



Chichester City Council

Media Policy

Introduction

The purpose of the Media Policy is to provide guidance on engaging with the media and sets out roles and responsibilities for Councillors and officers.

The Council Services Support Team is responsible for coordinating the Council's communications activities which aim to:

- Share the Council's successes and any updates on key policies and services so that residents feel informed about the Council's work
- Ensure Chichester City Council is recognised as being open, transparent, and accountable
- Handle requests for information in a timely way
- Manage risks to the Council's work and reputation via pro-active media management.

The Council's Services Support Team is available to provide support and advice to both Councillors and officers on communications issues and questions.

This policy reflects the guidance contained in the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Government Publicity, and complements the Council's social media policy.

Approach to media relations

The Council recognises the important role the media plays in informing residents, businesses and visitors about its work and the decision-making process. The Council is committed to developing and maintaining a positive working relationship with all professional media organisations. Providing a consistent approach to media relations will help to enhance and protect the Council's reputation.

When media outlets request information, quotes or interviews, the Council Services Support Team should coordinate these requests.

Roles and responsibilities

The Town Clerk is responsible for signing off press releases and media statements.

One of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor or Committee Chairs are responsible for signing off their quotes in Council press releases and any statements issued.

Ward Councillors will be invited to any photo opportunities taking place in their ward, alongside the relevant Committee Chair and officer.

It is acknowledged that Councillors may sometimes be approached directly by the media about issues within their ward, in which case it should be made clear that they are providing their personal view rather than the corporate view of the Council. Ward councillors should notify the Council Services Support Team if they are contacted by the media, so the team are able to monitor press contact and be aware of any developing issues.

Any Councillor can request media training and should advise the Town Clerk who will arrange a suitable programme of training.

Press releases

It is recognised that local press and radio stations, trawl social media for stories. In most cases, the easiest way to disseminate general news, is a good social media post. Although not all residents use social media, local media organisations form a bridge between social media and residents. Press releases help publicise more formal Council announcements and will reflect the Council's corporate view and values. Press releases should be used for more detailed items where there is value derived from providing a longer format to the media.

These releases will be drafted by the Council Services Support Team and issued to the media in a timely way. They will be shared with all Councillors at the point of release to the media and added to the Council website as soon as it is practical to do so.

Releases will include relevant facts and a quote from the appropriate Councillor. In certain circumstances, a quote from a Council officer will be used when the public would reasonably expect an operational viewpoint to be put forward.

Releases will not promote the views of political groups or publicise the activities of individual Councillors. They will not seek to persuade the public to hold a certain view unless part of an agreed marketing campaign. Additional restrictions will be in place to comply with legal requirements before an election, known as the "pre-election period". See below.

Where a release is not considered to be the best way to publicise a news item or event, the Council Services Support Team can advise on an alternative, such as a social media post.

Media enquiries and interviews

Media enquiries received about the Council's work will be coordinated by the Council Services Support Team, liaising with the Town Clerk, to ensure responses are prioritised and relevant spokespeople are sourced and briefed on any emerging interview bids. Officers and Councillors should assist the Council Services Support Team in gathering the relevant information for responses.

Committee Chairs will be quoted on relevant Committee decisions, or the Mayor for Council-wide issues.

Council officers who are directly approached by a media outlet should redirect the journalist to the Town Clerk at the earliest opportunity.

Quotes from "a spokesperson" will be avoided where possible, however, in some instances it may be beneficial. The use of this term is common during the pre-election period.

Where multiple enquiries about the same issue are covered by pre-agreed lines, the Council Services Support Team will not need to seek further clearance before issuing these to the media.

The Council Services Support Team will advise on journalists' deadlines and seek to meet these deadlines, wherever possible.

The Council Services Support Team will support interviewees in preparing for media interviews.

Officers put forward for interview should not provide a personal opinion on a matter. As the subject matter expert their role is to provide factual knowledge in support of the Council's approved policies.

In the event of an emergency requiring a county-wide response, the Council Services Support Team will liaise with West Sussex County Council and other key partners. In the event of an emergency, it is paramount that the Council Services Support Team manage the Council's

interactions with the press to avoid any confusion and provide clear information to the public and partners.

Identifying newsworthy items

Ensuring the Council Services Support Team is made aware of any potential news items at the earliest opportunity is crucial to maintaining effective media relations. At least two weeks in advance wherever possible. This will help the Council Services Support Team to manage drafting any supporting communications including press releases, photo call notices, sourcing any quotes and images, and planning any social media content to complement the story.

Correcting inaccurate reporting

Where the Council has been significantly misrepresented in media coverage, the Council Services Support Team will liaise with the media outlet to request a correction.

In the case of minor inaccuracies, the Council Services Support Team will consult with the Town Clerk as to whether any action should be taken.

If, on occasion, the Council gets something wrong, it will acknowledge any errors in a timely way, and address how it will put things right.

Media activity ahead of council meetings

Where possible, the Council Services Support Team should be made aware of any newsworthy items that are due to be considered at upcoming meetings.

Where appropriate, the Council Services Support Team will prepare news releases and / or statements to support decisions taken at key council meetings.

Agendas for council meetings will be published on the Council's website and made accessible to journalists in advance of any meetings.

Council meetings held in the Council Chamber will be open to journalists to attend and report on. Councillors, officers, and members of the public who speak at a public meeting may be quoted during the course of the committee meeting. Any requests to interview officers or Councillors after the meeting should be referred to the Council Services Support Team to manage.

Publicity during elections

The rules on publicity change when an election has been called. From notice of election to the election itself, also known as the pre-election period, all proactive publicity that includes candidates or other politicians temporarily ceases.

Council-related publicity during this time should not deal with any controversial issues. Officers may be quoted in this instance. This is to ensure fairness, and make sure no party, or individual candidate gains an unfair advantage by appearing in Council produced publicity, which extends to the use of social media.

Publicity events organised during the election period must not feature Councillors standing for election.

Community groups / partnerships

Where the Council is involved in a project involving a community group or partnership, any arrangements for proactive publicity must be agreed in advance by both parties, being mindful of the following guidance:

Where the Council is the lead organisation, the Council Services Support Team will draft news releases and request a quote from the relevant external organisation and issue the final / approved news release to the media.

Where the community group or partnership is the lead organisation, the community group or partner organisation should lead on the communications activity and contact the Council's Council Services Support Team to request a relevant quote for inclusion in their news release.

A copy of the final / approved news release should be shared with relevant parties and issued by the community group or partner.

Where the Council does not have direct involvement in a community or partner project, the community group or partner organisation is responsible for managing its own communications activities. In some cases, these activities may be shared on the Council's social media channels at the discretion of the Communications Team.

Events

The Mayor will usually be quoted in releases covering Council events. In the Mayor's absence, the Deputy Mayor will be quoted. The Council Services Support Team will advise on whether an event requires a news release or social media post to help publicise the activity.

Photographs / videos

A photo / video consent form should be used when sourcing images and videos commissioned by the Council for publicity purposes.

Evaluation

The Council Services Support Team will monitor media coverage about the Council.

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