

Brentwood Borough Council

Protocol for communications activities

Summary and purpose

This protocol exists to guide council officers' actions and decisions when arranging and delivering corporate communications activities. The protocol must be followed closely to ensure actions and decisions are consistent, clearly understandable and have approval of relevant elected members in promoting and defending the work of the council. Fairness is a fundamental principle, so the rules will be applied equally, regardless of which elected member is involved or the political group they belong to. This protocol applies in all forms of communications, including press releases, media appearances, public speaking opportunities, photography, social media, videos and digital communications.

Decisions on publication

On a day to day basis, members of the communications team will apply the protocol carefully. The Communications Manager will in consultation with relevant elected members; typically the leader, deputy leader or committee chairmen agree the form of any communication. Relevant Elected Member approval is required before any publication.

The CEO retains discretion to issue communications in the event of an emergency.

Proactive press releases

- Press releases issued by the Council will be written, coordinated and issued by the communications team and signed off by relevant senior officers and the relevant Committee Chair and/or The Leader, following consultation with appropriate officers
- In all cases, only the relevant Committee Chair (or officer in their absence) will be quoted in council press releases. This is because they are the recognised lead spokesperson for the council on that subject. In some cases, more than one relevant Committee Chair or officer will be quoted, but this will only be where necessary to complete the narrative required
- Local elected members and elected members not holding a role as Committee Chair, Deputy Chair, Deputy Leader or The Leader will not be quoted in council press releases. This is because they are not recognised lead spokespeople for the council on corporate matters which are usually the subject of press releases
- All council press releases, which quote a Committee Chair or the Leader, will include in the notes to editors' section at the end of the press release a list of relevant opposition/shadow councillors and their contact details. Political groups will name their councillors and advise the communications team of any changes if/when they are made
- All press releases that relate to a 'local matter' (as opposed to borough-wide matters) will include in the notes to editors an addition in the form of the name and contact details for the relevant local elected member (or members).
Examples of local matters include:

- opening a new, or renovating an existing, public facility or project for that area
- new social housing
- a local planning decision

Reactive comments provided to the media

- When the council is asked to provide a comment on a subject in a media story being prepared by a journalist, the communications team will coordinate the preparation and sign off that comment with relevant elected members.
- The default position is that only the relevant Committee Chair and/or the Leader (or officers in certain circumstances) will be quoted. This is because they are the recognised lead spokesperson for the council on that subject. In some cases (as appropriate), a comment will be offered in the name of a 'council spokesperson'. It is for the communication team to determine the most suitable approach in each individual case.
- Local elected members and members that are not the Committee Chair, Deputy Chair, Deputy Leader or Leader will not be quoted in these circumstances. This is because they are not recognised lead spokespeople for the council on corporate matters

Photography

- The communications team will use its discretion and judgement and will either take, or commission, a range of photography designed to meet the council's communications needs and the requirements of media organisations
- Any photography taken for the purposes of promoting the work of the council is open to any officers or members already involved in that work to appear in (if that type of photo is required). This includes local elected members where applicable
- In any large group photographs, key individuals will be named in any captions provided by the councils, namely Committee Chairs, Deputy Chairs, The Deputy Leader or The Leader or relevant partners
- Photographs taken by the council remain the property of the council and should not be used for any purpose other than that intended by the council on releasing it. Permission should be sought from the communications team should an alternative use be planned, including use by political groups of the council.

These principles will also be followed when dealing with media appearances, public speaking opportunities, using social media and recording and distributing video content.