



Section J

PROCEDURE RULES FOR PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

1. Publicity

- 1.1 Local Authorities are not allowed to undertake any activity that is intended to give support to any particular political party. Detailed guidance is published and available from the Head of Corporate Development. A Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity has been published by the Government under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1986. A copy of the Code can be viewed at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/>.
- 1.2 This becomes particularly sensitive at election times. The Code states that:

“During the period between the notice of an election and the election itself, local authorities should not publish any publicity on controversial issues or report views or proposals in such a way that identifies them with any individual members or groups of members. Publicity relating to individuals involved directly in the election should not be published by local authorities during this period unless expressly authorised by or under statute. It is permissible for local authorities to publish factual information which identifies the names, wards and parties of candidates at elections.”

2. Press and Public Relations

- 2.1 Media are required to contact the Council’s Press Office (Cobb PR) in the first instance. Where an Officer is approached direct, the Press Office must be contacted to deal with the matter. There are no exceptions to this. The Press Office will then contact the relevant Member of the Cabinet to discuss the format of the response. The Press Office will seek information from the relevant Officers and notify the relevant Head of Service (or Deputy Chief Executive or Chief Executive as appropriate). No response will be made in any form before contact has been made with the relevant Member of the Cabinet and all responses shall be co-ordinated and issued by the Press Office except as provided for in paragraph 2.2 below.
- 2.2 The Press Office may direct that factual enquiries of a low sensitive nature that do not require an opinion from a Councillor may be dealt with by other Officers. Such Officers must not give political comment nor voice personal opinions.

- 2.3 The Press Office will issue news releases and arrange for the relevant Councillors and/or Senior Officers, if appropriate, to participate in broadcasts as requested. The Leader of the Council and/or relevant Cabinet Member will be consulted on all news releases prior to issue. Officers may accept invitations to participate in a broadcast but this should only happen after liaison with the Press Office and the relevant Cabinet Member or Chairman. Where the matter is on the agenda of a forthcoming meeting or the subject of known political disagreement between the party groups, the Press Office will seek the consent of the relevant Cabinet Member or Chairman and also notify the Opposition Spokesperson.
- 2.4 Councillors, when making statements or responding to the media or participating in broadcasts, must be careful to make it clear in what capacity they are speaking. Either:-
- **As a Council Spokesperson** e.g. as the Leader of the Council or a Cabinet Member or Chairman of a particular Council body (speaking on behalf of the Council as a whole, in respect of matters which have Council approval).
 - **As a Political Spokesperson** (e.g. as the Leader of a particular party group or party spokesperson) advocating/defending the proposals of a political party in a particular matter. Thus a Councillor who appears on television as part of a campaign against a particular government policy, should not appear to be speaking on behalf of the Borough Council, but instead, for example, as Conservative or Liberal Democrat Group Leader or spokesperson.
 - **As a Ward or Local Councillor** speaking on behalf of local residents or in support of a particular interest group.
- 2.5 News releases should normally include a quote from the relevant Cabinet Member or Chairman. (An exception to this rule would include factual information given out at election time on electoral matters such as applying for postal votes and the situation of polling stations). Where the Council is balanced a quote must also be sought from the Opposition Spokesperson and be included in the Council's release. The Press Office must not be involved in the issue of news releases issued by any Party Group.
- 2.6 All Members of the Cabinet, relevant Chairmen and Opposition Spokespersons shall receive copies of news releases immediately following issue. In addition where a matter affects a particular Ward, the Ward Councillors shall be given a copy in the same time-frame.
- 2.7 Copies of news releases shall be available on the Council's website.