24 hours after the conclusion of a meeting. (See below for who should act as spokesperson.).

Press Releases Requested by Councillors

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16. It is perfectly acceptable for a Cabinet member/Overview and Scrutiny Chair, Task Group Chair or Committee Chair to request an Officer to produce a press release relating to their role outlined above.

17. However, Officers should not produce press releases for Councillors on individual Ward or party political issues prejudging a decision of a properly constituted councillor meeting.

Logos

18. The City Council Logo forms part of the Press Release template and therefore all Council press releases carry the Council logo and crest. However, when issuing a press release with a partner it may be appropriate to create another press release template carrying both the Council logo and the logo(s) of the other partner(s) involved.

Equal Opportunities and Race Equality Policies

19. When drafting press releases or selecting photographs, all Officers should be mindful of the Council's Equal Opportunities and Race Equality Policies. Publicity should avoid stereotyping of roles and should demonstrate the Council's commitment to providing equality of services and opportunities to people of sex, any colour, sexuality, all races and people with disabilities. Advertisements and information about services should be circulated widely and, wherever necessary, communicated in appropriate community languages.

(B) Who should act as Official Spokesperson?

Technical/Factual Information

1. When providing information of a technical/factual nature (such as planning technicalities, new Benefits policies) on a topic yet to go to Cabinet/Overview and Scrutiny/Council/Committee of Council, which has been to one of the above or which does not go to any of them, it is appropriate to use an Officer.

Commenting on an Issue

2. Where a comment is required on a subject that has been to Cabinet/Overview and

Scrutiny/Task Group/Committee of Council/Council then the relevant Cabinet member, Overview and Scrutiny Chair/ Committee Chair, Task Group Chair or Council Chair will normally act as the Council's Spokesperson.

3. If the appropriate Councillor is not available/contactable for interview at the requested time it may be appropriate to use an Officer. In these circumstances Officers must clear this with the Communications Team before giving any interviews.

Partners

4. Where the Council is involved in issuing a press release as part of a partnership arrangement e.g. the Community Safety Partnership, the Partnership's arrangements for who to quote should be followed. This would normally be the Chair of that organisation. In the case of a press release being prepared on behalf of a number of partners it may be appropriate to offer each partner an opportunity to be quoted.

Political

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5. If it is necessary, from a factual point of view, for a press release to identify by name one or more of the political Groups on the Council, then either a spokesperson for that political group(s) should be provided with the opportunity to comment in the press release issued on behalf of the Council or no politicians should be quoted at all. Group Leaders contact details will normally be provided to the media on request and political groups will determine their own spokespersons.

(C) Media Events/Launches/Receptions

1. Anyone organising an event to which the media is to be invited should liaise with the Communications Team in the first instance, providing details of times, venues and who is being invited. This will ensure that no two events are taking place at the same time.

In this way the risk of spreading the media too thinly will be reduced and the opportunities of gaining positive publicity will be maximised. In addition it will ensure the Communications Team is fully up-to-speed in the event of any media enquiries.

2. Each occasion will require a different audience but, in general, one or more of a combination of the following would normally be invited: Cabinet member, Chair of the

Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Chair of the Regulatory Committees, Ward Councillor(s).

3. Guidelines to assist Officers setting up a media reception etc are available on the intranet. The Communications Team is also happy to help.

(D) Photo Opportunities

Creating Photo Opportunities

1. The general rule is that where photo opportunities arise the relevant Councillors are invited. Depending on the issue this could be one of a combination of the following: Cabinet member, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Chair of the Regulatory Committees, Ward Councillor(s).
2. However, our goal is to achieve positive publicity for the Council as a whole and therefore some degree of flexibility is necessary in order to achieve that goal.
3. For example, photographic opportunities often arise at short notice. By needing to contact the relevant Councillors to arrange a time when all can be present, there are times when a photo opportunity and therefore positive publicity may be lost.
4. There are also times when it is appropriate to include Officers for photo opportunities (see examples below).
5. There are also times, depending on the story, when the photographer may wish to reduce or increase the number of people who would normally be invited to take part in a photo opportunity.
6. Anyone organising a photo opportunity should liaise with the Communications and Media Relations Manager to discuss how it should be handled.

Example a:

Photograph as a result of a Cabinet/Committee/Overview and Scrutiny/Regulatory Committee Meeting:

The appropriate Cabinet member/s and Overview and Scrutiny Chairs/Task Group/Regulatory Committee Chairs would normally be invited.

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Example b:

Large/high profile events e.g. Bus Station Launch, Millennium Bridge Launch etc.

Appropriate Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and Regulatory Committee Chairs and Ward Councillor(s) would normally be invited.

Example c:

Civic-related photo opportunities e.g. Council signing up to a charter/declaration/handing over a cheque/receiving a cheque etc. The Leader of the Council or appropriate Cabinet member and the Mayor or Deputy Mayor should be invited to act as representative of the Council.

Example d:

Quirky photo opportunity to highlight a Council story/not high profile issue e.g. Environment Co-ordinator distributing Local Agenda 21 Consultation by bike or launch of Town Hall Tours, Children's Festival – Officers and/or Leader of the Council or appropriate Cabinet member would normally be invited.

7. Details of any photo opportunities should also be cleared with the Communications and Media Relations Manager ahead of any invites being sent out to the media.

Taking Photos for the Media

8. On occasions, the media will not be able to turn up to a photo opportunity but will accept contributed photographs. For advice about taking photographs for the media please contact the Communications Office. Similarly, photographs should be submitted to the media via the Communications Office.

(E) Recording/Filming of Council Meetings

9. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 24, the press and media will be allowed to film and record meetings of Council, Cabinet, Audit Committee, Council Business Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Budget and Performance Panel, which are open to the press and public, so long as notice is given in advance to the Communications and Media Relations Manager .

(F) Campaigns/Sustained Coverage of Topic

10. The relevant Chief Officer and the Communications and Media Relations Manager will liaise to discuss the potential for sustained coverage of topics e.g. Recycling, Regeneration etc.

11. By drawing up a media strategy/campaign on a particular topic the Council can pinpoint

what particular aspect it wants coverage of and more accurately time when it wants any coverage to appear in the media.

12. Such a campaign can be targeted generally at all/majority of the local media locally or it can be targeted at a specific newspaper/radio as a 'joint' Council/newspaper and/or radio campaign.

(G) Success Stories

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All Officers should play their part in keeping the Communications and Media Relations Manager up-to-date on success stories e.g. successful grant bid, completion of a project, employee development etc.

(H) Human Interest Stories

1. The media is always interested in 'human interest' stories. These might not relate specifically to Council issues but are nevertheless an important tool in building up a positive image of the Council, its Councillors and Officers and making them appear 'human' to those outside the Council.

2. Examples of human interest stories: Unusual hobbies of individuals, special achievement of an individual e.g. first woman refuse collector, member of staff marrying another member of staff, bizarre holiday location/experience, two sets of twins born to staff on same day etc.

3. Officers and Councillors should take the initiative to inform the Communications and Media Relations Manager of relevant stories.

(I) Mayoral Publicity

1. The Communications and Media Relations Manager and Democratic Support will work closely to encourage increased publicity for mayoral activities. This will include:

2. The continued publication of the Weekly Mayoral List.

3. A weekly press release highlighting the key events in greater detail - to be sent to all media.

4. Asking the Mayor to alert us to any unusual/interesting experiences/incidents/events he/she comes across in his/her duties.

5. Enabling the Mayor to become more "interactive" in terms of photo opportunities whilst always recognising the need to maintain and follow the Mayoral protocol.

3. Developing Relationships with the Media

1. The City Council's Communications Team is in contact with a vast array of media from local papers to national and international television stations. However, the main day-to-day contact is with the local media:

- a. Lancaster Guardian
- b. Morecambe Visitor
- c. Lancashire Evening Post
- d. Westmorland Gazette
- e. Beyond Radio instead and Lancs Live
- f. Radio Lancashire
- g. Granada Television
- h. BBC North West
- i. Virtual Net (local web based newspaper)

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2. The Council's relationships with the local media are generally good. Take up of press releases is high and the percentage of media requests for Council comments is, on the whole, good and improving. However, it is important to maintain and develop relations with the media and to be responsive to their changing needs.

i) Deadlines

If we want a chance of getting our side of the story included in the media it is imperative that we meet the deadlines we are given. Further information on the local media deadlines is available from the Communications Section of the Intranet, but a basic rule of thumb is that all Officers contacted by the Communications Team regarding a media enquiry should treat it as a priority.

ii) Media Briefings/Press Launches

When relevant, media briefings should be arranged, to brief the press on an issue of importance to the public e.g. new Licensing Regulations, Budget, etc. This will also

provide an opportunity for lead Officers and Councillors to build relations with the media. Officers organising a media briefing or press launch should liaise with the Communications and Media Relations Manager regarding the organisation of the event.

iii) Annual Media Survey

An annual survey of the local media will continue to be carried out to ascertain the media's views on the level of service the Council provides and to learn how they feel we could improve that service.

iv) Councillor Contacts

A Council 'contacts' list of the Leader of the Council, Cabinet members, Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and Committee Chairs will be prepared and circulated to the local media. Photographs of all Councillors will also be provided to the photography departments of the local media.

v) Media Awareness Training

In-house Media Awareness Training courses are provided to all interested staff (please contact Human Resources for more details). This helps to improve the overall quality of service provided by the Council to the media.

4. Managing Negative Issues

From time-to-time the Council has to respond to negative issues. It is important that we 'manage' these situations so as to limit the potential for negative publicity.

i) Alerting the Communications Team

a. When the Chief Officers become aware of a potentially damaging/negative issue they should immediately alert the Communications and Media Relations Manager .

b. Chief Officers and the Communications and Media Relations Manager should work together to prepare an appropriate position statement/response. Wherever possible this should be done ahead of a story breaking. The response can then be used, if the

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potentially damaging issue is to be used by the media. In order to ensure that the Council's position is outlined to Councillors, briefings on difficult issues should be

circulated to appropriate Councillors and staff.

ii) Developing Database of Briefing Material

A database with briefing material on a wide range of issues will continue to be developed to assist this process.

iii) Briefing the Media

On occasion it may be necessary to brief the media personally or to hold a press briefing to 'manage' a breaking story. The Communications and Media Relations Manager will take a decision on this in conjunction with other relevant Officers.

iv) Correcting Inaccurate Reporting

a. The Council should make every effort to correct inaccurate reporting of Council issues. Discussion with the Communications and Media Relations Manager should take place in order to examine the most appropriate form of action e.g. personal contact, personal letter to the editor, open letter, legal advice.

b. Officers should act as spokesperson on any factual information and the relevant Cabinet member should act as spokesperson should a comment be required.

c. Officers need to respond quickly to requests for information from the Communications and Media Relations Manager to provide an accurate and full briefing of an inaccurate report.

v) When the Council gets it wrong

a. Occasionally the Council will get something wrong. In terms of damage limitation the best policy is generally to hold our hands up, apologise and draw a line under the episode by moving the story forward, outlining how we are going to/are already learning from error/how we are putting it right. This kind of situation should be handled in consultation with the Communications and Media Relations Manager.

vi) Leaked Items

a. Occasionally 'confidential' Council items are 'leaked' to the media.

b. The Council policy is that normally it does not comment on leaked or confidential items.

c. However, if an item which is not 'confidential', but which has yet to go into the official public forum e.g. Cabinet/Overview and Scrutiny/Council, is 'leaked' it may be appropriate for the Council to issue a comment. Each case will be judged individually.

d. In both scenarios the Communications and Marketing Team Leader should be made

aware and be involved in discussions on how to/whether to respond.

vii) Political Issues

There are occasions where an issue becomes 'political'. In these circumstances an official Council response will not be given but Political Groups can comment directly.

5. Monitoring and Evaluating

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1. The Communications Team will continually monitor the media perception of the Council using the aims and objectives set out under aims and objectives section and a media monitoring software system, Newsflash.
2. Reports of news coverage, how enquiries and releases have been used (positive, neutral or negative) will be circulated electronically to all Group Leaders, Group Administrators, Cabinet members/Overview and Scrutiny Chair and Committee Chairs, individual Councillors upon request, the Chief Executive and Chief Officers on a twice weekly basis.
3. A more comprehensive report evaluating media coverage will be produced annually.
4. Detailed monitoring reports, specific to a service or subject, can be provided on request.
5. Press releases will also be circulated to the above list via email regularly.
6. All press releases will continue to be posted on the Intranet and website as soon as they are issued.
7. Copies of all newspapers are available for viewing in the Communications Office. Cuttings of any national coverage or reports of any radio or television interviews should be passed to the Communications Office.
8. The Communications Office supports all Council related media issues. However, it is unable to support Officer requests for support for non-Council related press releases and media enquiries.

Media guidelines

People and Policy (Communications)
V2.0 XX 20XX



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1.0 Introduction – aims and objectives

The long-term aim of the council is to build and maintain a positive reputation for Lancaster City Council in the eyes of the public, its councillors and employees as well as key partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The media, traditional and new, plays a huge role in informing residents about what the council does and how it spends their money. In return, it's important that the city council communicates effectively with these key providers of public information.

2.0 Local councils and publicity

Whatever methods we use to communicate, we are governed by provisions in the Local Government Acts 1972 & 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011. The code is based around seven principles to ensure all communications activity:

- Is lawful.
- Is cost effective.
- Is objective.
- Is even-handed.
- Is appropriate.
- Has regard to equality and diversity.
- Is issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

[The latest code was published in March 2011.](#)

3.0 How we manage media relations

The council's relationship with the media, including online, is generally good, but it is important to maintain and develop our relations with the media and to be responsive to their changing needs.

There are a number of ways of generating media interest and publicising its services – press releases, press launches, photo opportunities etc.

The council runs a centralised 'press office' through the communications team.

This means:

- All media enquiries (including requests to film/photograph on council premises) to the council will be directed, at least in the first instance, to the Communications Team (councillors may be contacted by the media and respond directly)
- All news releases (information aimed at giving a news 'story' to the media) on behalf of the council will be issued through the Communications Team.

- All media statements (outlining the council's response to a particular issue) on behalf of the council will be issued through the Communications Team
- All media photocalls will be arranged through the Communications Team

However, every single member of staff within the council is responsible for ensuring the Communications Team is kept informed about services and projects, which could generate positive news stories, as well as about issues which may create adverse publicity.

3.1 Preparing press releases

Officers requiring communications support for their project should contact the Communications Team to discuss the most appropriate method and channel of communicating their announcement/news.

This may include the issuing of a news release or press statement, organising a press briefing, inviting the press to a council event, or placing an announcement on the homepage of the council's website,

It is also appropriate for officers to issue a statement/s outlining a summary of a report. In this way reporters will be more likely to use the readily provided council statement which provides a brief and accurate summary of a report or clarification of an issue.

However, officers should not produce press releases for councillors on individual ward or party political issues.

The Communications Team, department heads, and relevant officers will liaise before agendas and reports are issued to the media to discuss whether such an approach is required regarding specific items.

The media "pick up" many stories from agendas and reports ahead of meetings. Whilst it would be inappropriate to offer a "comment" by the council ahead of quasi judicial meetings, such as Licensing and Planning, it is appropriate for:

- A Cabinet member who has submitted a report for the public part of a Cabinet meeting to request a media release or statement ahead of that meeting
- For the chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Budget and Performance Panel and Task Groups to request a media release or statement ahead of one of these meetings.

However, media releases should be limited to providing information rather than anticipating an outcome or expressing a view as to a preferred outcome from the meeting.

Such media releases will be of a factual nature and will contain nothing that could be construed as politically motivated or biased.

Final approval for news releases (after they have been written/edited) will be sought from the originator in most cases, or relevant SLT member where an issue is of a high

profile nature. Councillors will be asked to approve any quotes that are attributed to them.

The Communications Team will seek approval on the factual content of releases and articles. Matters of style, presentation, punctuation, grammar etc are the responsibility of the Communications Team.

3.2 Responding to media enquiries

The Communications Team act as a one-stop shop for **all** media enquiries received by the council. This involves taking the enquiry and working with relevant officers/councillors to agree a response which will be passed back to the relevant journalist.

Officers should immediately alert the Communications Team when they become aware of an issue that could potentially lead to a negative news item.

Senior Leadership Team, relevant councillors and the Communications Team, should work together to prepare an appropriate position statement/response. Wherever possible this should be done ahead of a story breaking. The response can then be used if the potentially damaging issue is to be used by the media.

Occasionally, the Communications Team will ask an officer to talk directly with the media, for example to explain a technical issue or to give an in-depth background for a feature.

If an officer is approached for a comment or request by the media, other than on an occasion agreed with the Communications Team, the journalist should be immediately referred to the Communications Team. Under no circumstances should individual officers respond to enquiries themselves.

To help maintain our relationship with the media, responding to media enquiries should be a top priority for all officers and councillors. The sooner a response is provided, the greater the likelihood of contributing to the media angle and ensuring the council's position is reflected.

The council's policy is to always comment on matters which are relevant to us, although there will be occasions when we are limited in what we can say, especially if there are legal proceedings underway.

3.2.1 Correcting inaccurate reporting

The council should make every effort to correct inaccurate reporting of council issues. Discussion with the Communications Team should take place in order to examine the most appropriate form of action e.g. personal contact, personal letter to the editor, open letter, legal advice.

3.2.2 – Leaked items

Occasionally 'confidential' council items are 'leaked' to the media. The council's policy is that it does not normally comment on leaked or confidential items. However, if an item which is not 'confidential', but which has yet to go into the official public forum e.g. Cabinet/ Council, is 'leaked' it may be appropriate for the council to issue a comment. Each case will be judged individually and on its merits.

In both scenarios the Communications Team should be made aware and be involved in discussions on how to/whether to respond.

3.2.3 Commenting on employment matters

As a matter of policy the council does not comment on issues affecting individual members of staff, including those relating to disciplinary matters.

3.3 Media briefings

When relevant, media briefings should be arranged, to brief the press on an issue of importance to the public eg new licensing regulations, budget, etc.

This will also provide an opportunity for lead officers and councillors to build relations with the media.

Officers wishing to organise a media briefing or press launch should liaise with the Communications Team.

3.4 Photocalls

Photocalls, like news releases, are used to promote the work of the council, publicise council decisions and highlight developments in services. The relevant portfolio holder or committee chair will be asked to attend.

If a photocall is specific to one ward (such as the opening of a new children's play area) the ward councillors may also be asked to attend.

4. Spokespeople

Nearly all press releases and responses to media enquiries should be attributed to a named person, rather than a council spokesperson, as this helps to promote transparency and accountability.

4.1 Who should act as spokesperson?

Highlighting the link between elected representatives and council decisions helps residents understand the decision-making process and increase local accountability.

Quotes in news releases, attendance at photocalls and interviews will usually be offered to the relevant cabinet member or committee chair in the first instance, particularly when the story relates to council policy, new initiatives or major issues or events.

In the absence of individual cabinet members, or for matters where the council as a whole needs to be represented, the leader of the council will act as official spokesperson.

For any issues relating to the council's civic function the official spokesperson will be the mayor.

If the appropriate councillor is not available/contactable for interview at the requested time, or during the pre-election period, an officer may be considered.

Any quotes/interviews conducted by officers should keep to the technical and factual details and refrain from straying into matters of policy.

4.2 Partners

Where the council is involved in issuing a press release as part of a partnership arrangement e.g. the Community Safety Partnership, the partnership's arrangements for who to quote should be followed. This would normally be the chair of that organisation. In the case of a press release being prepared on behalf of a number of partners it may be appropriate to offer each partner an opportunity to be quoted.

Unless in exceptional circumstances, it is expected that the city council will take the lead on any joint press releases where a project has involved a piece of council land or building.

For example, if a play area has been refurbished, the council would expect to take the lead on any publicity, involving other partners (such as Friends groups) as appropriate.

4.3 Political press releases

While the Communications Team supports all council related media activity, it is unable to advise on any matters related to party politics. All press releases or responses to media enquiries will therefore be factual and avoid any political bias.

If it is necessary, from a factual point of view, for a press release to identify by name one or more of the political groups on the council, then either a spokesperson for that political group(s) should be provided with the opportunity to comment in the press release issued on behalf of the council or no politicians should be quoted at all.

Group leaders' contact details will normally be provided to the media on request and political groups will determine their own spokespersons.

4.4 Commenting in the public domain

Officers and councillors should always be aware of the comments they make when attending public meetings, as these may be recorded by the public or media, attended by the media and legitimately quoted as *on the record*.

Comments made via social media can equally and legitimately be used by the media so special care should be taken.

5.0 Elections

Communications during the run-up to local elections is particularly sensitive and there are restrictions which cover the period from the day when formal notice of an election is given, up to and including the day of the election (the pre-election period).

The Monitoring Officer will provide detailed guidance prior to the start of each pre-election period.

6.0 Social media

The council has a number of social media channels available corporately, and officers wishing to make use of these channels should consult the Social Networking Protocol.

Councillors may have their own social media accounts to inform residents of news from their ward and discuss issues with constituents.

If a councillor creates an account in their capacity as a Cabinet member or committee chairman, the account should be limited to their role on the council and avoid the promotion of party politics.

The use of social media, including Twitter and Facebook, in council meetings is permitted by councillors as long as it does not disrupt meetings and councillors give the proceedings their full attention.

The use of social media by the press and public is permitted so long as the proceedings are not disrupted.

7.0 Filming enquiries

The council regularly provides assistance to film production companies interested in filming in the district. Any officers who are contacted by a company wishing to film in the district should direct the enquiry to the Communications Team.

7.1 Filming at council meetings

Rule 24 of the council's constitution outlines the position with regard to filming or audio recording of council meeting.

Whilst no prior permission is required, anyone wishing to film or audio-record a meeting is requested to contact the Communications Team in advance so that necessary arrangements can be made.