

**PUBLICITY PROTOCOL &
MEDIA GUIDELINES:**

**DRAFT LAST UPDATED: September 2006 (subject to
final approval by portfolio holder for resources,
staffing, information and customer service)**



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1. Introduction

These publicity protocol and media guidelines aim to help you to gain positive publicity for South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC), manage messages and work with the media under SCDC's constitution.

This document (last updated September 2006) is written for officers and members and replaces all other circulated versions. It has been agreed by the resources, staffing, information and customer services portfolio holder - who will also monitor its operation.

All publicity material released by SCDC seeks to operate within the national Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity first published by the Government in August 1988. In April 2001, the Government agreed a series of alterations to the Code of Recommended Practice to take account of changes since 1988 and in particular:

- political structures in local government
- emphasis on partnerships and new requirements for consultation
- electronic media
- Human Rights Act, Disability Discrimination and Equal Opportunities Acts

The Code defines the main functions of local authority publicity as follows:

“To increase public awareness of the services provided by the authority and the functions it performs; to allow local people a real and informed say about issues that affect them; to explain to electors and ratepayers the reasons for particular policies and priorities and in general to improve local accountability.”

1.1 The communications team

SCDC's communications team aims to provide an efficient and timely response to media enquiries and raise the positive profile of the authority by actively promoting accurate and balanced media coverage of its work and activities. It also works to reduce negative profiling of the authority wherever possible.

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These officers are the daily contact for media information at SCDC. They will:

- prepare and distribute news releases
- respond to media enquiries and liaise with the media
- organise photocalls and interviews
- help prepare interviews, quotes, statements
- provide media training
- organise special events
- provide a press cuttings, TV and radio recording service
- manage the 'news releases' section on the website and 'communications and media' section of the intranet
- provide advice on communication
- hold up-to-date lists of parish magazines and media contacts
- devise and manage media campaigns

2. Corporate objectives and priorities

The communications team concentrates on issues that support the priorities for the year and reflect and develop the council objectives – they are contained within its Performance Plan. All news releases should try to contain references to the objectives and/or priorities. These can either be included in the main section of the news release or as editor's notes at the end of the news release.

The corporate objectives:

- 1) High quality, value for money services
- 2) Quality village life
- 3) A sustainable future for South Cambridgeshire
- 4) A better future through partnership

For more information on the Performance Plan, council objectives or annual priorities please contact Ian Salter, performance improvement officer on (01954) 713018, email ian.salter@scams.gov.uk, or see the 'corporate information' pages on the Intranet.

3. Media information

3.1 Council papers

The following agendas and minutes are emailed to the media by democratic services. Paper copies are given to attending media on the day.

Cabinet	Full Council
Planning	Planning sub committee
Standards committee	Licensing committee
Scrutiny committee	Councillors' weekly bulletin

SCDC is legally obliged to be open and accountable, to admit the media to open council meetings and specify exempt or confidential business to exclude them.

3.2 News releases

News releases cover news matters that services or members want to promote, publicise or explain. They will often arise from items being raised or considered by members, member decisions or matters of policy. Note the term 'news' as opposed to 'press' as this covers radio and TV in addition to the print press media.

3.3 Photocalls/interviews

These are invitations for a photographer and/or journalist to attend an event at a designated time and place.

3.4 Statements

Written statements give comment to a particular media request. The communications team emails statements for the majority of adhoc media enquiries. A saved written record helps to ensure SCDC's position cannot be open to possible misunderstanding or misrepresentation.

3.5 Letters

Sent to the editor, usually from the leader or a Cabinet member usually in response to a news article or to raise a pertinent issue. It is not recommended practice for officers to send letters.

3.6 Media briefings

Media briefings are arranged to provide additional information and support to the media, usually on a one-to-one basis:

- when complex issues are being determined/raised they will aid the media's understanding of the subject and promote accurate reporting
- when sensitive issues need absolute accuracy and confidentiality
- if a major incident arises
- when the media identifies a need to clarify council reports issued ahead of meetings
- if major corporate news (good or bad) will attract media attention
- to illustrate the work of major services

Media briefings should ideally involve:

- the portfolio holder for the related issue or the leader if it is a council-wide issue
- chief executive or relevant director
- the appropriate service head and/or any technical expertise
- a representative from the communications team
- leader and chairman should be informed of all media briefings and are entitled to attend should they wish.

Media briefings do not preclude the media from approaching other council representatives for comment.

4. The process

4.1 Production

The communications team generates the majority of news releases. It is extremely helpful for members and officers to give the team advance warning of potential positive or negative stories, and a good brief. The communications team should be consulted, in advance, whenever an issue arises to which the answer to any of the following questions is yes!

- Is it likely to attract a large volume of media interest?
- Is it sensitive or seriously contentious and likely to attract unfavourable publicity?
- Does it have corporate implications?
- Does it involve public consultation or publicity campaigns?
- Does it celebrate a notable success story?
- Are you unsure about how to handle the issue?

Timing is critical. The communications team should be contacted as soon as possible.

Services are encouraged to prepare a first draft of written statements, comments and news releases. See Appendix I for 'Tips on writing a news release'. However, all releases should be approved and issued by the communications team.

- The content of all principal news releases should be developed and agreed in draft stages with the appropriate cabinet member and relevant officers.
- In the case of sensitive or contentious stories a statement and/or briefing notes will be prepared by the communications team for use by all members and officers.

4.2 Timing

National and local media journalists are selected according to their subject area of interest and the geographical area they cover. The daily Cambridge Evening News has different deadlines for each of its editions (between 9am and 12.40pm for the final edition) but most of the news pages will have been filled on the previous day.

Most of the local weekly papers publish on Thursday and Friday but have filled most of their pages by Tuesday and Wednesdays To ensure well timed coverage send the release at least three days before press day. If you send a release on press day it will be too late for that week and may be too old to merit use the following week.

4.3 Distribution

Releases aim to be posted onto the website news section on the day of the release.

All releases (and statements, where relevant) are emailed to the chief executive, executive director, leader, chairman, relevant portfolio holder, opposition spokesperson, and where relevant, local members.

In the event of major news stories, the communications team will phone news desks to advise them that a release is due.

All news releases issued by SCDC should be treated in this way to ensure consistency. If a department sends any correspondence to the media, or is contacted directly, the communications team should be informed.

5. Quotes and interviews

Portfolio holders (or designated spokespeople) should be briefed on the news release and available and prepared to give interviews.

5.1 Officers and the media

Interviewees need to think about who they are communicating with. The journalist is just a conduit to a wider audience. Start with the premise that the public have, in most cases, only a vague understanding of how the council functions or what it does.

If officers have been media trained and feel it is appropriate they can speak to the media. Officers should confine their answers to providing information rather than giving opinions. If contacted on a controversial, important or political issue, or simply feel unsure please transfer the call to the communications team.

Officers should also place a high priority on providing guidance, when requested and where appropriate, to any member on ward issues.

Please inform the team if you have spoken to the media and beware the friendly journalist. Talking 'off the record' and assuming you won't be quoted is not recommended.

5.2 Members and the media

Members are naturally free to speak to the media and discuss issues. However, if members are contacted directly and asked to comment on an issue they are unsure about, an immediate answer is not obligatory. They can refer the comment to the relevant portfolio holder or to the communications team, or agree to get back to the media at a later agreed time.

It is inappropriate for the communications team to publicise individual members except basic information such as contact details, their responsibilities and any proposals or recommendations that are relevant to their position.

Views of leading members, who represent SCDC can be publicised as long as the views are relevant to their position on the Council - for example, portfolio holders. Most councils take the view that leading politicians can comment on topics within their portfolio, while officers are restricted to giving information.

The leader, portfolio holders, chairman and committee chairman will often be approached by the media, as representatives of the Council, to comment on issues. Members should be briefed and guided by officers on handling such enquiries.

All members and officers are entitled to media training/guidance on request. Contact the communications team for more information.

5.3 Summary

- In the majority of cases quotations should be from an elected member. This will most often be the Cabinet member with responsibility for the area concerned. In this case the phrase used is 'Councillor XXXXX, portfolio holder for xxxxxxxx'. All quotations will be cleared by the named person (s) before use.
- Quotes related to policy matters will generally come from the leader or other appropriate Cabinet member.
- TV, radio and press interviews can be given by officers if the subject matter is directly related to their job and has the approval of the communications team and/or the officer's line manager.
- If the subject matter is controversial such interviews should be at the discretion of the relevant service head.

6. Media issues

The rights of the media and members of the public to attend meetings are governed by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985. Copies of agenda papers and reports must be available at meetings.

Under the 1985 Act, the media and members of the public are given automatic access to all council meetings unless the business is confidential or exempt.

There is no statutory right for taking photographs, filming or recording any council meetings or public enquiries.

Filming for television, or other recording of council meetings, is only acceptable if the relevant committee gives permission. At planning inquiries the inspector may allow filming of the Council Chamber before proceedings start.

Television companies, and any other publishing or broadcast media, are permitted to make representations to the chairman.

6.1 Embargoes

Embargoes are used to ensure that all media have an equal opportunity to feature a story at the same time or to provide information to the media before a specified launch date. They are only used when considered essential i.e.

- When news releases are linked to a launch event
- When an issue of confidentiality requires it
- When it is required by a third party

Embargoes are not legally enforceable, but are adhered to by general agreement.

6.2 Partnership working

- Where we are issuing or participating in the release of news on a partnership matter we will ensure that our role or contribution is identified appropriately and the release includes quotes from named members or officers.
- The text should be shared in draft stages between partners and approved by the relevant communication leads prior to distribution

6.3 Media contacts

Local and national media contacts are available from the communications team. Parish council magazine contact lists are available on the intranet. The communications team is responsible for maintaining these lists and ensuring their accuracy.

6.4 Evaluation

A press cuttings service is provided by the communications team. Cuttings from the Cambridge Evening News and other local papers are on the 'News' section of the intranet. Paper copies are available to view from the library. For information on national media coverage contact the communications team.

Radio and TV coverage is not included in the cuttings service but the communications team has access to facilities to record coverage on request.

Members and officers who do radio/tv interviews are encouraged to ask when they will be broadcast and to inform the communications team. The communications team holds a record of all media enquiries and interviews for evaluation purposes.

6.5 Inaccurate reporting

If a journalist has failed to write/broadcast exactly what was said, only acts of bad faith, factual inaccuracy, harassment and unfairness merit a complaint.

Remember, too, that you can rarely, in reality, put the record straight. Even if the media publishes a correction, or your letter, the record has already been bent by the impression created in the original article.

To complain effectively you must confine yourself to serious errors of fact or breaches of faith. If the reporter does not promise redress, go to the editor. If you are still not satisfied the Press Complaints Commission can be contacted. In cases of inaccurate reporting, harassment, intrusion or discrimination, members can approach editors themselves or refer the matter to the communications team.

6.6 The media and Freedom of Information (FOI)

It is possible that journalists will use the FOI Act to access information on a controversial issue. All requests for information to the Council come under the FOI Act and this will apply to some media enquiries.

What should I do if I get an FOI request from a journalist?

Under FOI Act people are not obliged to disclose their interests or reasons for requesting information. Potentially this means that a journalist may request information without stating who they are or who they work for. If you suspect that the requestor may be a journalist but they do not disclose this fact, deal with the request in the usual manner but inform the communications team.

The communications team should also be informed if information of a controversial nature is released to a member of the public as this may be passed on to the media.

How will FOI requests be handled?

Where queries are received by email or letter these will be dealt with following the FOI procedure. However most journalist queries are received by phone. It would not be appropriate to expect a journalist to wait for a request form in the post so it's important to ensure that the journalist is kept informed.

Where information falls into one of the qualified exemption categories the public interest test will have to be considered by the relevant section manager. The communications team and the centralised respondent will record FOI requests from journalists.

Where a complicated query is received the journalist will be informed that their request may take longer than 20 working days to be fulfilled. Things to consider are:

- the media in which the disclosed information will be used, particularly if the information is controversial or reflects badly on the Council
- the implications for not disclosing information and opening the Council to accusations of a 'cover-up' must also be considered.

6.7 Photographs

Parental consent (or the consent of a guardian, teacher or coach) should be sought before taking photographs of children or vulnerable adults for use in *South Cambs magazine*, or other publications.

Under the Data Protection Act (1998) personal data collected by SCDC, (images including photographs are considered personal data) should be required and relevant and only kept as long as necessary. A time limit of three years has been set for use of photographs without

seeking further permission. When seeking consent, parents or guardians must also be made aware of where the photograph may be used and who may be able to view it.

If you could readily identify a child by sight, or if a child is named, then you are strongly advised to:

- Have written consent for the publication of the photograph, signed by the parent or guardian
- Retain the signed consent form in case it is required for reference

These considerations do not apply if, for example, a group of children were viewed from behind, or in the distance, and it would not be possible to identify individuals - but if you are in doubt, it is best to err on the side of caution.

A photographic consent form and full guidance is available in the 'Communications' section of the intranet.

6.8 Copyright

Copyright is the right given to authors and creators of works to control the exploitation of their works. This right broadly covers copying, adapting, issuing copies to the public, performing in public and broadcasting the material. Copyright arises automatically and does not depend on the completion of any formalities, such as registration. Photographs obtained from the Internet are also subject to copyright. The first owner of copyright is usually the author of the work. The author has IP (Intellectual Property) rights, however if the author is working for an organisation and produces images for work purposes then the organisation will hold the IP rights.

Commissioning and paying for work does not procure the copyright. Contractors and freelancers own the first copyright in their work unless the commissioning contract agrees otherwise.

Photographs which are on our website that are not owned by the Council should have a photographic credit attached to them. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that all photographs on SCDC's website has this credit applied, if required. Photographs owned by the Council do not need a credit.

7. Roles and responsibilities

Leader of the Council

Provide lead commentary on any major issue. In the leader's absence, the deputy leader should be approached. Their role is to lead the decision-making process and chair the Cabinet.

Portfolio holders (executive spokespeople)

Portfolio holders should provide quotes or comments on issues arising from their area/portfolio of responsibility. The shadow portfolio holder will be approached in their absence.

Chairman

The chairman of Council is the civic head (the chairman is called the mayor at some councils), or the first citizen of the district. They carry out civic and ceremonial duties and chair Full Council meetings. The chairman is the personification of the council at all ceremonial occasions at which the council is represented.

Scrutiny Committee

The chairman comments on issues that arise from this group and in their absence, the vice chairman.

Local councillors

Should be available to comment on issues relating to their particular villages. Local councillors have a right to be informed about matters affecting their villages and to be consulted on proposed decisions relating to them.

Leaders of political parties

Council resources can only be used for non-party political publicity of the Council - not for criticism of the Council or of council policies, or for individual members' own concerns. All officers have to act with political impartiality, and within the terms of this protocol. However, it is accepted that political groups may wish to issue their own publicity and press releases. It is not the council's role to present conflicting political views.

Party spokespeople

With the agreement of the political parties, the communications team can provide details of individual party spokespeople to the media to enable them to use the information to make proactive approaches if they wish.

8. Protocol for involving members at events

Officers organising events must consider protocol for inviting members. To ensure all relevant members are invited officers should consider the roles and responsibilities of members listed above. Officers should also consider whether they are the most appropriate person to organise an event.

- For small, low-key events only the relevant portfolio holder should be invited.
- For larger events the chairman should be invited. If they are unable to attend the vice-chairman of the council should be approached.
- If a presentation of prizes etc forms part of the event the chairman (or vice-chairman in their absence) should always be invited to make the presentation.
- The chairman will normally wear their chain of office or the crest on a ribbon, unless asked not to by event organisers. If the event is outside the district then the local council should be contacted to check if the chairman should wear his chain or ribbon.
- If a congratulatory or presentation speech is required the chairman should be approached in the first instance. If the event is focused on council policy or services then the leader (if it is a corporate issue) or the portfolio holder should be invited to speak. Councillors may wish to discuss this and come to other arrangements for speeches and presentations amongst themselves.
- If an event takes place in or concerns a specific village or area, local members should be invited, and be able to make a speech if appropriate.
- If other local authorities or groups are involved appropriate councillors or representatives from these organisations should be invited.
- Remember this protocol also applies if you have been asked to invite particular members and you don't feel it is appropriate due to number restrictions or other factors.
- Don't forget to invite relevant chief officers.

The officer's role is to facilitate, organise and, where appropriate, to add to what the members say at an event, but not generally to take a leading role. In most cases the members will acknowledge and thank the officer(s) who have set up and organised the event. Failure to invite the correct members to attend or speak at events could cause offence or annoyance. If in doubt ask senior officers or the communications team for guidance.

See Appendix IIII Grant Award Support for more information about how the council can provide support and publicity for community events and openings.

9. Training

Officer and member media training, which is part of the central training programme, includes:

- how to spot a news story
- construction of a news release
- understanding of media deadlines and information requirements
- radio and TV interview skills and practice

To date the following officers are either media trained, have media experience and are potentially appropriate media spokespeople:

Chief Executives

Busby, Malcolm – ranger
Carroll, Sally – communications manager
Edwards, Tara – community safety officer
Harris, Susannah – community development officer
Harlock, Greg – chief executive
Lampshire, Jane – sports development officer
McIntosh, Simon – head of community services
Laura Lock - electoral services manager
O’Hanlon, Andy – arts development officer
Quigley, Kelly – communications officer
Salter, Ian – performance improvement officer
Simmons, Kirsty – corporate project officer
Thompson, Jane – cultural services manager
Wetherfield, Tim - head of policy and communications

Development services

Ayre, Julie – project manager (Northstowe)
Green, Jane – major developments manager
Harris, Susannah – community development officer
Hunt, Caroline – principal planning policy officer
Jones, Gareth - deputy development services director
Koch, John – appeals manager (special projects)
Lewis, Denise – head of housing strategic services
Lyons, Sarah – partnership projects officer
Menelik-Mfuni, Theodore - policy officer

Miles, Keith – planning policy manager
Mungovan, Rob – ecology officer
Pope, Tricia – community development manager
Rush, David – development control quality manager
Sexton, Paul – area planning officer
Siggery, Matt – Travellers officer
Spencer, Claire – senior planning officer (transport)
Wood, Kate – new village/special projects officer (Cambourne)

Finance and resources

Bird, Philip – revenues manager
Gardner Craig, Susan – human resources manager
Rayment, Steve – assistant director finance and resources (ict)
Phanco, Lee – assistant director (revenues)
Tucker, Colin – head of legal services

Housing and environmental services

Bradley, Chris – enforcement officer
Carter, Sue – housing advice and options manager
Cassidy, Tracey – sheltered housing manager
Gardner, Pauline – housing services manager
Green, Iain – environmental health officer (promotions & campaigns)
Hampson, Steve – executive director
Harwood Clark, Stuart – general works manager
Heffernan, Brian – environmental protection team leader
Keerie, Geoff - principal environmental health officer
Matthews, Pat –drainage manager
Quigley, Paul – environmental services manager
Poole, Jane – community telecare co-ordinator
Robinson, Dale - chief environmental health officer
Susan Walford – health protection team leader

Appendix I - Tips for writing news releases

Give your story a chance by getting the basic news release right. Others fail because they are badly constructed, poorly written and difficult for editors to understand.

Don't imagine your news release will be printed in full, word for word. Only a few trade publications, and some news agencies, print or rebroadcast releases unedited. Even if editors like the story, they will want to rewrite it to put into the publication's 'house style'.

Journalists may phone you for more information or an interview. If the subject is controversial, they may phone round for opposing points of view.

The news release must have an immediate impact. To win an editor's attention, a release gets as much time as readers give an advertisement: on average, three seconds. Many editors are overwhelmed by the volume of releases they have to sift through.

Your first audience is the journalist, but they are thinking about their audience and the story's relevance to their lives. Therefore, you must engage the editor's attention on behalf of the wider audience. The editor must be prompted to think 'ah, here's a story for my readership'.

Writing a news release

Keep it short and to the point - one page best, two maximum. The story must be up front – the headline does most of the work - the first sentence or paragraph tells the story - everything else is detail that can be filled in once interest has been caught. Examine some newspaper stories to see how this works. The headline grabs attention and the first sentence clicks right into the meat of the story as you read on, the supporting facts are quickly revealed and each paragraph then becomes less central and the last few paragraphs could usually be cut without loss.

Stick to the facts and avoid hyperbole. If you have a story to tell, it will be apparent from the facts. The more shouting and exclaiming you do, the less credible you appear. When you want to add opinion, do it with quotes.

Get the basic page layout right. 1.5 line spaced, today's date at the top; put the word 'ends' at the end of the body of text; add 'for further information' and put your contact name, phone/fax numbers and email address; always check spelling, don't over use capitals, avoid jargon.

Sample news release

News release (Or Statement or Photocall)

Day, date, month year (Thursday 4 May 2006)

Title (i.e. Mouse chow mein)

Cambridgeshire Magistrates Court heard how chinese take-away had become the meal of choice for Linton's mouse population. They fined The Dragon King chinese restaurant £3250, with £475 costs for a major breach in food hygiene regulations.

The court heard how environmental health officers from South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) inspected the restaurant after a complaint. They found mouse droppings throughout the building including the floor in an upstairs storeroom, the food preparation room and bathroom. Chopping boards were covered in black mould; cloths were putrid; walls were thick with dirt and the extraction flue was dripping with grease.

Carol Archibald, team leader for food, health and safety at SCDC, and the lead inspecting officer said, "The take-away was infested with mice and conditions were very poor. The owner voluntarily closed and remained closed until the mouse problem was completely eradicated. This removed any immediate risk to the general public. They undertook major cleaning and appointed a pest control contractor. We only allowed them to re-open once the infestation was no longer active."

The business had breached Food Hygiene Regulations, Regulation 6 of the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995 and the Food Safety Act 1990.

The magistrate said it was an unacceptable and disappointing situation and that while the court could have fined the business £5000 they took account of the guilty plea and the restaurant's full cooperation with the local authority.

- ends -

For further information please contact the communications team at South Cambridgeshire District Council on (01954) 713262.

Editor's notes:

Photos of the infestation at the restaurant are available on request.

Appendix II

Can we help you to publicise your grant?

In recognition of your grant award, South Cambridgeshire District Council would like to be involved in any publicity you propose to promote your project.

This may involve:

- a credit to South Cambridgeshire District Council in any literature you produce
- printing our logo in any promotional material
- including a comment or quote from South Cambridgeshire District Council in any news release you may be sending
- arranging for a Councillor to support your publicity plans
- setting up a photo opportunity for the local press
- including your event in our 'What's On' website column
- supplying a giant cheque, ribbons, signage, or develop any other ideas you may have

If you would like some help or advice with promotion, please contact:

Sally Carroll
Communications manager
SCDC
South Cambridgeshire Hall
Cambourne Business Park
Cambourne
Cambridge CB23 6EA
Tel: (01954) 713262
Fax: (01954) 713149
sally.carroll@scambs.gov.uk

Kelly Quigley
Communications officer
SCDC
South Cambridgeshire Hall
Cambourne Business Park
Cambourne
Cambridge CB23 6EA
Tel: (01954) 713289
Fax: (01954) 713149
kelly.quigley@scambs.gov.uk

NB: Photographs of children should only be used in promotional or council publications or the media with the permission of parents or guardians.

Advertise your project in South Cambs magazine

- reach more than 132,000 residents.
- special rates available on receipt of a grant.

Contact: Manning Publishing (01954) 212906