

GUIDANCE FOR MEMBERS ON COMMUNICATIONS AND THE MEDIA

Communications

The Communications department covers media relations, marketing, internal communications, public affairs and consultation.

Media relations

The Council is quoted, reported or covered in around 4,500 articles or broadcast reports each year. The following vehicles are commonly used to communicate to journalists the position of the Council on a number of policies.

- **Broadcast Interviews:** Media Officers offer Members or Senior Officers for interview on radio and television to explain and promote council policies.
- **Press releases:** To support council policy and promote the interests of the city, the media team issues press releases setting out the views of the authority. These are in response to news events, council activities and performance or policy decisions.
- **Verbal or written briefing:** Press Officers offer briefing to journalists on a range of issues based on material supplied by service departments.

Members can contact the Communications Team direct to make an enquiry on a particular issue. The Communication's Team cannot, engage in party political activity or promote the individual interests (political or otherwise) of an individual Officer or Member.

Members must have regard to any applicable Code of publicity made under the Local Government Act 1986.

Media enquiries

There will be occasions when callers will seek a view or opinion from the City Council on a particular issue. The Communications Team can provide that view from a relevant official document or from facts provided by officers. The Communications Team may seek a view or opinion on an issue from the relevant Chief Officer and/or Cabinet/Leading Member before responding to the enquiry. In these cases, it must be stressed to all parties concerned that this represents the view of the Council as a corporate body.

In most circumstances the team will seek the view of the relevant service department and legal services before issuing a comment. The Director of Communications and

Strategy will authorise the 'line to take' on an issue in exceptional circumstances where the news agenda dictates the need to act with speed; where officers cannot be contacted or outside office hours.

Callers seeking a view specifically from a political group will be directed to the most appropriate member of the Council. The role of the Communication's Team in these circumstances is to contact the appropriate Member with the request providing the journalist and Member with their contact details and a brief description of the nature of the enquiry.

Publications and Corporate Controls

The City Council produces a large amount of printed material to promote services, inform customers and raise awareness of certain issues.

In most cases, publicity material is commissioned by Chief Officers through service heads and the Communications Team provides an "agency" service for them to call on. The City Council does not have a general central publicity budget but does have budgets to pay for the production of the Council's "core" publications (Westminster Reporter, Annual report etc.). Funding for publications outside this core group is the responsibility of the commissioning officer and the relevant Chief Officer.

There may be occasions where it is appropriate for Members to be consulted on the content and style of publicity material either as a formal group, such as a Committee, or perhaps on a less formal basis if the material impacts on a particular area or service issue.

In these instances, the officer responsible for producing the publicity material will need to ensure that Members' comments are taken into account, subject to the rules governing publicity detailed above.

(Members requiring further information on any of the above or on media-related issues generally should contact the Director of Communications and Strategy, Alex Aiken on extension 3226)