

# Media Protocol for Portfolio Holders and Scrutiny Chairs

1. The former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) Code of Recommended Practice on Publicity guides the way in which the Council approaches publicity. The code notes the importance of local accountability and that this requires understanding. It is acknowledged that councils need to explain their objectives and policies to their electors and ratepayers and use publicity to keep the public informed and encourage greater participation.

Key points of the code are:

- the Council shall not publish material which appears to be designed to promote a particular political party.
- the functions of the Council are discharged corporately and therefore resources cannot be used to promote individual councillor's activities
- in the interests of public accountability however it is appropriate to give publicity to an individual where that person represents the whole Council or a particular committee
- particular care must be taken in the period prior to elections which involve the Council and individual councillors should not be involved in publicity at this time
- the Council must ensure that publicity is cost-effective - the code acknowledges that there may be cases where higher costs are justified to achieve better presentation
- any publicity should be relevant to the functions of the Council and not duplicate those of other tiers of government
- publicity for the Council's objectives and policies should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts, explanation or both
- publicity relating to services should focus on factual information although promotional publicity for leisure and tourism is accepted
- publicity campaigns to promote use of services and facilities, to attract tourists or investment or to influence public behaviour in areas such as community safety are allowed
- information should be available to all who like access to it
- publicity should be targeted wherever possible

It is accepted that individual councillors will wish to promote the work that they do at a ward or party level. However, any such publicity must be arranged by those councillors or their party and does not form part of the functions of the Communications Service.

## **2. The Protocol**

To reflect the importance of local accountability councillors will be the main focal point of the Council's proactive media service. Where the media approaches the Council and the information requested by the media is operational then the relevant Media Contact officers or the Communication Service will comment. However, if it is a matter of policy then the appropriate councillor should be contacted.

## **3. Roles and Responsibilities - Working with the Communications Service**

### **3.1 Leader of the Council/Chair of the Executive**

Lead commentary on any major issues including the budget, emergency issues, major built environment or media campaigns. In the Leader's absence any of the Portfolio Holders may be approached.

### **3.2 Portfolio Holders**

Portfolio Holders will comment on issues arising from their area of responsibility.

### **3.3 Scrutiny Committees**

Media interests in Executive reports going first to scrutiny committee will normally be responded to by the relevant portfolio holder if the enquiry is about the content of the proposal or by the scrutiny committee chair if it is about the committee's role in considering and reporting on the proposal.

Media interest in items following a scrutiny committee will either be commented upon by the portfolio holder or by the scrutiny chair depending on whether the enquiry concerns the proposals to be considered by the Executive or the comments of the scrutiny committee.

If the scrutiny chair is not available then the deputy chair should be approached.

### **3.4 Planning Committee/ Licensing/Audit and Governance/Exeter Grants Panel**

The chair of the relevant committee will comment on issues arising from their committee or in their absence the deputy chair (where there is one). It is important to remember that it is not appropriate for councillors serving on these committees, if approached by the media, to comment on individual applications before they are determined.

### **3.5 Titles of Individuals and Meetings**

It is proposed that titles of committees/portfolios are abbreviated when for the sake of clarity and understanding it makes sense to do so. For example: The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee for Customer Focus could be abbreviated to Scrutiny Customer Focus Chair.

Portfolio Holders have chosen as their preferred description for media and publicity the term “Lead Councillor for”.

For all other committees the title Chair will be used.