



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council Communications Protocol

Constitution Working Group

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I. Introduction

1.1 West Oxfordshire District Council is committed to communicating with the public, keeping residents, businesses and partners informed, and involving them in the process of local decision making. Our communications activity should be guided by best practice and must respond to the requirements of the law on local government publicity.

Good communication and engagement creates a positive experience for those who interact with the Council. It helps residents, businesses, employees, partners, and the media understand the Council's objectives, values, services, challenges and achievements. It also helps protect and improve the reputation of the Council and the work of local authorities more generally.

Without clear protocols, the reputation of West Oxfordshire District Council is vulnerable. These protocols form part of the Code of Conduct for employees and Elected Members. They have been developed to support and govern communications and marketing activity within the Council, including press relations. They are based on protocols seen across the country with other local authorities.

1.2 The objectives of the protocols and principles are:

- To establish, promote and embed effective working protocols to govern and guide the way West Oxfordshire District Council communicates and engages with a range of stakeholders
- Present a professional, accurate, co-ordinated and consistent approach that is resident centric and supports our audiences and services
- Provide guidance for all employees and Members to mitigate risk and promote council services and activity
- Ensure that all council communications is delivered in line with laws and best practice

1.3 The Communications and Marketing Team aims to provide guidance and leadership on communications and marketing activity. It will take responsibility for promoting and monitoring the communications protocols and principles, including highlighting instances when the protocols have not been observed and provide evidence to monitor the impact, which may include supporting any resulting investigation or disciplinary procedure.

1.4 The Council's Monitoring Officer will oversee the communications protocols and principles and will provide advice and guidance to The Communications and Marketing Team and Elected Members.

2. Scope

2.1 These protocols apply to any Council communication, including:

- Published press releases and statements to the media
- Digital content including web copy, visual/ audio content and social media
- Any communication or document prepared by West Oxfordshire District Council services for public consumption, including advertising, leaflets, newsletters, reports, posters, banners, flyers or websites
- Any document or publicity with which West Oxfordshire District Council is associated with, even if the publication is produced in partnership or is a joint document then the communications protocols and brand guidelines still apply
- Any publication or work prepared for the public domain, by consultants or contractors when working on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council
- Internal communications to employees, Elected Members and partners

2.2 The protocols apply to everyone who works for West Oxfordshire District Council in any capacity, or who represent the organisation in some way, including:

- All Elected Members
- All employees working on behalf of the council, including those directly employed by the council, employed by Publica, employed by another council and working on behalf of this council, an agency, freelance or consultant basis
- Volunteers working with Council service teams
- Partners, providers and suppliers (including contracted or commissioned services) that may want to refer to West Oxfordshire District Council in publicity material.

2.3 Employees should refer to the communications and marketing pages on the staff portal for other communication resources which include brand guidelines, style guide and templates.

3. Legal framework

3.1 A legal framework binds publicity or public statements issued by West Oxfordshire District Council. The Council must operate within the Local Government Act (1986), [The Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity](#) and the [Explanatory Memorandum](#) to the Code. This section of the protocol covers the aspects of how this legal framework impacts on council communications and sets out the principles of all council communications.

3.2 The Code is grouped into seven principles for local authorities to follow. A council's publicity should:

- be lawful
- be cost-effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to equality and diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

3.4 The Code covers the full range of publicity, including where it is used to comment on controversial issues, or where there are arguments for or against the views or policies of the Council. The Code states that when communicating around these issues the Council “should seek to present the different positions in relation to the issue in question in a fair manner”.

3.5 Where the term ‘publicity’ is used it refers to all corporate council communications across the various channels used by the council to communicate including the local press, social media, newsletters and leaflets. The definition is “any communication in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public”.

3.6 The Code states that where publicity is used to comment on the policies of central government, other local authorities or other public bodies, it should be ‘objective, balanced, informative and accurate’. It should aim to set out the reasons for the Council’s views and “Such publicity may set out the local authority’s views and reasons for holding those views, but should avoid anything likely to be perceived by readers as constituting a political statement, or being a commentary on contentious areas of public policy”. Political parties can choose to issue their own communications stating their political views on such issues if they so wish but it should be clear it is the view of a political party and not the Council as an organisation.

3.7 The attribution of marketing, promotional and advertising materials that reach the public unsolicited should be clearly laid out. It should be clear that the Council is responsible for the event or service, so the correct inclusion of the Council’s corporate branding as described in the brand strategy is a prerequisite.

3.8 Publicity campaigns are appropriate in most circumstances. They can form part of consultation processes where local views are being sought, promote the effective and efficient use of local services and facilities, or influence public behaviour or attitudes on such matters as health, safety, crime prevention or equal opportunities. Publicity campaigns can also provide an appropriate means of ensuring that the local community is properly informed about a matter relating to a function of the local authority and about the Council’s policies in relation to that function and the reasons for them. However, the Code states, “Local authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy”. The

Council Communications and Marketing Team may communicate decisions made by the Council as part of the formal democratic process which form a particular view on a question of policy as long as the communications follows the principles of the Code.

3.9 When the Council is negotiating a commercial transaction or conducting enforcement activity, employees or Elected Members will not weaken the Council's position by disclosing it publicly or to the press. To do so would compromise a number of statutory obligations including the duty of care we have to council tax payers who rightly expect the Council to protect its financial position. In these circumstances only the Communications and Marketing Team, working with Legal Services, will communicate with the press. If this is not observed, it may result in disciplinary action in the case of employees, and a Code of Conduct investigation in the case of Elected Members.

3.10 Case law has established that the public interest, and what interests the public, is not the same thing. The Council has a duty to act in the public interest. The press may often be concerned with what interests the public. When these are in conflict, the Council will always act in the public interest.

3.11 There is a general prohibition on local authorities producing "party political publicity". Council publicity should never attack or appear to undermine generally accepted moral standards. Section 2 of the Local Government Act (1988) prohibits local authorities publishing any material which in whole, or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party. Also, councils should never use advertising as a means of giving financial support to any publication that could be associated with a political party. Publicity should reflect the tradition of a politically impartial service, and the fact that local authority staff are expected to serve the authority as a whole, whatever its composition from time to time.

3.12 Publicity may include information about the Administration's proposals, decisions and recommendations where it is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and whilst it may acknowledge the part played by individual Members as holders of particular positions in the Council, personalisation of issues or personal image making should be avoided.

3.13 Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual Councillor which are relevant to her/his position and responsibilities within the Council, and to put forward her/his justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating policies of those of a particular political party or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups or individuals.

3.14 The Communications and Marketing team will seek legal clearance where appropriate for any issues that may be contentious, subject to a legal dispute, or part of a regulatory

process.

4. Protocols for Members

4.1 It is important Elected Members are supported and confident in communicating Council processes, priorities, services and decisions. However, there is often a need for Elected Members to distinguish between when they represent West Oxfordshire District Council in the press, on social media, and in public or when they are representing their personal views, those of their political group, or those of other groups of which they are members.

Members should also have regard to the [Member Code of Conduct](#), the [Member/ Officer Protocol](#) and the other elements of the [Council Constitution](#).

Members should be aware of the legal framework and political dimension relating to communication as covered in section 3 of this document.

Working with the media

4.2 To assist Members and to provide the most effective communications, protect the organisations reputation and support compliance with the protocol on use of council resources and the Member Code of Conduct, a Member should not issue a press release, statement, letter for publication, or organise a press conference on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council, without notifying the Communications and Marketing Team in advance and obtaining their agreement.

Members can independently issue communications of a political nature and political groups will have their own arrangements for issuing communications on behalf of their group.

Members wishing to make comment as ward councillors are not required to notify the Communications and Marketing Team in advance, but should ensure it is clear they are making such comment in a personal capacity and should be careful not to be seen as spokespeople for the organisation. If a Member is uncertain they should contact the Communications and Marketing Team for guidance.

4.3 If a Member is contacted directly by a local or national journalist and asked to speak on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council Council, they should refer the journalist to the Communications and Marketing Team and should not respond to the journalist on behalf of the organisation, even in an 'off the record' capacity. For specific issues and issues relating to Members' wards, Members are able to refer to the Communications and Marketing Team for support. This helps ensure consistency and accuracy.

4.4 Elected Members have obligations both individually and collectively. If they breach the requirements of the Members Code of Conduct – for example by 'leaking' confidential

information to the press or by bringing the Council into disrepute – this may lead to referral to the Council’s Monitoring Officer, who will deal with the complaint.

Working with outside bodies

4.5 Appointees to outside bodies should refer to the body’s own communications protocols. Statements or queries about West Oxfordshire District Council’s approach to the outside body should be directed to the appropriate Executive Member, or in some cases a Member ‘champion’ or a Councillor in a formally appointed role. If an appointee is asked to make a statement, or wishes to do so proactively, they should first engage the Communications and Marketing Team.

When acting on behalf of other organisations, Councillors should give thought to the fact that comments made by them will reflect on West Oxfordshire District Council and should maintain the responsibility to protect the reputation of the Council.

Internal communications

4.6 If Members wish to share a message with staff or across the organisation they should approach the Communications and Marketing Team who will be able to support with sharing the message. Members should not directly message the whole organisation or groups of staff (Publica or council employees) without consent from the Communications and Marketing Team or the Chief Executive or lead officer for a partner organisation.

Use of Council materials in personal or political capacity

4.7 Members are encouraged to make use of Council imagery, videos or other materials in a personal or councillor capacity to help inform and communicate with residents and build engagement. This could include sharing council social media posts on their own channels or in those of local community groups.

4.8 However, Members should not make use of Council imagery, videos or other materials as part of political materials or use it in a way that is intended to influence people to a particular political point of view. This includes any materials produced by employees or published by the Council.

4.9 Elected Members should not ask employees to take any part in producing political materials. In the context of this protocol this may mean asking an officer to take a photo, arranging a politically motivated event or providing material that could be used for political material.

4.10 When communicating for political or personal purposes, Councillors should not use Council email addresses or any other Council property. Council emails and resources should only be used for Council business in the role of a councillor.

Social media

4.11 Elected Members should refer to the [Social Media Guidance for Councillors](#) in the Council's constitution and should not use West Oxfordshire District Council social media channels to make political comments. This includes commenting on Council social media posts either using a personal account or any other account owned or managed by the Councillor.

Use of campaign materials during council business

4.12 Elected Members will at times be campaigning for their political party, either for elections for West Oxfordshire District Council, or for other bodies such as Government. To maintain the objectivity of the Council, Councillors should avoid displaying campaign materials in official meetings or in places/ activity which may compromise officer neutrality such as attending a meeting with partners as a council representative alongside officers.

5. Protocols for employees

5.1 These guidelines provide the protocols and principles for employees across the organisation and sets out their role in regards to managing corporate communications. Individuals and service areas should seek advice from the Communications and Marketing Team on any of the topics below if further clarity is required.

Working with the media

5.2 Service areas should notify the Communications and Marketing Team in advance of positive or negative issues that may be of future press interest. Statements or media releases can be prepared by the Communications and Marketing team in advance of enquiries, to help protect the reputation of the service and the organisation.

5.3 Employees writing reports for council meetings will inform the Communications and Marketing Team of potential news items or matters which may attract negative or positive publicity, as early as possible. The Communications and Marketing Team will likewise ensure that it is aware of events and issues and will keep up to date with pipeline reports in the Forward Plans to identify any potential issues so that they can be dealt with proactively.

5.4 Employees of West Oxfordshire District Council will often be asked by the Communications and Marketing Team to respond as quickly as possible to media requests for interviews or background operational information, providing the employee with a deadline. This request will be in the form of an email and be followed up with a phone call. Those asked by the Communications and Marketing Team to assist in responding to press enquiries should do so as quickly as possible, so that press deadlines are met and to help support the reputation of the service and the Council.

5.5 All approaches by the press should be directed to the Communications and Marketing Team. No employees should respond to a journalist's enquiry or provide information

outside of the Communications and Marketing Team. If an employee is contacted directly by a local or national journalist, the protocol is:

- Advise the journalist to contact the Communications and Marketing Team in the first instance by email
- Take the name of the journalist, the publication they represent and their telephone number. Notify the Communications and Marketing Team and provide the journalist's contact details

The Communications and Marketing team will follow up with the journalist directly and identify the most suitable person to respond to the request.

Social media

5.6 The employee code of conduct applies both online and offline. An employee must not bring the Council into disrepute via their own social media activity (either as part of or outside of work). Failure to adhere to the code of conduct may result in disciplinary procedures.

5.7 No individual or service area may undertake a social media account as representing a service area or representing as West Oxfordshire District Council, without prior agreement from the Communications and Marketing Team.

5.8 Employees of the Council may be asked by the Communications and Marketing Team to respond quickly to social media queries. Those asked to assist in responding to social media enquiries should do so as quickly as possible, to help support the reputation of the service and the organisation. The request will be in the form of an email and be followed up with a phone call.

5.9 Usage of corporate social media accounts will be monitored by the Communications and Marketing Team. Any employee's access to platforms or services may be suspended as part of a performance management or disciplinary process. Reference is made to the employee code of conduct, which also applies to online activity.

Websites

5.10 The Communications and Marketing Team will work in conjunction with the ICT Team to manage the websites from a functional perspective but services areas are responsible for managing the content relating to their area.

5.11 All content should adhere to the brand guidelines and style guide. All content and copy should be in Plain English and avoid the use of jargon and acronyms. All images should be cleared with the Communications and Marketing Team and if possible, be locally relevant.

5.12 All content must adhere to accessibility laws. The design of the website is built around the recognised Government standard to meet accessibility guidelines and the Communications and Marketing Team regularly review content for accessibility. The Council is also regularly audited by the Government Digital Service to ensure we are meeting the legal requirements. Service areas are responsible for ensuring any content they wish to publish is in line with accessibility guidelines.

5.13 Services will be responsible for checking the accuracy and relevance of their web pages every month to ensure content is current and correct. The Communications and Marketing Team are responsible for ensuring all web content is useful and usable.

5.14 When necessary, and with support from the Communications and Marketing Team, services may produce dedicated websites to help support a sub-brand, service or business outcomes. A clear business case and objectives should be set when working with the Communications and Marketing Team to decide on potential return and the level of investment of funding and officer time.

Internal Communications

5.15 The Communications and Marketing Team will be responsible for identifying key audiences and circulating information to the wider organisation. The Communications and Marketing Team will also help all services include key council messages in communications internally.

5.16 If staff have a message they wish to share with staff they should approach the Communications and Marketing Team for advice on how that message should be shared.

6. Protocols for corporate communications

6.1 Corporate communications is managed by the Communications and Marketing Team and encompasses materials issued on behalf of the council across a wide range of channels including press, social media, newsletters and print media.

6.2 Adherence to the protocol will ensure consistency of standards, accuracy of information and appropriate Elected Member and officer input with a view to protecting and enhancing the reputation of the Council so that it is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner.

6.3 The Communications and Marketing Team provides advice and support to all services and Elected Members. Its main roles are to manage and maintain relationships and reputation, as well as to promote pro-active publicity on Council policy, local authority partnerships, paid for services, local initiatives/achievements and other issues affecting the Council and the district.

6.4 The Communications and Marketing Team communicate on behalf of the organisation. As part of the Council's Constitution, an Executive is formed that sets the strategic direction and priorities for the Council and therefore the corporate communications will largely communicate the decision-making, strategic direction and views of that Executive and its Elected Members in their formal role along with Council and committee decisions. It does not constitute 'political' communications to communicate the views and activity of the Executive regardless of whether or not the members are all of one political party, and it is important to distinguish between the political allegiances of an administration and their activity in a formal council role - which is the focus of corporate communications. The communications should however, not fall foul of the legal framework set out in Section 3 of this protocol and the Communications and Marketing Team can not provide any support to Executive Members in a political capacity.

Spokespeople for the Council

6.5 The following roles will act as spokespeople for the Council on activity conducted by the Council or in response to media enquiries:

- The Leader of the Council - on combined portfolio and/or high profile issues
- Executive Member – on subjects relevant to their portfolio including policy, decision making and council activity
- The Chairman of the Council - on civic matters
- Chairman of any committee – on the business of the committee where it is not appropriate for the relevant Executive Member to respond
- Individual Members of the Council – may express a personal view but should not speak on behalf of the Council other than as above. If they are making representations on behalf of constituents or communities they should make clear that this is the case.

Where an Executive Member may not be available to take part in communications regarding their portfolio, the Leader of the Council, or another Executive Member may step in.

6.6 Where the relevant Member is not available to take part in communications, employees may act as spokespeople in their place. This will first be offered to senior employees such as the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer or Section 151 Officer.

6.7 Elected Members may delegate to an officer to act as a spokesperson where the officer may be better placed to speak on a topic. This would require the consent of the officer to act in that capacity and the Communications and Marketing Team would provide support.

Media releases

6.8 The Council values the press as one of its key partners in communication and aims to forge strong professional links with local, regional, and national media. It is committed to being transparent and maintaining a positive working relationship with the media and respects the right of the media to report on any given topic.

Positive press coverage supports the reputation of the Council. When issuing proactive media, all content will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted, and a central record will be maintained. All releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of the Council, contain relevant facts, and include an approved quotation from the appropriate councillor. This will in most cases be the relevant Executive Member.

6.9 All official Council news/press releases will be placed on the Council's website within one working day of issue wherever possible.

6.10 The Communications and Marketing Team will consider the timing of releases carefully with each case being decided on its merits. Issuing press releases when, or just after, meeting papers are published can help the Council drive the narrative of an issue from an early stage, or it may be preferable to issue press releases after meetings.

6.11 Should the media publish / broadcast an inaccuracy relating to Council business, policy or process, a quick decision will be taken on any action necessary to correct it. The issue will be discussed with the appropriate senior officer and a plan of action agreed. It should be noted that in the case of minor inaccuracies which have little or no impact on the message being conveyed, it can sometimes be counterproductive to complain. Each case must be judged individually.

6.12 The Council will publish media releases relating to Council legal and enforcement activity once it is concluded to demonstrate the Council's action and to help deter people from breaking the law. In the case of these releases, the content will be led and signed off by the relevant specialist officers and will follow a different format to ensure they present the legally correct wording in context.

Media enquiries

6.13 The Communications and Marketing Team receives a significant number of enquiries from local, national, and international TV, radio, newspaper and news website organisations. All media enquiries should be referred to the Communications and Marketing Team in the first instance. This enables the service to make a judgement about whether an enquiry should be answered and by whom. Sometimes it is not in the best interest of the organisation to respond. If a response is required it can often be handled with a written statement prepared by the Communications and Marketing Team in conjunction with relevant employees or a statement may come from a relevant Executive Member if it is of strategic importance.

6.14 Responding to media enquiries can be time-consuming and often, responses are requested within a short timeframe. The Communications Team will manage these requests and establish realistic response times in conjunction with employees, Members and the

media organisations concerned. At all times, the Communications and Marketing Team will seek to protect and enhance the Council's reputation.

6.15 When an inquiry is received, the Communications and Marketing Team will ask the most appropriate officer for the information required and formulate a response. The normal response will be attributed to an 'WODC spokesperson' or relevant Executive Member if they wish, however, there may be occasions when a deadline must be met, and an 'WODC spokesperson' will be quoted. The response will be approved by the relevant Service Head and a Senior Leadership officer (Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer)

6.16 Occasionally, requests for interviews are received from media organisations. Defined spokespeople will be asked by the Communications and Marketing Team if they wish to be interviewed, and a pre-interview briefing can be supplied on request. Media training will be offered to all Executive Members and senior officers to assist with this.

6.17 The Communications and Marketing Team will make every effort to ensure that employees and Elected Members are informed before they are exposed to significant issues through the media. However, in an increasingly fast and pervasive communications environment, particularly given the speed and ease of dissemination on social media this will not always be possible.

6.18 In the event that the media requests a comment on an open investigation either being conducted by the Council, or by a partner, the Communications and Marketing Team will seek guidance from the relevant specialist team or partner organisation to ensure any Council response (or other communication) does not compromise the investigation while still adhering with the principle of being open and transparent.

Social media

6.18 The Council has several active social media channels which are used to promote operational matters, and strategic priorities which have been agreed by the Administration. Given research is showing more and more residents are relying on social media it is important that the council proactively engages on these channels

6.19 Where the Council issues a press release the Communications and Marketing Team may look to develop social media content to sit alongside and compliment those releases. The Elected Member(s) quoted in the press release may be included in the content.

6.20 Social media calls for a different approach to content to keep it engaging to audiences. As such, social media content will include a range of Elected Members, employees, partners and residents. The Communications and Marketing Team will use their professional judgement to ensure content complies with the other relevant points in this protocol.

6.21 The Communications and Marketing Team will manage comments and feedback on the council social media accounts in line with the approach below. This is published on the accounts where possible:

“To protect your privacy, we may delete posts that contain personal data. We strongly advise you NOT to publish any personal data. If you need to send us these details, please email [correct email provided].

“We do not accept obscenities, bullying, insults, trolling, misinformation, fake news or political comments. We will also not tolerate discrimination or unfair treatment on the basis of certain personal characteristics as set out in law. We reserve the right to remove any posts containing any of this material on our page. We also reserve the right to block any individuals who post the content.”

Photos and Video

6.22 Photo and video are crucial to providing engaging content for residents. It is important that the right Elected Members and employees are included in images/ videos so it is clear to residents who is responsible/ associated with the communications being issued.

6.23 When a photo is taken as part of communications around a Council decision or policy, the relevant Councillor spokesperson will be the key focus of the image/ video. This can also include key employees who have/ will be delivering the work in question. Other Elected Members may be included in the photo/ video if the topic of the photo affects their ward and they have taken an active/ official role in the topic being communicated. However, it is often challenging to organise a time/ place for everyone involved to be included. In this case the Executive Member will be included along with whoever else is available. All efforts will be made to be inclusive.

Communications during emergencies

6.24 There will be instances where the Council is required to respond to civil emergencies. This will either be as a Category 1 responder in a formal civil emergency/ major incident or in reaction to events that do not trigger a formal response but do have a large impact on the district, residents and businesses. In either scenario The Communications and Marketing Team will work to the separate communications protocol set out in the Council’s Emergency Response Guide and in line with national best practice and laws around emergency response.

7. Communications around elections

7.1 Communications during the run-up to elections may be particularly sensitive and there are restrictions contained with the [Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity](#). To ensure the continued political impartiality of West Oxfordshire District Council and its employees, the restrictions on communications apply to District Council elections and also to national, County Council and PCC elections.

7.2 The period of restriction in question relates to the day when formal notice of a local or national election is given, up to and including the day of the election – this is known as the pre-election period (formerly known as ‘purdah’). Corporate communications activity will continue as normal until the pre-election period starts and will recommence the day following the election.

7.3 Any local authority is prohibited from publishing any material that appears to be designed to affect support, positively or negatively, for a political party. Careful consideration should be given to the style, content, timing of material and the likely effect it will have on the audience. Material is prohibited if:

- It refers to a political party of a person identified with a political party
- It promotes or opposes a point of view on a question of political debate or controversy
- It supports a view or issue identifiable as the view of one political party and not of another
- It identifies with individual Elected Members or groups of Members
- It is part of a campaign associated with a political view
- It contains quotes from politicians outside of the Council, such as members of parliament, who are clearly identified as part of a political party.

7.4 However, even during the run up to a local or national election, communications and marketing can continue as follows:

- It is acceptable for the Communications and Marketing Team, on behalf of the Council, to distribute press releases, social media content, newsletters, etc provided the content is factual and not party political. This can include corporate narrative that was used before the pre-election period
- Press releases can be issued but can not quote Elected Members during this period. senior officers will instead be quoted.
- It is admissible for Elected Members of the Council holding key positions 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.
- It is admissible for the Chair of the Council to be included in communications regarding civic events and activities

7.5 All these restrictions apply to other organisations that receive local authority funding and employees should check with community groups they fund and with third sector organisations that may be planning publicity around election time.

7.6 In general the question to ask of all publications, documents or events is; ‘can it wait?’ And if not, ‘will the subject matter be regarded as influential on voting behaviour?’ This will be the case with controversial subjects and needs to be avoided altogether.

7.7 If an Elected Member asks an employee of the Council to publish something that the employee considers to be inappropriate or is against communications protocols, the concerns need to be raised with the Monitoring Officer and the Communications and Marketing Team. If something cannot be distributed as a Member has suggested then the employee should explain why. Guidance and support is available through the Communications and Marketing Team and the Monitoring Officer and the Monitoring Officer will make final decisions on contentious decisions.

7.8 If the document has a high corporate profile or deals with a strategic issue then the Chief Executive or a Director should approve the final version.

7.9 Political parties should avoid using any straplines or key messaging from Council campaigns, policy or other activity to avoid the association of the Council with the political activity of a single political party and maintain the neutrality of the Council.

7.10 During a pre-election period it is likely that the local media and other organisations will use material published by the Council before the pre-election period. For example this could result in a story in the local paper being printed during the pre-election period based on a media release issued before the pre-election period began. The Council can not control the activity of external organisations and their activity is not covered by pre-election guidance. As long as the Council published the information before pre-election it is lawful.

7.11 The pre-election period only applies to the publication of new communications. It is neither practical, nor legally required, for officers to remove any material published before the pre-election period from platforms where they can be viewed by the public.