

# **EAST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Protocol for handling media enquiries**

1. The central handling of media relations is recognised as best practice as it ensures consistency in messages and high quality in the content and speed of responses to media enquiries.
2. Officers and Members of the Council must comply with the Code of Practice on Local Government Publicity, issued under the Local Government Act 1986 (as amended in 1988 and 2001). The code stipulates that publicity or information campaigns should:
  - Promote well being
  - Not be politically biased
  - Be balanced, informative and accurate
  - Not be designed to persuade people to hold a certain view
3. The Council's Communication Team will ensure that the Council's communications are clear, consistent, timely and in keeping with the Council's corporate vision, policies, aims and priorities.
4. Wherever possible the emphasis of Council communications should be proactive, informative and customer centred, rather than reactive, defensive and internally focused.
5. All staff should adhere to these guidelines.

### **Media relations**

6. Media releases and media comments about council issues will be issued through the Communications Team and be authorised by the Communications Officer. No other officers (other than the Chief Executive, Directors or Assistant Chief Executive) should issue media releases.
8. All media releases fall into one of four categories:
  - a. Media releases on factual matters (such as announcing the date and content of an event or policy). An officer with relevant experience of that subject area should clear these. Any quote in the media release will be attributed to the relevant officer or Portfolio Holder.
  - b. Media releases arising from any meetings or directly related to service issues will be cleared with the appropriate Service Manager and/or the Portfolio Holder. Any quote within the media release will be attributed to the relevant officer/Councillor.
  - c. Media releases with a political emphasis or covering significant or sensitive issues will be cleared by the Leader or Deputy Leader AND the Chief Executive or, in the Chief Executive's absence, a Director, Assistant Chief Executive or Communications Officer.
  - d. Media releases produced within partnerships or with partner organisations will be cleared by the relevant officer working within the partnership and similar senior representatives of relevant partner organisations. They should be issued as combined media releases and may be branded with that partnership's brand if relevant and/or other partner organisations' logos.
9. Any references to the outcome or comment upon any legal proceedings must be cleared by the Legal Team.
10. In addition to being sent to Members, media releases will be posted on the Council's website, making them accessible to all Members and Staff at the time they are being issued to the media.
11. The Chief Executive, Directors, Assistant Chief Executive, and Communications Officer shall be authorised to speak to the media on behalf of the Council, including appearing on both radio and television. These posts can authorise other officers to speak to the media also.
12. Media releases may contain quotes, where appropriate, from the Leader, Deputy Leader, or the relevant Portfolio Holder, in accordance with the procedure outlined in paragraph 8 above. In some instances it may be appropriate to include a quote from the Ward Councillor when an issue is specific to that particular area.

13. When responding to newspaper, radio and television requests for information or interviews of a political nature, journalists should be referred to the Leader, Deputy Leader, or Portfolio Holder, in accordance with the procedure described in paragraph 8 above.

14. Members may respond to requests for newspaper, radio and television interviews in a purely personal capacity outside these procedures, which will be the personal responsibility of the Member concerned. Similar considerations will apply to letters to the press. However officers will, of course, be able to supply factual information at the request of Members.

15. Where press conferences or media events involving Members are arranged, the Leader, Deputy Leader, will be invited to attend.

#### Correcting media errors

16. Where factual errors are made in a newspaper article or media broadcast the Communications Officer (or Communications Team in his absence) will contact the appropriate editor/journalist to have the information corrected and seek an appropriate apology.

17. If misleading information is reported in a newspaper or by the broadcast media or printed in a letter or contained within an interview published or broadcast by the media, the Communications Officer (or other members of the Communications Team in his absence) will liaise with the relevant officers as to whether the Council should respond to this information. The response should be written by the Communications Officer (or in his absence another member of the Communications Team)

18. Given the need to respond quickly to erroneous information, the Communications Officer should start preparing a response as soon as possible if he feels it is appropriate but should, before sending such a response, clear this with the Chief Executive, Director, Assistant Chief Executive or, in the absence of these, the relevant Service Manager.

19. As a corporate body East Lindsey District Council cannot sue a reporter or organisation (such as a newspaper) for slander or libel. However there are avenues such as the Press Complaints Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Agency, which regulate the media. The Communications Officer, in consultation with the Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Executive or Director will undertake to liaise with these organisations should the need arise.

#### Elections

20. The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all forms by the Council for candidates and also for other politicians indirectly involved 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.

21. It is, however, acceptable that The Council responds to events and legitimate service enquiries providing factual responses. Members holding key political or civic positions may comment officially in an emergency situation or where there is a genuine need for a Member response to an important event outside the Council's control.