



DRAFT

Media Relations Protocol

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1. Introduction

This protocol serves as the definitive media relations guide for Cheshire East Council. *Once this has been approved by Cabinet, the Leader and CEO, its contents must be adhered to.*

1.1 Strategic aim

The aim of this policy is to enhance and protect the reputation of the Council, communicating its key information and messages in a professional and timely manner and to maximise opportunities to engage with its customers.

As part of the larger Communications & PR Team the Cheshire East Council Media Relations Team will work with the local, regional and national media to achieve this.

2. Structure of the Media Relations Team

Media Relations Manager

Senior Media Relations Officer

Media Relations Officer x 2

Media Relations Assistant

3. Media Relations policy

a. Council spokespeople

The Council will be required to respond to questions, issues and events relating to CEC in the media. To ensure that all these enquiries are co-ordinated and managed effectively, the team must be able to record and monitor ALL interaction with the media. Without this, the reputation of the Council is potentially at risk. The Media Team will also provide advice and guidance where appropriate.

Members and employees of the Council will be required to speak to the media at different times. This could either be directly e.g. TV or radio or in written form.

The media may contact officers or members directly. If the nature of the enquiry is straightforward and the member or officer is able to provide the necessary information, to ensure a swift response, they should do so and then inform the Media Relations Team.

If the enquiry is contentious or has wider implications for CEC or if it is a criticism about CEC, the member or officer should take details of the

journalist and the full nature of the enquiry and pass this on to the Media Relations team who will then liaise with the relevant parties to provide an appropriate response.

Where Members are required to respond to the media regarding the policy of CEC, such publicity should be objective and explanatory. While it may acknowledge the part played by individual Members as holders of particular positions in the council, personalisation of issues or personal image making should be avoided.

This protocol does not preclude any political group or member issuing its own media information through its own channels. However all such information should be copied to the Media Team where it will be held in confidence and used only to inform responses to media enquiries.

Where a formal response is required, or we wish to proactively place news in the media, the standard practice will be that this should come in the first instance from the relevant portfolio holder. If they are not available this will be deferred to the Leader in the first instance, following that it will be the relevant Chief Officer. Quotes will not be included without the relevant authorisation from the spokesperson. Exceptions to the portfolio holder and Leader involvement may arise during periods of purdah or if there are potential conflicts of interest. In these cases Media Relations will identify a suitable alternative. News releases will also seek to include a quote from the relevant service manager or team member.

Unauthorised comment by officers on behalf of the Council that is potentially harmful to its reputation will be investigated as a disciplinary matter

A regularly reviewed media training programme for elected members and relevant employees will assist with developing the appropriate skillset for media interviews.

If this structure is followed we will be in a strong position to minimise the risk of reputational damage.

b. Putting the Council's interest first

Representing the best interests of the Council in the media is at the centre of the Media Relations Team's purpose. Coverage of elected members and employees will be determined in a system of prioritisation, according to the current news agenda.

It is important to note that the most effective strategy is not always to respond to issues in the media. Also media requests will be determined by both the news agenda and their prior agreement in directorate

communications plans. However, we will also need to seek approval from other involved parties as appropriate.

Any Member or employee speaking on behalf of the Council is required to put the interests of the Council first.

c. Media monitoring

Monitoring the coverage of the Council in the daily media is the responsibility of the team. This is done in a variety of ways using the best in modern technology and practice, including a media cutting service.

Disseminating recorded media coverage of the Council to the various internal stakeholders will be done in a clear, accessible and stream-lined way.

d. Crisis media relations

The Media Relations Team is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In the event of a crisis breaking in the media outside of normal office hours (9.00am -5.00pm), a duty media relations officer will always be available on call. We are developing a crisis media protocol.

e. Pro-active coverage

Through proactive coverage we will position the Council in a positive and transparent light. The team will advise on how best to place the right stories in the most appropriate outlet (eg: radio, television, print, online, blog etc) with the best chances of success.

The media expertise of the team, led by the Media Relations Manager, will determine how pro-active coverage is generated. Planning pro-active coverage will form part of the wider communications plans for each of the Council's three main directorates (People, Places and Corporate).

f. Reactive coverage

It is inevitable that the Council will face regular attack in the media. Often, this will be unfounded and will be challenged by the team; and if necessary, supported by Legal Services. On the occasions where the criticism is genuine, the team will respond with transparency and accountability. Again judgement will be used as to whether we respond or not.

g. Confidentiality

The business of the Media Relations Team is highly confidential and all matters discussed within and by the team are treated with the highest standards of discretion. It is essential that the team are briefed on all

aspects of any issues, no matter how confidential or sensitive, to enable them to be best prepared for enquires and put the interests of the Council first.

4. Contact details for the team

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