

## **ELECTED MEMBERS & OFFICERS MEDIA PROTOCOL**

Sefton MBC undertakes to provide a comprehensive flow of information through a range of access channels to ensure:

- Continued public awareness of the services provided by the authority and the functions it performs.
- Advance and ongoing publicity on matters of public interest.
- Those affected by the Council's decisions, policies and priorities are given information to understand them and to have a real and informed say about them.

### **ELECTED MEMBERS:**

#### **Cabinet**

The Council's Cabinet executive decision-making and accountability is reflected in the media liaison arrangements. In particular:

- Media statements on Cabinet decisions will be made by the appropriate cabinet member (or their deputy), the leader or deputy leaders of the council or issued on behalf of the entire cabinet.
- Interviews on Cabinet decisions will only be given by the appropriate cabinet member, their deputy or the Council leader/deputy leaders.
- Where the media team are asked to draft media releases or letters on behalf of Cabinet or Cabinet Members, such releases/letters will be of a factual nature and will contain nothing that could be construed as politically motivated or biased.
- The Cabinet will be given relevant support and advice to enable them to play a pro-active role in presenting issues to the media, explaining their work and managing controversial issues covered by the media.
- All official media releases will be issued by the Corporate Communications team in the standard format.

#### **Overview and Scrutiny**

The work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny committees is an integral part of the Council's political arrangements and for the purposes of ongoing media relations:

- Media statements and interviews on Overview and Scrutiny matters will be made by the relevant chair or their substitute.
- Where a minority report is released by a member or members of a Overview and Scrutiny committee, media statements will be the responsibility of those issuing the report.
- Where the media team are asked to draft media releases or letters on behalf of Overview and Scrutiny committee, such releases/letters will be of a factual nature and will contain nothing that could be construed as politically motivated or biased.
- All official Overview and Scrutiny media releases will be issued by the Corporate Communications team in the standard format.

- Members of the Overview and Scrutiny committees will be given relevant support and advice to enable them to play a pro-active role in presenting issues to the media, explaining their work and managing controversial issues covered by the media.

### **Full Council**

- Media statements on policy and other matters which are the remit of full council will be made by the leader of the Council or the Deputy Leaders.
- Media enquiries on such matters will be referred to the leader/deputy leaders.
- Leader/Deputy Leaders will be given relevant and appropriate support and advice to enable them to deal effectively with the media.
- The Leader and Deputy Leaders will be supported in making the best use of the media to promote his or her special role as ambassador for the Council.

### **COMMENTING ON CONFIDENTIAL, NON-CONFIDENTIAL REPORTS.**

**Reports made on green paper contain exempt information.** Information contained within the report has met the criteria as set out in the schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**Once this criteria has been met the report, the information contained within the report and any discussions undertaken during the meeting regarding the report are strictly confidential and MUST NOT be disclosed.**

The minute of the meeting is the official public record and members if required can comment or quote upon the details of the minute.

If the report is an executive decision (Cabinet or Cabinet Members committees) the call-in procedure is relevant. This means that the decision does not come into full force until after the expiry of the call-in period. This is the same for both confidential and non-confidential reports.

If during the call-in period a councillor is required to make a comment on the published minute they should make it clear that the minutes are subject to call-in and if this happens the decision could change.

In an ideal world it is safest not to comment until after the expiry of the call-in period.

### **Political Group Press Releases**

Corporate Communications has no involvement with political groups press releases, as these are a matter for the individual parties. If a press officer receives an enquiry based on a press release sent out by a political group they will refer the journalist or reporter to the Group Leader or Deputy Leader for a response. However, they will give answers to purely factual questions, which may emerge from such releases as clarification.

### **Individual Councillors**

The work of individual councillors is recognised as an important contributor to the Council's community leadership role.

- Each local group/party has its own protocol for dealing with the media and publicity. Councillors should, in the first instance, consult with their leader, deputy leader or party whip for guidance or support on media issues.
- Whilst it is legitimate for the Council to publicise local issues, the Council will not involve itself in any publicity, which ‘personalises’ such issues and therefore appears to be designed to affect support for a political party.
- Advice and guidance will be available to councillors on promoting local issues through the media.

## **OFFICERS**

The Council needs to have the capacity to maintain its reputation through good media management.

The general policy of the Council in working with the media will be of openness and accessibility of information. The Corporate Communications unit is responsible for handling all enquiries and requests from the media on behalf of Sefton MBC.

These protocols are to ensure that this work is carried out consistently and that everyone is aware of where responsibility lies.

All our communications will comply with relevant legal requirements and conform to the Code of Conduct on Local Government Publicity.

Corporate Communications will provide a professional, efficient service to the media and monitor satisfaction with the service. The aim is to treat the media outlets fairly and professionally and provide a range of services including; writing and issuing all press releases, organising interviews and photo-calls, monitoring media coverage, giving advice on media handling and preparing and distributing press cuttings.

Press officers will never knowingly mislead or give false information to a journalist or reporter and rely on colleagues to ensure that the information provided is accurate.

All media outlets are aware that Sefton Council will only accept dealing with the media through the Corporate Communications unit. Even if journalists or reporters choose to ignore this and make a direct approach to an officer, they should be told their enquiry will not be dealt with and redirect them to the Corporate Communications unit.

- All media liaison will be carried out via the Corporate Communications unit.
- All of the Council’s media contact will be professionally managed to meet the communications needs of the Council and the media.
- All incoming calls, requests and enquiries from the media will be fielded initially by Corporate Communications staff who will respond on behalf of the Council where appropriate.
- All media enquiries, releases and statements will be logged on an operational database which will record response times, what was said, which officer gave the information to the media team and who has approved the response or release.

- Designated press officers are empowered to make statements on behalf of the Council, presenting the agreed position and helping build and protect the Council's reputation.
- Interviews with media outlets arranged by Corporate Communications will normally be undertaken by officers at Director/Assistant Director level. On non-contentious issues where it is deemed to be more appropriate for this to be done by someone with specialist technical knowledge, directors may delegate; but only to named individuals who have undergone media training.

Underpinning all aspects of this protocol is the general principal, enshrined in government legislation, that the council will not involve itself in any publicity which appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party.

In addition to this general principal is the detailed Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, issued by the Secretary of State, which highlights factors to be borne in mind when taking decisions on publicity.

Details of the code of practice can be obtained through the corporate communications unit. For the purposes of guidance for councillors and officers paragraphs 39, 40 and 41 are particularly relevant and are reproduced below.

**Individual Councillors;**

39. Publicity about individual councillors may include the contact details, the position held in the Council (for example, member of the executive or chair of Overview and Scrutiny committee), and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual councillors' proposals, decisions and recommendations only where this is relevant to their positions and responsibilities within the council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and whilst it may acknowledge the part played by individual councillors as holders of particular positions in the Council, personalisation of issues or personal image making should be avoided.

40. Publicity should not be, or liable to misrepresentation as being, party political. Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual councillor which are relevant to his/her position and responsibilities within the Council, and to put forward his/her justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating policies of a political party or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups or individuals.

**Elections, referendums and petitions;**

41. The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. However, it is acceptable for the authority to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political. Members holding key political positions should be able to comment in an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the

authorities control. Proactive events arranged in this period should not involve members likely to be standing for election.