

## Appendix F: Conventions For The Conduct Of Council Business

### ~~A – Political neutrality of council publicity Protocol on media relations and filming, recording and photography at council meetings~~

#### ~~1. News releases sent to the media~~

~~News releases may be used to publicise executive councillor decisions, new council policies or projects, major, sensitive or controversial issues or other initiatives.~~

~~All news releases should be issued proactively and in a timely way to capture media attention. A well-timed news release is more likely to engage reporters and to set the tone for positive media coverage. News releases issued before or immediately after a decision or event will be of more interest to reporters and therefore have greater impact.~~

~~News releases issued by the council should adhere to the following protocol:~~

- ~~1. Officers draft the news release to include a quote attributed to the appropriate executive councillor(s) or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee and director or head of service(s);~~

~~Note: Generally executive councillors will be quoted although the council's constitution also allows for news releases arising from scrutiny committee decisions and also regulatory committee decisions. In these instances the chair of the scrutiny committee or regulatory committee may be quoted and be consulted to approve the final draft. Directors or head of service quotes may be included in addition to, but not instead of, a councillor quote.~~

- ~~2. Consult corporate marketing if advice on content and format is needed;~~
- ~~3. Draft news release to include contact details for the appropriate officer, executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee and minority group spokesperson(s);~~
- ~~4. Draft must be agreed by head of service or director;~~
- ~~5. Draft must then be agreed by executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee;~~
- ~~6. Final version issued to media;~~
- ~~7. Final version sent to all councillors by email immediately after release;~~
- ~~8. Final version sent to corporate marketing for inclusion on council's website immediately after release.~~

~~Note: News releases publicising event programmes for the Corn Exchange do not require executive councillor agreement.~~

### ~~**2. Responding to media enquiries**~~

~~The media may make contact with officers on issues. Officers should give factual information and should refer the media to the executive councillor and minority group spokesperson(s) for opinion and further comment.~~

### **Request for interviews**

~~The media may approach officers for interview on a particular issue. The opportunity to take part in an interview should first be offered to the relevant executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee. If the councillor is not available officers may conduct the interview only after gaining director or head of service level permission to do so.~~

~~If an interview request is declined the media should be notified in good time. Saying “no comment” is not an acceptable response. The media must be provided with a written news statement on the issue as a minimum (see process below). Consult corporate marketing if further advice is needed.~~

### **News statements**

~~These are issued in response to media enquiries and may often address specific or sensitive issues requiring a quick reply in order to meet media deadlines. News statements issued by the council should adhere to the following protocol:~~

- ~~1. Officers draft news statement to include a quote attributed to the appropriate executive councillor(s) or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee and/ or director or head of service(s);~~
- ~~2. Consult corporate marketing if advice on content and format is needed;~~
- ~~3. Draft news statement to include contact details for the appropriate officer, executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee and minority group spokesperson(s);~~
- ~~4. Draft must be agreed by head of service or director;~~
- ~~5. Draft must then be agreed by executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee;~~
- ~~6. Final version issued to media;~~
- ~~7. Final version sent to corporate marketing for information.~~

~~*Note: Generally executive councillors will be quoted although the council’s constitution also allows for news statements arising from scrutiny committee decisions and also regulatory committee decisions. In these instances the chair of the scrutiny committee or regulatory committee may be quoted and be consulted to approve the final draft. Directors or head of service quotes may be included in addition to, but not instead of, a councillor quote.*~~

~~*If an executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee is unavailable to approve the news statement and there is a risk of the media deadline being missed the director and/ or head of service has discretion to have the quote attributed to themselves and to issue the news statement without approval from the relevant councillor.*~~

### **3. Letters to media organisations**

~~Occasionally it may be appropriate to send a letter to a media organisation for example to respond to an inaccurate report or to clarify the council’s position on a sensitive issue. Letters sent to media organisations should adhere to the following protocol:~~

- ~~1. Officers should discuss with corporate marketing the reasons for writing the letter;~~
- ~~2. Officers draft the letter and attribute it to the appropriate executive councillor(s) or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee and/ or director or head of service(s) including contact details;~~
- ~~3. Draft must be agreed by head of service or director;~~
- ~~4. Draft must then be agreed by executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee;~~
- ~~5. Final version issued to media;~~
- ~~6.1. Final version sent to corporate marketing for information.~~

#### **41. Party political publicity**

All news releases, news statements and letters to the media issued by the council must adhere to the code of recommended practice on local authority publicity. This means councillors must not produce party political publicity on council paper or using council facilities (including officer assistance). Publicity material must comply with the relevant restrictions on political publicity which are contained in section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986, as amended by section 27 of the Local Government Act 1988. This states councils shall not publish any material, which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect support for a political party. The Head of Legal Practice may be consulted for further advice.

#### **52. Publicity in the run-up to elections**

The council's employee code of conduct stresses that staff must be, and be seen to be, politically neutral at all times. In the run-up to an election it is essential that officers do not act in any way that could call into question their political neutrality, or give the impression that they are offering assistance to a political party in its election campaign.

The run-up to an election formally starts when the notice of election is published. The Head of Legal Practice will circulate detailed guidance to staff in good time before the notice of election to explain the publicity restrictions.