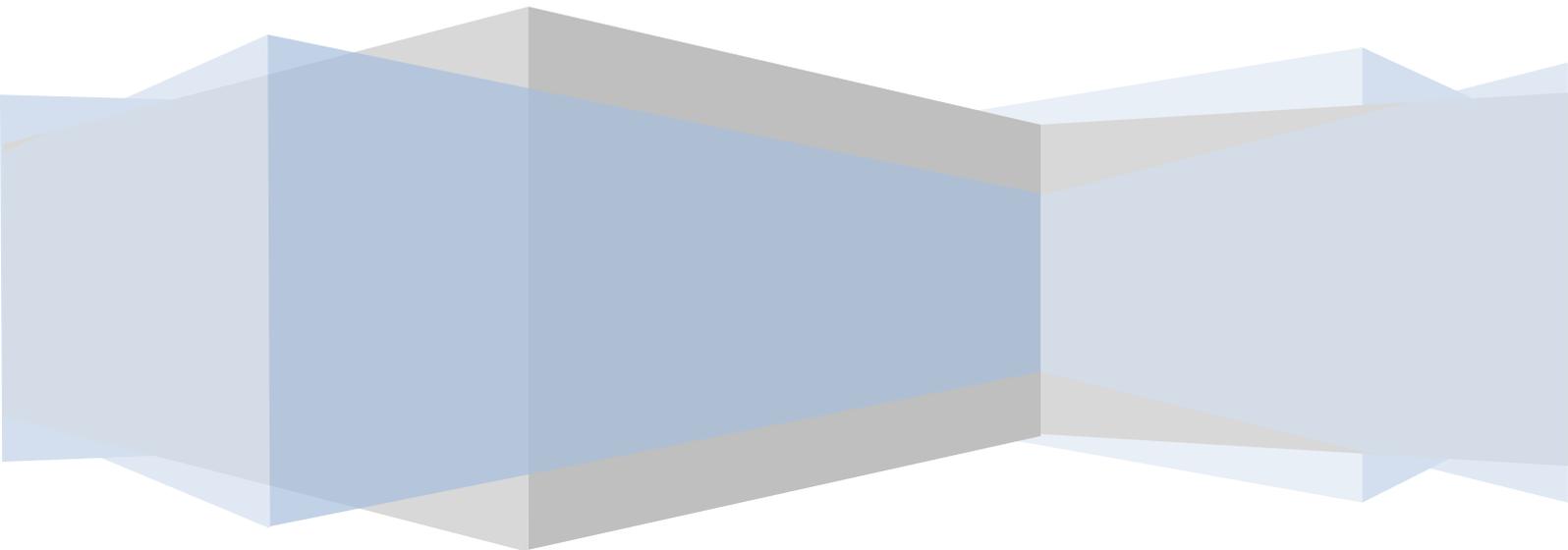


Carmarthenshire County Council

Press and Media Protocol

2015



Introduction:

The press and media are essential channels of communication for the Council. Stakeholders [residents, staff, Town and Community Councils and partner organisations] use them as the primary source of information about the Council and its services. Social media is also an increasingly popular way for residents to access information about the Council and its services, and to contact the Council.

This document has been produced to provide Members and Officers with information on the basic protocol for working with the media as well as clear guidance in their roles and responsibilities.

An effective press and media protocol will assist the Council in providing information, promoting its services and developing its image as an open and transparent organisation that is accountable to the local community. The Council will continue to promote a culture of openness and accessibility towards the media.

This protocol explains the principles that the Council adopts, whilst taking into account the national Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity in Wales (the Code). Local authorities are required to 'have regard to the provisions' of this Code in the way they approach communication.

The Code recognises the political nature of local government, and takes into account the fact that some local authority publicity will deal with issues which are controversial because of particular local circumstances, or because of a difference of view between political parties locally and nationally. However, the principles do not prohibit the publication of information on politically sensitive or controversial issues, nor stifle public debate. It sets out safeguards and ensures the proper use of public funds for publicity.

Principles and Objectives:

The Council is committed to effective communications so that residents of the county are well informed about council services, decisions and developments. The Press Office undertakes to maintain a full and steady flow of information to the media, and operate at all times within the Code. Aims are:

- To be open, honest and accurate in dealing with the media and to respond to enquiries within reporters' deadlines whenever possible, in the event it is not possible to provide an explanation.
- Maintain and raise public awareness of the services provided by the authority and the functions it performs.
- Advance and ongoing publicity on matters of public interest; and to provide public information.
- To give those affected by the Council's decisions, policies and priorities the information to understand them and how to participate in consultation and engagement when relevant

- To ensure the Welsh language is recognised when dealing with media requests.
- To promote and highlight the successes and achievements of the Council and its partners.
- To ensure a co-ordinated response from one single point of contact , the Press Office.
- To provide timely and accurate media responses.
- To ensure that statements and other material published on behalf of the Council (including on the Council's website) must not be party political.

Roles and responsibilities:

1. Press Office:

The Council's policy is to deal with all media enquiries and issues centrally through the Press Office in order to ensure that a consistent message is given through the media to the public. All officers who are approached by the media should refer them to the Press Office.

Councillors can deal with the media directly should they wish to do so. However, should they require support and advice it is available to them via the Press Office. Facts and information are available to them via the Democratic Services Unit.

All press releases and statements will be approved by the relevant Director and or Head of Service before being released. All quotes and statements will be attributed to a named Councillor or Officer. Press releases will include quotes from the appropriate Executive Board member and/or the appropriate Chief Officer when appropriate. Press statements will be made by the appropriate elected Member or the appropriate Chief Officer.

The principle of executive decision-making and accountability will be reflected in the Council's media arrangements. Decisions taken at Full Council and Executive Board, and the work of the other committees will be publicised when requested by the Chair of the relevant committee.

2. Council:

Where decisions at Council have cross party support and are publicised the Press Release will include quotes from all three Group Leaders.

Where decisions at Council have majority support the main objection or argument from the party in disagreement will be included to demonstrate the democratic debate.

3. Leader of Council and Executive Board:

The Leader and Executive Board Members will give media statements or be quoted in relation to their portfolios. The Leader or a Deputy Leader to be quoted in the absence of the relevant Executive Board Member. Interviews on Executive Board decisions will be given by the Leader, Deputy Leader or appropriate Executive Board member.

If an Executive Board Member chooses to respond publicly to a letter, feature or comment made in the media they can do so as an Executive Board Member. However, if their response is 'party political' it must be made by them directly and not via the Press Office.

4. Chair of Council:

The Chair of Council will be supported by the Press Office to promote his or her special role as ambassador for the Council. A regular press programme and photographs will be arranged for this purpose.

5. Chairs of Committees:

Committee Chairs, or in their absence Vice Chairs, to be quoted in press releases or statements concerning the work, recommendations or decisions of their committees. Task and finish groups are included.

Chairs, or Vice Chairs, to liaise with the Press Office to implement a regular publicity programme to help inform the public and promote the work of their committees.

6. Ward Councillors:

Ward councillors to be informed of any press releases or photoshoots directly relating to their area and given the opportunity to be involved. They will be quoted in press releases where they have had involvement in the subject matter and invited to photoshoots.

The Press Office would not issue press releases on behalf of ward councillors. However, should a ward councillor require information or advice the Press Office will be happy to assist.

7. Officers:

Appropriate senior officers to be quoted in press releases. Although senior officers would not generally comment to the media on Council decisions they could give interviews or comments on operational/technical matters.

Other, officers could give interviews on occasions where specialist or technical knowledge is needed, providing they are comfortable doing so and have had approval from the relevant Chief Officers.

Press releases:

All press releases will be issued through the Press Office. Editorial coverage will either be generated by issuing a Press Release, or the press/media contacting the Council regarding a story.

All press releases will be posted on the newsroom on the Council's website, and some promoted through social media channels including Facebook and Twitter.

All press releases will be of a factual nature and will contain nothing that could be construed as politically motivated or biased. They will not be used to promote political parties.

Decisions taken at Council, Executive Board, and the work of Council committees to be publicised when considered appropriate.

All press releases will include quotes from the appropriate Executive Board Member.. Quotes from local the member (s) will be always be included where they have involvement in the subject matter.

Media enquiries:

All media enquiries to be dealt with and issued by the Press Office. All statements will be attributed to the appropriate Executive Board Member, or officer. The term 'spokesman' will not be used.

'No comment' is not an acceptable response, unless it is absolutely unavoidable. It is preferable to give a holding comment if information is not available in time for a media deadline.

Officers should prioritise press enquiries in order to meet the required deadlines.

The Press Office will ensure the needs of the Welsh language media are catered for when dealing with media requests.

Enquiries of a political nature will be referred to the individual/s concerned and will not be dealt with by the Press Office. The Press Office will not issue any statements or responses of a political nature.

Social Media:

Social media will be used for the same reasons as traditional media and the same principles and protocols will apply.

There are a number of Council accounts for both Facebook and Twitter, there is also a Flickr account for photographs. All accounts should be fully bilingual.

The use of Social Media within Carmarthenshire County Council is an increasingly important method of communicating with customers whether residents, tourists or businesses and is a growing trend to all audiences.

Social Media has two defined roles within the council:

- Communication
- Customer Service

A specific social media strategy is in place to ensure these methods of communicating are delivered consistently throughout the Council and that social media is used to its full potential. It will also be used to engage and consult directly with the public and increasingly it is being used to deal with enquiries from members of the public.

The Ombudsman has issued advice for councillors on the use of social media in his March 2015 Guidance on [The Code of Conduct for Members](#). The WLGA has also produced useful guidance on social media entitled [“Social Media: A Guide for Councillors”](#). The guidance aims to provide a clearer idea about how to use social media, the possible pitfalls and how to avoid them.

A Best Practice Guide for social media is available from the web editor.

Emergency information:

In the event of an emergency the online Newsroom will be the primary source of information, backed up by Twitter and Facebook. Members of the public, councillors and staff will be directed there for updated information.

Press releases and links will also be sent to traditional media.

Events:

Democratic Services is responsible for ensuring all appropriate people are invited to events or official visits. The Protocol for Communication with Members gives guidance on keeping local members informed, and where appropriate, involved.

The Press Office should be contacted by the event organiser to provide a photographer and/or PR support. The Press Office also helps organise certain events such as school openings. Local members will be informed of these and invited to attend.

Press Conferences:

Press Conferences will be called for major incidents or important issues which are of public interest. They can be either proactive or reactive, and will be arranged by the Press Office who will ensure that the appropriate Chief Officer/s and elected Member/s are in attendance.

Photographs:

Photographs are all booked and arranged through the Press Office. Photographs are usually taken by the Council staff photographer and used in the local media; on the internet, on Facebook, in publications such as Carmarthenshire News or other corporate documents. Most are stored on Flickr and are available for public sale.

The majority of photographs are of staff members promoting day to day services or ongoing developments. More high profile photoshoots will include the appropriate Executive Board

Member and/or Chief Officers. Local members will be informed of these photoshoots and invited to attend.

Corporate Advertising:

The advertising function is managed centrally by Communications and all requests for promotional advertising and statutory advertising, notices and vacancies should be made to them. This is to ensure all money spent on advertising is effective and value for money, and helps to contain corporate spend. It also ensures that there is consistency in the style and content of advertisements, that they are in line with corporate guidelines regarding branding and the bilingual policy, it allows the Council to more effectively manage its use of advertising and obtain greater discounts. Operating via this method saves the Council a considerable amount of money.

Each request to advertise is considered by Communications based on criteria including value for money, whether or not it is appropriate to advertise, what means of advertising is the most appropriate, timeliness, whether evaluation and monitoring is in place, whether evidence of effectiveness is available, or whether promotion could be achieved via another method such as press or web.

According to the Code, any decision to take advertising space in a publication produced by a voluntary, industrial or commercial organisation should only be made on the grounds it provides an effective and efficient means of securing the desired publicity.

Advertising includes national, local, specialised print and broadcast media, banners and posters, both on vehicles, buildings and bus shelters and web.

Carmarthenshire News:

Carmarthenshire News is a quarterly Local Service Board publication, of which the Council is one of six partners. The others are Hywel Dda Health Board, Coleg Sir Gar, Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, CAVs, and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. It is produced and managed by the Press and Communications Office. Design and advertising is carried out by Local World. (N.B. Any changes to Carmarthenshire News have to be approved by all partners.)

Carmarthenshire News is delivered to every household in Carmarthenshire, and is also distributed at a number of public buildings. All editions of Carmarthenshire News are published on the online newsroom.

Content reflects the key priorities of the Council such as the Modernising Education Programme and the budget. Articles should be aimed at providing useful and/or essential information to residents. No articles should be of a party political nature or promote a political party.

Monitoring:

A record is kept of all press releases and enquiries, and media coverage, including online press articles. Social media sites are also monitored.

Media training:

Media training will be provided to members of the Executive Board, Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs, the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and the Chair of Council.

The Executive Board will be given relevant support and advice to enable them to play a proactive role in presenting issues to the media, explaining their work and giving interviews. Support will also be provided to Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs, the Leader and Deputy Leader of the opposition party.

Advice will be available from the Press Office to local members in promoting local issues through the media and dealing with media enquiries.

Social media training will also be made available to all Councillors in order to support them in communicating effectively to their electorate.

Elections:

The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. However, it is acceptable for the authority to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political. Members holding key political positions should be able to comment in an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the authority's control. Proactive events arranged in this period should not involve members likely to be standing for election.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT: Debbie Williams, Press Manager, 01267 224037, e-mail DeAWilliams@carmarthenshire.gov.uk