

Report to:	Audit and Governance Committee	Date of Meeting:	Wednesday 7 September 2022
Subject:	Issuing of Press Releases		
Report of:	Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

This report summarises the process of issuing a press release to media outlets, and the involvement of elected members.

Recommendation:

That the process undertaken to write and issue press releases to media outlets will remain as detailed in the report.

Reasons for the Recommendation:

To ensure that press releases can be written and issued in a timely manner.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

Sending all press releases to all elected members 48 hours in advance of being issued to the media would mean that releases that require a quick turnaround (such as those in the examples given below) could not be issued, and the Council would miss out on opportunities. Being slow to respond to stories may also result in reputational damage, as stakeholders may perceive the Council as not having an opinion/voice/involvement.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

N/A

(B) Capital Costs

N/A

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):	
None	
Legal Implications:	
None	
Equality Implications:	
There are no equality implications.	
Climate Emergency Implications:	
The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	N
Have a neutral impact	Y
Have a negative impact	N
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Y
There are no direct Climate Emergency implication arising from the report	

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: n/a
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: Ensuring Councillors and Residents are well informed
Commission, broker and provide core services: n/a
Place – leadership and influencer: Promoting initiatives and examples of where the Council is seen as a leader or place
Drivers of change and reform: n/a
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: n/a

Greater income for social investment: n/a
Cleaner Greener n/a

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.6923/22) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5123/22) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

None

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Committee meeting.

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Appendices:

There are no appendices to this report

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 At the June 2022 Audit and Governance Committee meeting a request was made for elected Members to be given 48 hours advance notice of press releases, except where immediate response is required.
- 1.2 A press release is usually a proactive, formal news story or announcement made by an organisation to spread important or newsworthy information through media coverage.
- 1.3 A media statement is a reactive comment, usually in response to a request from a media outlet about an event or breaking news story, meaning an often very quick turnaround of just a few hours (same day) from request to issuing the statement.

2. Process of writing and disseminating press releases

- 2.1 Whilst every effort is made to write press releases well ahead of time, there are many instances when this is simply not possible, and a quick turnaround is needed. Sometimes press releases need to be issued to address misinformation, or to give a local perspective to a developing story.
- 2.2 The Corporate Communications Team will work with colleagues in the relevant department to write a draft press release. This draft is circulated to the Assistant or Executive Director, and relevant Cabinet Member for approval. Any amends are incorporated and sent back to the Officer and Cabinet Member for final approval.
- 2.3 Once approved, the press release is issued to media outlets via our media management system, Vuelio, which sends the press release and any accompanying imagery/video to the selected list of journalists and media outlets via email.
- 2.4 Vuelio has a comprehensive database of nearly every journalist, reporter and media outlet in the country. It is kept updated centrally, so should a journalist move to another outlet their contact details will be updated.
- 2.5 The press release is also uploaded to our MySefton news site mysefton.co.uk. The Corporate Communications Team have an agreement with media outlets that any story, and photos/video, on MySefton is available for them to use without needing to seek explicit permission from the Council.
- 2.6 On average, all of this usually happens within the space of 24, or sometimes 48 hours. Although there are occasions when the team may have a few days to complete this process, and rarely is the team given more than a week to do this.

3. Elected Member involvement

- 3.1 Proactive press releases, wherever possible, will include a quote from the Cabinet Member / portfolio holder.
- 3.2 Where this is not possible, for example during the pre-elections period, then a senior officer such as an Executive or Assistant Director will be quoted instead.
- 3.3 If the press release is about a hyper local topic, then the relevant senior officer for that particular service area will brief the relevant ward members before the press release is issued to the media. For example, when the Council and its partners were door knocking in wards in Southport as cases of the South African 'variant of concern' of Covid-19 had been identified in that area. Ward members were fully briefed prior to the Council issuing any press release or statement to local and regional media.

4. Changes to the current process

- 4.1 The Corporate Communications Team ensures that opportunity is given to the Strategic Lead (Assistant or Executive Director), the Political Lead (Cabinet Member), and where applicable, Local Leaders (Ward Members via Senior Officers) to have sight and input into the content of press releases issued.
- 4.2 To add a further 48 hours to this process would mean that there will be some media opportunities missed. For example, the opportunity to give a local perspective to a developing national story. There were many examples of this during Covid, when a story would break on Breakfast News, and the Comms Team had managed to write and distribute a press release quoting our own Sefton Director of Public Health and/or Cabinet Member(s) and have it with the local and regional media by lunch time; ensuring Sefton's voice is heard.
- 4.3 The more people involved in the approval process the longer it will take.
- 4.4 Given that all proactive press releases, and occasionally some reactive statements, are uploaded to MySefton news site, which has been in place for many years, elected members should be checking this site regularly for updates. Members are also kept updated by a quarterly e-newsletter, issued to all Sefton Councillors which directs readers to the relevant article on MySefton.
- 4.5 Elected Members are advised to keep up to date with Council stories by regularly reviewing the MySefton website and reading the quarterly MySefton e-newsletter, which is notified by email to all Elected Members.

5. Recommendation

Following consultation with the Cabinet Member, Regulatory Compliance and Corporate Services, it is recommended that the process to write, approve and distribute a proactive press release is not amended.