

(M) Media Contact Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Douglas Borough Council aims to build and maintain a positive reputation and has adopted a proactive approach in its relationship with the media.
- 1.2 This document provides information to Members and Officers on the basic protocol for working with the media as well as clear guidance in respect of roles and responsibilities.
- 1.3 The Council welcomes enquiries from the media, and will attend to media requests promptly and with courtesy, honesty and respect. The Council believes that a good relationship based on trust, familiarity and confidence, is important between the Council and the media.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of the Media Contact Policy are to:
 - (i) Ensure that the Council complies with the principles of corporate governance, ie openness, accountability and integrity;
 - (ii) Ensure that the Council communicates effectively with all its stakeholders;
 - (iii) Ensure all communication with the media is consistent, balanced, well-informed, timely, professional and appropriate;
 - (iv) Improve communication with customers and support the Council's public relations;
 - (v) Limit the possibility of miscommunication and clearly indicate the Council's authorised spokespersons.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

- 3.1 As stated in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution, Media Relations is within the remit of the Executive Committee of the Council.
- 3.2 The Chief Officers Management Team 'COMT' (ie the Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Environment & Regeneration and Director of Housing & Property) will be responsible for endorsing and overseeing the Media Contact Policy. The Assistant Chief Officer (Digital & Information), under the direction of COMT, will provide practical support for this function together with liaison between the media, COMT, Members, and the Council's Media Relations Advisor. The role of Media Relations Advisor is contracted as part of the Council's public relations service.
- 3.3 The Council's Media Relations Advisor will generally be the first point of contact for press enquiries (eg newspapers, radio and TV stations etc), and will liaise with COMT and the Leader of the Council as appropriate to issue press releases and respond to queries.

- 3.4 The Leader of the Council and Chairs of Committees may act as spokespersons for the Council on agreed Council policy matters within their delegated areas of responsibility under the Council's Constitution, and in accordance with the principles set down in this Media Contact Policy.
- 3.5 The Worshipful the Mayor may act as spokesperson for matters relating to the civic role of the Mayor and in respect of non-contentious matters of Council policy.
- 3.6 The Chief Executive, and officers delegated by the Chief Executive, may provide information to the media on agreed Council policy matters and on operational matters of public interest.

4. Members and the Media

- 4.1 In their role as elected representatives, Members are free to talk to the media at any time on any issue of interest. However, whilst every Member has a right to express a private opinion on any issue, Councillors must carefully identify the role in which they speak.
- 4.2 When Members speak 'for the Council' they must express and support Council's entire policy on the issue at hand. Any Member who feels unable to speak in support of a Council policy whilst formally representing Council faces a dilemma and must treat it in a similar fashion to a conflict of interest issue.
- 4.3 Whilst Ward Members are encouraged to keep in regular contact with the local media in order to promote their community leadership role and the positive work they are carrying out in their community, Members should be sensitive to the fact that they are perceived to be speaking on behalf of the Council. If writing or expressing a view that is not in accordance with Council policy it should be made clear that this is an independent opinion.
- 4.4 From time to time Members may be requested to contribute material for newspapers or participate in a broadcast interview. The views expressed should, where required under this Policy, be identified as the Member's own and must not include personal criticism of other Members or Officers.
- 4.5 Members are encouraged to consult with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive or with the Council's Media Relations Advisor prior to speaking to or issuing statements to the media, whether on an individual or Council basis.
- 4.6 Defamation law applies to Members as it does for other members of the public. It could be considered defamatory to harm another person's reputation verbally or through the written word.
- 4.7 Members must not use the Council's framework for media relations in support of election campaigning or for individual political gain.
- 4.8 Any Member in a position as spokesperson and who considers that training in media relations would be useful is encouraged to contact the Council's Members Services Officer.

5. **Media Enquiries**

- 5.1 Officers should direct all media enquiries to the Chief Officer of the respective Department, via the line management structure, for appropriate action which may involve contacting the Council's Media Relations Advisor, the Chief Executive and/or the Leader of the Council dependent on circumstances. Members are encouraged to direct queries to the Chief Executive, the Council's Media Relations Advisor and/or the Leader of the Council in the first instance, dependent on the level of query.
- 5.2 In respect of day-to-day management and operational matters, an Officer of COMT may delegate Officer(s) to speak to the media.
- 5.3 Members and Officers are encouraged to co-operate at all times with media outlets subject to the provisions in this policy and to be proactive, as opposed to reactive in their use of the media. The wording 'No comment' is to be avoided – Members and Officers should indicate that an official response will be provided as soon as possible.
- 5.4 As soon as Members or Officers become aware of an issue likely to attract media attention, either positive or negative, then COMT should be alerted.
- 5.5 Contractors or service providers employed by the Council must refer all media enquiries relating to the Council to the Chief Executive or Assistant Chief Officer (Digital & Information).
- 5.6 All requests for filming of Council services or filming on Council property must be referred to COMT in all instances when there is a likelihood of Council services being impacted or the Council's reputation being affected. The Chief Executive may authorise filming where there is likely to be minimal implications.

6. **Media Releases**

- 6.1 Officers and Members should ensure that information provided to the Council's Media Relations Advisor is correct. Officers should prepare and draft information so that a speedy and accurate response can be provided. Where resource permits, Officers are encouraged to provide a draft press release which can then be formatted by the Media Relations Advisor to provide a consistent standard and message.
- 6.2 The Council's Media Relations Advisor will prepare releases, for approval by the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, and any Member quoted in such release.
- 6.3 Once approved, statements will be issued to all Members electronically prior to general release to the Island's media. Releases will also be published to the Council's website. A summary of releases will be issued in the Members' Monthly Bulletin.
- 6.4 Members and Officers should treat all media outlets equally and should avoid giving one outlet preferential treatment. Media releases will be distributed to all media outlets at the same time.

6.5 Where media releases are jointly issued with partnering organisations (for example Douglas Community Partnership), agreement from those organisations must be obtained.

7. **Emergency Planning**

7.1 Specific procedures for media and public communications are contained within the Council's Emergency Plan.

8. **Social Media**

8.1 In respect of Social Media and the interaction with media relations, it is inevitable that once an item of interest is available in the public domain, then queries and comments may be generated via social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter.

8.2 The Council's Social Media accounts are monitored on behalf of COMT by the Assistant Chief Officer (Digital & Information). Where significant issues are raised the Assistant Chief Officer (Digital & information) will refer these as soon as practicable to COMT for management of any media relations elements. Where immediate action is required because of incorrect or reputationally-damaging posts, then the Assistant Chief Officer (Digital & Information) is delegated by the Chief Executive to take immediate action to block or terminate posts.

8.3 For Members and Officers, the advice contained within this Policy equally relates to communications on social media.

9. **Equal Opportunities**

9.1 When drafting and issuing press releases or selecting photographs, Members and Officers should be mindful of equal opportunity and diversity principles.

9.2 Publicity should avoid the stereotyping of roles and should demonstrate the Council's commitment to promoting equality and diversity. This applies to services and opportunities to people irrespective of age, sex, race, and disability.

10. **Safeguarding**

10.1 All persons or organisations dealing with the media on behalf of the Council must be aware of the Council's current policies and procedures in relation to Safeguarding.

10.2 In particular respect of photography and the use of images of children :

- (i) Children's names should not be used in photograph captions without consent;
- (ii) Permission must be obtained for a child to be photographed or videoed;
- (iii) Avoid the use of images accompanied by personal information, for example, on the Council's website or via social media if consent has not been given;
- (iv) Professional photographers or press invited to attend Council events must provide a written statement advising of their child protection policy;
- (v) Photographers must not be allowed unsupervised access to children nor should photography sessions outside an event or at a child's home be permitted.

11. **Data Protection**

- 11.1 Members, Officers and all persons or organisations dealing with the media on behalf of the Council must comply with Data Protection legislation. Advice may be sought from the Assistant Chief Officer (Digital & Information).

12. **Officers of the Council**

- 12.1 All officers other than the COMT should seek consent from their Chief Officer prior to speaking to an external media representative. Information or statements provided to the media must be in accordance with the principles and procedures set down in this Media Contact Policy.
- 12.2 Officers may not provide any comment or information to the media with the intention of contesting or undermining Council policy or casting the Council, Members or Officers in a negative light.
- 12.3 Officers may speak or write to the media or write as private individuals with the following conditions:
- (i) They do not comment on Council business or policy;
 - (ii) They are not identified as Council employees;
 - (iii) Their comments are not perceived as representing official Council position or policy.
- 12.4 Where Officers have provided personal or Council mobile telephone contact details to third parties whilst engaged in Council business, for example to Police or other Emergency services, it should be made clear that this number must not be passed on to the media (or any other organisation) without consent.

13. **Review and Circulation**

- 13.1 All new employees are to be made aware of the Council's Media Contact Policy as part of the induction process.
- 13.2 This policy will be reviewed in line with the Council's Constitution.