

**REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 21 OCTOBER 2009**  
**PORTFOLIO: OVERALL STRATEGY AND POLICY DIRECTION**  
**REPORT FROM HEAD OF INFORMATION & CUSTOMER SERVICES**  
**SUBJECT: MEDIA PROTOCOL**

**1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED**

- 1.1 To approve the revised and updated Media Protocol.

**2 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 To ensure that the Council handles contact with the media in a clear and consistent fashion, the media protocol has been reviewed and updated. It provides clear guidelines on how the Council should manage the relationship with the media and is attached at Appendix A. The protocol also covers partnerships and emergency situations.
- 2.2 It is proposed that the protocol applies to all staff, and to Members when asked for a statement on behalf of the Council.
- 2.3 If a Member is commenting to the media outside these parameters, the Communications Team is happy to provide advice and guidance if and when required.

**3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 3.1 No alternatives were considered as it is necessary to have a revised and update media protocol.

**4 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There is a risk to the Council's reputation if the relationship with the media is not managed in a positive way. It is important to work with the media to explain and publicise the work of the Council to the residents of the District.

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

SMT Lead Officer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Head of Information & Customer Services**

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**Background Papers:**

None

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If you would like this report in large print, braille or another language please contact 01702 546366.

## Contents

	Page
Introduction .....	3
General guidelines for Officers and Members.....	3
Communications Team Contact Details .....	3
Press Releases.....	3
Press releases on subjects where the Council wishes to communicate proactive message to its residents:.....	4
Statements to the press regarding potentially controversial, negative or high-profile issues or if the Council is asked to provide a reactive statement: .....	4
Press Release Procedures.....	4
Proactive and promotional press releases.....	4
Potentially controversial, negative or high-profile issues and reactive statements to the media.....	5
Photographs.....	5
Television and radio .....	5
Emergencies .....	5
Partnerships.....	6
Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) .....	6
Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) .....	7

### Introduction

Rochford District Council's Communications Team has two clear aims:

1. To gain the maximum amount of media coverage for the Council and its work to convey the right messages to our residents.
2. To respond efficiently, effectively and, when possible, to an agreed deadline expressing the Council's point of view when asked by the media about an issue.

The media protocol provides clear guidelines on how we should manage our relationship with the media including:

- Press releases
- Who should talk to the media
- Approvals for a press release and/or statement from the Council

### General guidelines for Officers and Members

Rochford District Council officers should **never** speak to the press either formally or informally. **The only exceptions are the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors or Heads of Service.** In exceptional circumstances other officers may be allowed to speak to the press **but only after agreement and briefing from the Corporate Communications Officer.**

All telephone calls from the media should be directed to the Communications Team. If the media contacts any member of staff they must inform the Communications Team immediately.

If the media contacts any Council Member asking for a statement on behalf of the Council, they should inform the Communications Team as soon as possible. Statements made on behalf of the Council can only be issued by the Leader or Chairman of the Council, Portfolio Holders, or Committee Chairmen.

If any Member receives an enquiry from the media, the Communications Team is happy to provide advice and guidance. Comments or statements regarding Council policy on behalf of the Council should be made in conjunction with the Council's Communications Team.

### Communications Team Contact Details

Email: **communications@rochford.gov.uk**

Tel: 01702 318014/ 01702 318139/ 07870863152

Tel: 01702 546366 ext: 3509/3806/3156/3221

### Press Releases

The Communications Team are responsible for all press releases and statements given to the media.

### Press releases on subjects where the Council wishes to communicate proactive message to its residents:

- Press releases must be accompanied by an agreed quote from the Leader or Chairman of the Council, relevant Portfolio Holder or Committee Chairman wherever possible – the only exception is during the purdah period in the run up to elections.
- The relevant Head of Service, Corporate Director or Chief Executive will sign-off the press release prior to issue.

### Statements to the press regarding potentially controversial, negative or high-profile issues or if the Council is asked to provide a reactive statement:

- Statements should always come from the Leader or Chairman of the Council or relevant Portfolio Holder, or Committee Chairman.
- Statements of this nature must be developed in conjunction with the relevant Head of Service, Corporate Director or Chief Executive before final approval for release by the Leader or Chairman of the Council, relevant Portfolio Holder, or Committee Chairman.

Please note these are general principles, at all points the Communications Team need to be kept informed.

## Press Release Procedures

### Proactive and promotional press releases

#### **Stage 1**

The Communications Team **must** be informed of the event/initiative/campaign by the relevant department. The Communications Team will liaise with the relevant officer to draft the release. Responsibility for checking factual accuracy lies with the officer/department involved.

#### **Stage 2**

Obtain quote from relevant Portfolio Holder, Committee Chairman, Leader or Chairman of the Council. A quote should accompany all press releases wherever possible – the only exception is during the purdah period in the run up to elections.

#### **Stage 3**

Press release should be checked and agreed for despatch by the relevant Head of Service, Corporate Director or Chief Executive.

#### **Stage 4**

Press release is issued to local (and where relevant regional or national media) by the Communications Team.

### **Potentially controversial, negative or high-profile issues and reactive statements to the media**

#### **Stage 1**

Communications Team are to be informed as soon as possible. The Communications Team will liaise with the relevant officer to draft the statement. Responsibility for checking factual accuracy lies with the officer/department involved.

#### **Stage 2**

Press release should then be checked by the relevant Head of Service, Corporate Director or Chief Executive and discussed with the Leader, Chairman, relevant Portfolio Holder or Committee Chairman. During this stage an appropriate quote from the Member will be discussed and the finalised release/statement agreed.

#### **Stage 3**

Press release is issued to local (and where relevant regional or national media) by the Communications Team.

### **Photographs**

The Communications Team encourages the use of photographs to accompany press releases. Please email any photographs to the Communications Team who will then forward them to the media. Any images that are sent to the Communications Team to accompany a press release **must** also have a consent form (available from the intranet). This is especially important in the case of those photographed who are under 16 – no photographs will be released without a consent form.

### **Television and radio**

Only the Leader and Chairman of the Council, Portfolio Holders, or Committee Chairmen, the Chief Executive, Corporate Director or Head of Service can be interviewed for radio and television as a spokesman for the Council.

However, understandably the demand for a spokesman for the Council from local, regional and national television and radio stations can be at short notice. In exceptional circumstances when there is no other person available then – and only if the Communications Team has obtained the express permission of the Chief Executive or Corporate Director – a senior officer who has been fully briefed, will be allowed to do an interview.

### **Emergencies**

This protocol for major events which involve the Council and one or more of the emergency services will only be needed in exceptional circumstances as the emergency services will nearly always take the lead in dealing with the media.

## Media protocol

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It is imperative that whoever is involved in the emergency situation notifies their Head of Service as soon as possible. The following people should also be alerted as soon as possible:-

- Leader of the Council
- Chief Executive
- Communications Team

The Communications Team will liaise with the press office of the relevant emergency service and ensure the Leader and the Chief Executive are fully briefed. They will then work with the relevant officers to draft a statement that will be issued to the media, **if requested**.

### Emergency Planning Officer Contact Details

Email: [peter.mckenzie@rochford.gov.uk](mailto:peter.mckenzie@rochford.gov.uk)

Tel: 01702 318132/07970835716

### Partnerships

Rochford District Council is part of several partnerships. The protocols here are provided as general guidance for the Communications Team in helping to prepare partnership releases.

The protocols should be agreed and managed by the partnerships themselves. Press releases or statements made using these protocols will not necessarily reflect the views of the Council.

### Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

Proactive and promotional press releases and potentially controversial, negative or high-profile issues and reactive statements to the media

#### **Stage 1**

The Communications Team will liaise with relevant LSP officer to draft the press release. Responsibility for checking factual accuracy lies with the LSP officer involved.

#### **Stage 2**

A quote from Chairman of the LSP will be obtained. A quote must accompany all press releases wherever possible. (If unavailable a quote will be obtained from Vice Chairman of the LSP).

### **Stage 3**

The press release will need to be agreed by the Chairman of the LSP – if this proves impossible final approval should be gained from the Vice Chairman of the LSP.

### **Stage 4**

Press release is issued to local (and where relevant regional or national media) by the Communications Team on behalf of the LSP.

### **LSP Officer Contact Details**

Email: **cheryl.milton-white@rochford.gov.uk**

Tel: 01702 318167/0784862056

### **Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP)**

The CDRP employs their own press officer, who is responsible for co-ordinating press releases on behalf of the CDRP.

The CDRP should inform the Communications Team of any press releases or statements being prepared, as well as keeping them informed about issues and developments happening within the CDRP.

### **CDRP Press Officer Contact Details**

Email: **alan.jones@rochford.gov.uk**

**alan.jones@essex.pnn.police**

Tel: 07724121456