

Media Relations Protocol

Media and publicity protocol

The council is in constant contact with the media and it's important that we have procedures in place to deal with their enquiries.

Having an established protocol on dealing with enquiries and sending information to the press, means that we can ensure a consistent approach, and our colleagues in the media know what to expect from us.

The following guidelines outline the council's procedures for dealing with the media. The aim is to provide a clear and simple process for dealing with the media that means we can keep our residents informed.

Responding to media enquiries

1. The media should be encouraged to approach the Communications Team with any enquiries that relate to the council, its processes, conduct, decisions or initiatives. It is the responsibility of the Communications Team to produce responses in direct liaison with the appropriate councillor(s) and to seek advice from relevant officers during this process.
2. The Leader, Deputy Leader, Cabinet portfolio holders, committee chairmen or vice-chairmen will be the official spokespersons on matters concerning their area or brief. Depending on the nature of the issue, it may be appropriate for both a committee chairman and a portfolio holder to be asked to comment.
3. If the appropriate portfolio holder, committee chairman or vice-chairman cannot be contacted, the Leader of the Council or in their absence, the Deputy Leader should be contacted.
4. If the appropriate councillors are not available, the Chief Executive or member of the Leadership Team may respond on behalf of the council or authorise another officer to respond on their behalf. The appropriate councillor should be informed at the earliest opportunity.
5. A councillor may wish to ask an appropriate officer to speak to the media on what appear to be technical matters, but this decision should be that of the councillor.

6. Councillors should be informed if the media are likely to contact them.
7. Employees contacted by the media should refer all enquiries to the Communications Team in order that they may be dealt with as described above.
8. The Communications Team will keep a log of all media enquiries received, the deadline of such enquiry and the date/time the enquiry was responded to along with the final response.

Approval matrix

1	Press enquiry comes into the Communications Team.
2	Enquiry sent to relevant officer for information to form a draft.
3	Draft statement is sent to relevant officer and/or Leadership Team member for first approval.
4	Draft sent to relevant councillor for final approval.
5	Final statement is sent to enquirer and logged.

Issuing proactive news releases

9. The Communications Team will generate and issue news releases and will maintain a forward plan to manage opportunities for coverage in liaison with officers and members.
10. Each release will be produced in liaison with the appropriate officer, cabinet portfolio holder, committee chairman or vice-chairman. Councillors should be quoted in proactive releases. All quotes will be approved by the councillor(s) concerned.
11. If the appropriate portfolio holder, committee chairman or vice-chairman cannot be contacted, the Leader of the Council or, in their absence, the Deputy Leader should be contacted.

12. Members and officers are responsible for identifying opportunities to promote the council within their areas of responsibility and for notifying the Communications Team in a timely manner when such opportunities arise.
13. Ideas for press releases are actively encouraged. Employees and members should contact the Communications Team in a timely manner who will produce releases as appropriate.
14. The Communications Team will log and retain copies of all releases issued. These will be made available on the council's website.

Approval matrix

1	Idea for communication comes into Communications Team.
2	The team work with relevant officer to draft a release and write a quote(s) for relevant Members.
3	Draft release is sent to relevant officer for fact-checking
4	Draft release is sent to relevant Member for final approval
5	Final release is issued to the media (and other channels where relevant) and logged.

Responding to letters in the press

15. Letters published in the press, which criticise the council will be left unchallenged unless:
 - The content is inaccurate
 - The content is considered highly damaging to the council's reputation
 - Responding would help to set out the council's position more clearlyIn these circumstances, the communications team will discuss and develop a response in conjunction with relevant service and spokesperson.

Responding to comments on social media

16. On some social media sites, it is possible to post comments, posts or messages from an organisational account (for example on twitter, use is made of @SouthRibbleBC). In these circumstances, the council will use these profiles rather than a spokesperson. This is because the organisation is more easily identifiable than individuals on social media, and relies on a reputation being built on the platforms. However, in some circumstances it is not possible to post from an organisation account (for example to groups on Facebook), or it is better to have a personal profile, then the relevant available spokesperson will be used.

Media Visits/Interviews

17. Reporters and photographers should be encouraged to liaise with the Communications Team and obtain consent before observing, photographing or otherwise recording any event or activity that relates to the council. Employees should contact the Communications Team if they see or are approached by a member of the media, and should consult with them if they wish to organise a media visit or interview
18. All media requests for interviews should be coordinated by the Communications team. The appropriate cabinet portfolio holders, committee chairmen or vice-chairmen will represent the council in all media interviews. The team can provide briefing and/or guidance on request.

News Conferences

19. If the council wishes to proactively media-manage an issue, or becomes the subject of significant media attention, it may be necessary to hold a news conference. This will enable the authority to provide convenient and controlled access to information for reporters.
20. The Communications Team will coordinate any press conferences and ensure that the appropriate spokespersons have been briefed. Unless agreed otherwise in consultation with the Leader/Deputy Leader, the only persons that should normally attend a press conference are the Leader/Deputy Leader, relevant portfolio holders and appropriate officers.

Events and photo calls

21. The Communications Team can assist with generating media coverage of events. Anyone wishing to invite the press to an event should ask the team to arrange a media photo call. At least two weeks' notice is required for events or initiatives for which advance publicity is essential in order that the deadlines of the weekly news media can be met. Broadcast media like to be informed at least a week in advance. Please bear these deadlines in mind when arranging an event.

Media training and guidance

22. The Communications Team can provide media training and guidance and will help councillors learn to identify opportunities for positive media coverage. The team can advise on handling media interviews as required.

Councillors acting on their own account

23. This protocol relates only to the communication activities undertaken by the council. It does not prevent or limit elected members from acting in their own capacity and undertaking such activities directly themselves.

Purdah period

24. This is the period in the run up to the elections where the organisation cannot do any publicity that might favour a candidate or political party. During this time publicity will be restricted to items that are time sensitive and need to be done in that period and business as usual.
25. In these circumstances the chief executive or directors (or nominated officer) will be the spokesperson for the authority.
26. In the run up to elections that are not South Ribble Borough Council elections (i.e. county council, or police and crime commissioner elections) the above will need to be considered but it may be possible for elected members to be the spokesperson depending upon their involvement in those elections.

Dealing with issues that are conflicted across Chorley and South Ribble

27. With the communications team operating as a shared service there may be times when both authorities have a differing view on an issue or are conflicted in their interests.
28. If that is the case the relevant member of the communications team will act on behalf of the authority it is representing in drafting any statements that will be agreed by the relevant member and officer.
29. An individual can do this for each authority, or in exceptional circumstances, it may be that two members of the team deal with the enquiry at the same time – one working on behalf of each authority.
30. This will be managed by the service lead to void any operational issues.