

Corporate Policy Committee

Date of Meeting:	08 June 2021
Report Title:	Media Relations Protocol
Report of:	CLT Lead Officer: Jane Burns, Executive Director – Corporate Services
Report Reference No:	CP/05/21
Ward(s) Affected:	All wards

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report presents an updated draft media relations protocol for Cheshire East Council. A media relations protocol sets out the policy and principles that define how public and media relations activity for an organisation will be undertaken. It sets out roles and responsibilities with regard to public relations and specifically media relations activity. This includes establishing the approvals process, identifying spokespersons and the distribution / publication protocol.
- 1.2. The protocol supports the Corporate Plan priority of promoting and developing the services of the council through regular communications and engagement with all residents.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. Corporate Policy Committee is asked to approve the updated protocol.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. We want residents to be aware of the council and the services we provide. We will produce regular, proactive communications through all channels. The media relations protocol will enable efficient and responsible public communications activity. It will ensure that the organisation's public communications are approved by those officers and members with appropriate authority. It will also make it clear which individual officers and members are empowered to speak on behalf of the organisation. It

has been updated to reflect changes resulting from the recent move to the committee system.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1.** The council could operate without a media relations protocol. However, this would mean that the organisation had no framework to coordinate, govern and manage public communication activity. This would hamper the ability of the organisation to communicate effectively with residents, customers, and stakeholders. It would also put the organisation at increased risk of reputational damage.
- 4.2.** The council could continue to use the previous version of the media relations protocol. However, this previous version was aligned to the cabinet system of governance and is not considered fit-for-purpose under the committee system.

5. Background

- 5.1.** Cheshire East Council is an important organisation with a significant impact and influence locally and regionally. Its policies and service delivery have wide-ranging, direct, and indirect impact on people's lives and futures.
- 5.2.** It is important that our customers and other stakeholders have good access to information about the organisation.
- 5.3.** It is also important that the policies and priorities of the organisation, and the reasons and drivers for those policies and priorities, are presented in ways that can be easily understood by the full range of stakeholders.
- 5.4.** The media relations protocol is a framework that establishes the rules and conventions to ensure that the council's public communications activity is well managed and well governed.

6. Implications

6.1. Legal

6.1.1. The communications and engagement activities covered by this report and strategy are subject to the following guidance and legislation:

- Data Protection Act 2018
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
- Libel and defamation law
- Code of recommended practice for local government publicity

6.2. Finance

6.2.1. The media relations protocol has been written in the context of agreed 2021/22 budget for communications and media activity.

6.3. Policy

6.3.1. The media relations protocol is a key document that establishes how council communications will be managed and governed.

6.4. Equality

6.4.1. The Council has a duty under the Equality Act (2010) and the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Government Publicity to ensure that information about council services is made available to all audiences.

6.4.2. The Code of Recommended Practice states that: “Publicity about local authorities and the services they provide should be freely available to anyone who wishes to receive such information in a format readily accessible and understandable by the person making the request or by any particular group for which services are provided.”

6.4.3. While the media relations protocol does not in itself dictate the channels, format or means of communication, it does support communications activity of all kinds, for all audiences, including those with protected characteristics, by setting out a framework to ensure that any public communications activity is approved and voiced by individuals with the appropriate authority.

6.5. Human Resources

6.5.1. This report has no direct impact on human resources.

6.5.2. The protocol shapes the way in which the communications and media team operates. Any significant variation in the volume and/or nature of the work required resulting from a change of protocol, would require a review of resourcing.

6.6. Risk Management

6.6.1. An effective media relations protocol will support the organisation to ensure that it is fairly represented, that it is transparently and clearly accountable and accredited for its decisions and actions. The protocol will reduce the risk of reputational damage through misrepresentation, misinformation and/or disinformation.

6.7. Rural Communities

6.7.1. The media relations protocol is a necessary tool to ensure that the council’s public communications are well managed and are available across a range of channels, reaching individuals and

communities in all geographies across Cheshire East, including rural areas.

6.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

6.8.1. Communications and media activity will be central to the council's work to deliver the ambitions of the council's children and families services. The media relations protocol is a necessary tool to ensure that the council's communications resources are well managed.

6.9. Public Health

6.9.1. Communications and media activity will be central to the council's work to deliver the ambitions of the council's Public Health service. The importance of effective public communication has been highlighted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The media relations protocol is a necessary tool to ensure that the council's communications resources are well managed.

6.10. Climate Change

6.10.1. Communications and media activity will be central to the council's work to address the climate change emergency and deliver the ambitions of the council's environmental strategy. The media relations protocol is a necessary tool to ensure that the council's communications resources are well managed.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Michael Moore, Interim communications manager Michael.moore@cheshireeast.gov.uk 01270 686581
Appendices:	Appendix 1: CEC Media relations protocol 2021
Background Papers:	Code of recommended practice on local government publicity.