

Paragraph 3.2.3 Proactive Media Releases and Ward Members

Quoting ward members in press releases

In order to implement the requested changes to proactive press releases, a consistent approach needs to be agreed.

It must be clear when it is a 'place' release and when it is a 'policy' release. It cannot be arbitrary on each issue that is being talked about as this could lead to lengthy discussions which will inevitably lead to time delays and could mean deadlines being missed.

Definition of 'place'

When an event or an issue occurs within a specific ward and is pertinent to that ward only.

For example:

The opening of a play park
A story about a specific car park
Community Tree Planting

Definition of 'policy'

When an event or an issue occurs across more than one ward

Announcement of the Clearway policy
Cuts to services across the borough
Waste collection in Macclesfield

Where a 'place' release is being written, every effort will be made to quote a ward member. Given that there are three ward members the Media Team need an agreed process for managing who is quoted. There are two options that members can choose from;

1. Ward members are placed in alphabetical order and as and when a Ward issue/media release comes up they are taken in alphabetical order one at a time for quoting.
2. The quote goes out in the name of all three ward members. E.g. Councillors Smith, Jones and Collins said For this option to work, ward members would need to agree either one point of contact or, that whoever is contacted undertakes to co-ordinate the approval of the quote.

It would have to be agreed that ward members choose either option 1 or option 2 as a way of working for all releases relating to their ward. It would not be practical for sometimes being quoted together and sometimes separately as it would be very difficult for the team to know who to go to and it would increase the amount of time taken to get the release out.

However, on significant issues it will be the preference for all members to be quoted

We would like to trial this until the end of January and then re-evaluate the process to ensure it is working and address any issues.

Important points to note:

- It must be remembered that the Media Team are there to enhance and protect the reputation of the council.
- Any quotes that are included in releases sent out from the Media Team will seek to enhance and protect the reputation of the Council.
- Quotes from individual members will not be self promoting

Key Issues:

- There is the potential for all Ward members to come directly to the Media team for their personal press releases on their activities and there is a risk that there are not sufficient staff resources to service 81 members. Where the Media Team have the resource and consider the release actively enhances the reputation of the council, the team will always endeavour to put the release out. Where this is not possible advice and guidance will be offered along with a template, in order that they can write and send the release themselves.
- Support will be needed from Cabinet to implement this approach as it will reduce the number of releases that go out in Portfolio holders names.
- There is a risk that the local media will question why we are quoting Ward members suddenly, five months before an election, and will be seen as politicking. With this in mind we will actively inform the press of the changes we are making to the way we release news.
- This process relates to written proactive media releases. For radio and television and statements in response to enquiries, it will still be the Portfolio holder who responds.

- Recent examples have demonstrated that there are large grey areas which are likely to cause disagreement over the definition and therefore who is to be quoted. This will mean some kind of adjudication is likely to be needed involving portfolio holder for Performance and Capacity or the Leader.
- In order to determine which ward a 'place' release will come from, the Media Team will use the 'In your local area' post code search on the home page of the internet.

The Communications team will provide training for ALL ward members on how to generate positive publicity and raise their profile in their wards. This would include a suite of templates they can use to provide information to the media on how they have helped make improvements for their constituents in their areas.