

## MEDIA AND PUBLICITY PROTOCOL

### 1. CONTEXT

- 1.1 The purpose of this Media and Publicity Protocol is to clarify the respective roles of officers and members when dealing with matters of media interest or general publicity to ensure that Kettering Borough Council remains open, honest and accurate in dealing with the media and to ensure that the Council responds to enquiries as soon as is practicable without compromising political impartiality, the law, guidance or good practice.

This protocol governs the work of councillors in their various roles when acting for the Council, and officers when dealing with the media or promoting services.

- 1.2 It is good practice for the Council to clearly outline the organisations mechanics and procedures that will be followed when dealing with the media or publicity material.
- 1.3 This Protocol is governed by the provisions of the Local Government Act 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (The Publicity Code).
- 1.4 The Local Government Act of 1986 prohibits a local authority from publishing, or assisting others to publish, any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party.
- 1.5 The Act defines publicity as, *“any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public.”*
- 1.6 The Publicity Code does not override the Act, it gives guidance on communications between communities, individuals and the media to ensure that publicity of any kind is effective, impartial and represents proper use of public funds. It states that :

*“The main purposes of local authority publicity are to increase public awareness of the services provided by the authority and the functions it performs; to allow local people to have a real and informed say about issues that affect them; to explain to electors and taxpayers the reasons for particular policies and priorities; and in general, improving local accountability.”*

It is therefore clear that any communications made on behalf of the Council must be politically impartial and based on facts not opinion.

- 1.7 In compliance with the Publicity Code any publicity produced by the Council may be used to;
- ◆ Raise awareness and promote the council's policies in an objective and factual manner;
  - ◆ Support local democracy in an impartial and non political manner;
  - ◆ Support effective dialogue between the Council and the community;

- ◆ Promote and inform the public in relation to the responsibilities of the council;
- ◆ Promote public safety messages and keep people informed during any crisis;
- ◆ Meet legal requirements

1.8 The Publicity Code also gives guidance on publicity about individual Councillors and their roles. Paragraphs 39 and 40 are reproduced below:

- ◆ *“Publicity about individual councillors may include contact details, the positions they hold in the council (for example, member of the Executive or Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee), and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual councillors’ proposals, decisions and recommendations only where it is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and whilst it may acknowledge the part played by individual councillors as holders of particular positions in the Council, personalisation of issues or personal image making should be avoided.”*
- ◆ *“Publicity should not be, or liable to misrepresentation as being party political. Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies to put forward by an individual Councillor which are relevant to his/her responsibilities within the Council, and to put forward his/her justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating policies of a particular political party or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups or individuals.”*

## **2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 The Council recognises the role of the media in helping the authority to fulfil its duty to maintain a dialogue and present information to its residents and stakeholders.

2.2 In order for the council to effectively present decisions, services and policies a professional and consistent approach to media relations is essential. Any publicity produced by the Council must reflect the approved policy of the Council and not the views of a particular political party.

2.3 This Media Protocol has been produced to:

- ◆ Clarify how Kettering Borough Council’s message will be communicated to the media.
- ◆ Identify who will communicate with the media
- ◆ Clarify the Local Government Publicity Code and to ensure that the Council’s media output is within the law

- ◆ To ensure that publicity and communications are politically impartial and reflect the corporate policy not personal opinions.

2.4 The following section deals with how the Council will interact with the media as a 'corporate body'. When doing so, members must only comment on facts and not personal opinions – the information in a later section (section 4) provides some guidance about how councillors may legitimately interact with the media as a political group member as apposed to a member of the council.

### **3. DEALING WITH THE MEDIA (THE COUNCIL)**

#### **The role of the communications team**

- 3.1 The communications team will provide the link between the council and the media.
- 3.2 All communications (from the council to the media and from the media to the council) will be coordinated through the communications team.
- 3.3 The communications team will coordinate all media enquiries and publicity and therefore has a significant impact on how the council and its services are viewed by the public.
- 3.4 Communicating with the media via the communications team benefits both the council and the media. The team will consider the best way to communicate with the media, anticipate problems and find the best ways to explain services and policies. In turn, the media has a one-call contact to get accurate and quick information about the council.
- 3.5 The communications team aims to raise the profile of Kettering Borough Council and promote the district by securing accurate and balanced media coverage. This will be done by responding quickly and accurately to media enquiries and by identifying all appropriate news stories and publicising them appropriately.
- 3.6 One section of the media will not be favoured over another.

#### **Press releases**

- 3.7 All press releases will be;
  - ◆ Prepared by Officers
  - ◆ Cleared by the responsible Head of Service
  - ◆ Signed-off by Senior Management Team
  - ◆ Contain a quote that is attributable to an officer or member
  - ◆ Wherever possible include a photograph or image.

3.8 The following protocol will be followed in relation to the provision of quotes,

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Officer Quote (if appropriate)</b>	<b>Member Quote (if appropriate)</b>
Policy Issues	Possible supporting quote	Yes
Operational Service Issues	Yes	Possible Supporting Quote
Legal Proceedings	Limited , in some cases	No
Statutory Officer Functions (including Civil Emergencies)	Yes	No
Election Administration	Returning Officer and his staff	No
Individual Staffing Matters	No	No

3.9 Officer quotes will ordinarily come from Heads of Service or the Senior Management Team. In responding to the media the use of “a council spokesperson” will be avoided wherever possible and the names of the officer or member will be used. On occasion, a quote may be provided by an Activity Manager if the subject is technical or service delivery based or from the appropriate regulatory body or other organisation e.g. Health and Safety Executive.

3.10 Member quotes will ordinarily come from the relevant Portfolio Holder or Chair (or Deputy) of a Council Committee. It may also be appropriate to offer the opportunity to provide a quote from the local ward member.

3.11 In order to respond promptly a deadline for clearing news releases will be given by the communications team. If a response is not provided within that timescale, it will be assumed that the content has been accepted and the news release may be issued after consultation with a Deputy Chief Executive.

3.12 All news releases will be available for members, staff and the public to view on the council’s website as soon as possible after issue. News releases will also be emailed to all members.

### **Speaking directly to the media**

3.13 The media have been provided with a list of contacts that they can use when required.

3.14 The media have been requested in the first instance to always come through the Communications Team. However, if they are experiencing difficulties doing so they can contact an individual officer on the list.

3.15 Where the media make direct contact with an officer (or member), the respective officer or member must inform the Communications team so that a log can be maintained.

- 3.16 It is recognised that on occasion, the media will want to directly approach individual members on matters of local importance. Members are advised that when providing information to the media they should come through the central Communications Team. Where such requests are outside normal working hours, any information provided should be restricted to official Council Policy only and should not be party political or involve the personalisation of issues in any way.
- 3.17 Any requests to take part in live media interviews should be communicated to the Communications Team. Council involvement can only take place when the discussion is about approved Council Policies;
- ◆ Officer involvement must be cleared by Senior Management Team,
  - ◆ Member involvement must be advised by Senior Management Team and should take the form of commenting only on the Councils approved policy position (and normally on issues relating to their specific roles).
  - ◆ Anyone representing the council (officer or member) shall present the facts about council decisions in the context in which they were taken. Personalisation of issues and/or personal image making must be avoided (see section 1.8)

3.18 The following table identifies the role of specific members:

The Mayor	The role of Mayor is non-party political. The Mayor may make statements relating to the day-to-day work of the civic team and may also be called upon to make statements on behalf of the district in connection with civic and ceremonial duties
Executive Members	Members of the Executive may comment on executive policy matters (in line with their portfolio's).
Scrutiny Chairs	The chairs of the relevant Scrutiny committees on scrutiny matters
Chairs of Decision Making Committees	The chair of a decision making committee, outside the function of the Executive e.g. Planning or Licensing may comment on behalf of the committee
Chair of Standards Committee	The chair of Standards Committee may comment on Standards issues.
Ward Member	May comment on issues of specific relevance to their ward.

### **Responding to media enquiries**

- 3.19 All requests should come through (and be coordinated by) the Communications Team
- 3.20 If requests are made directly to officers or members by the media, the Communications Team must be informed at the earliest opportunity. Direct requests for quotes or information from the media should be the exception rather than the norm. If this becomes the norm the Communications Team will remind the media of the correct protocol that they should be following.
- 3.21 Wherever possible, a 'same day' response will be provided to media enquiries – and certainly aim to respond within 24 hours. The Communications Team will

coordinate a response (including quotes) and will liaise with the relevant officer / member to clear the quote. If a response is not forthcoming within the deadline, an alternative source may be used or in exceptional cases the quote may be cleared by a Deputy Chief Executive for inclusion.

- 3.22 A response will not be given to any media enquiry that is prompted or provoked by anonymous 'sources close to the Council' or 'informed sources'.
- 3.23 Leaked information can seriously damage the council's reputation. Group Leaders will be encouraged to take responsibility for members any members who are found to leak information, directly or indirectly, to the media. Disclosure of confidential information is a breach of the Member Code of Conduct and a reference to the Standards will normally be made if there is sufficient evidence of a breach of the Code. The Management will deal with any issues where members of staff are found to have leaked information to the media. This is covered in the council's disciplinary procedure.

#### **Photo shoots, media events and press conferences**

- 3.24 Photo shoots, media events, including radio and television interviews and press conferences will be arranged by the relevant officers of the Council. If councillors identify an opportunity linked to a policy initiative and operational issue, then it should be discussed with the relevant senior officer as the first port of call. Senior officers will then be able to arrange the event with the relevant media contacts.
- 3.25 When photo shoots and events relate to initiatives in a ward, as apposed to being borough-wide, then the relevant ward Councillor/s will be invited to attend. In all cases the Group Leaders/Deputies will be advised of the event.
- 3.26 Councillors should be aware that photographs taken during the course of photo shoots and media events could be used for other communications activities whilst the councillor is still a member of the Council; for example, in the Council's various publications.
- 3.27 Filming or recording on Council land, and premises or of Council Assets and Council Staff shall only be done with the express permission of a member of the Senior Management Team. No Councillor shall grant such permission.

#### **4. DEALING WITH THE MEDIA (PARTY POLITICAL)**

- 4.1 It is important to state that nothing in this protocol applies to press releases or media contact that individual political parties may undertake.
- 4.2 Where political parties release information to the media it is important that the following rules are followed;
- ◆ It must be made clear that the release is from a political party and it is NOT a Council release
  - ◆ It should be in a format that is distinguishable from the Council

- ◆ No Council role or job titles should be used
- ◆ Parties or groups must also observe any embargo imposed by the Council. Party or group press releases should not be distributed ahead of those issued by the council.
- ◆ Party or group press releases will not be issued by the Council or on behalf of the Council.

## 5. ELECTIONS

- 5.1 The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians directly or indirectly involved in the election.
- 5.2 Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals and recommendations in a way that identifies them with individual members or groups.
- 5.3 During this period media office will respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries with answers that are factual and not party political.

## 6. SOCIAL NETWORKING

- 6.1 Blogging and social networking are becoming an increasingly popular and effective method of communication for councillors to engage with members of the public.
- 6.2 Use of blogs, Facebook and Twitter can be used to assist councillors carry out their political work. It must, however, be recognised that councillors will still be under an obligation to meet certain standards of conduct.
- 6.3 Councillors can take part in robust political debate and state their opinions provided they are not using Council IT equipment for personal or political blogging. The Code of Conduct will apply to online communications. The Code prohibits treating others with disrespect, bullying and bringing the Council into disrepute.
- 6.4 It is acceptable to use a blog to draw attention to local issues and to call the Council to account in a similar that you would in a public meeting. It must be noted that any communications ridiculing or attacking individuals, including officers, or making accusations about their personal competence or integrity, could amount to a breach of the Code.
- 6.5 In some circumstances Councillors may have “blurred identities” when using social media. If a Councillor uses their account to comment both as an individual and a Councillor it can be unclear to others in what capacity the Councillor is acting. This can have implications where views are taken as those of the organisation rather than personal opinion. It is extremely difficult to keep your identity as a councillor separate from your personal identity. It is the perception of the public reading the blog that must be considered. It is likely that they will consider that you are acting in the role of councillor. It is, therefore, safest to assume that any online activity can be linked to your official role. When using social media Councillors must, therefore, take great care to concentrate on facts not opinion and to avoid personalisation of issues. It is important that it is made clear that you do not act or claim to act, or give

the impression that you are acting as a representative of the Council, this can be done by avoiding the use of council titles such as “chair of” or “portfolio Holder for” . Of course councillors can make commentary and respond in their role as councillor in their capacity as the local ward councillor.

- 6.6 Councillors are advised to follow the guidance on Blogging and the use of Social Media issued by Standards for England and the I&DeA .
- 6.7 Officers shall not respond to members through social media. If officers communicate either in a personal or professional capacity through social networking sites they must ensure that they comply with the Staff Code of Conduct.

## **7. Freedom of Information**

- 7.1 On occasions, members may be asked for, or copied in on requests, information from the media (or other parties) under the Freedom of Information legislation.
- 7.2 If this happens, it is very important that the request is passed on to the Council’s Freedom of Information adviser at the earliest opportunity.
- 7.3 Members should not attempt to provide the information or deal with the request.
- 7.4 Freedom of information requests can only be made to the Council, individual councillors are not “authorities” for the purpose of either the Freedom of Information Act or Environmental Information Regulations.. All requests must be received by the Council and processed in accordance with the statutory procedures.

**Media and Publicity Protocol - Media Contact for members**

The contacts that Members should use to implement the protocol are;

**Communications Team:**

**1. SMT Support (first port of call)**

Kellie McIntyre  
Emma Atkins  
Claire Davies

} 01536 534206

Or can be e-mailed at [mediaenquiries@kettering.gov.uk](mailto:mediaenquiries@kettering.gov.uk)

Members can also contact the following officers should they have difficulty in contacting SMT Support

**2. Corporate Development (second port of call)**

Guy Holloway            01536 534243            [guyholloway@kettering.gov.uk](mailto:guyholloway@kettering.gov.uk)  
Deborah Snow            01536 534344            [deborahsnow@kettering.gov.uk](mailto:deborahsnow@kettering.gov.uk)