

Argyll and Bute Council Media Protocol

The media protocol is a tool for Elected Members, managers and other council employees to provide clarity on the processes involved in dealing with the media on behalf of the council.

The communications team provides the link between the council and the media and should be the first point of contact for the media for enquiries and for council officers for any proactive media activity or campaign requests. This protocol outlines the procedure for dealing with proactive and reactive media as well as publicity for events. It is designed to make the processes clear in order to protect council employees and managers and to ensure that a corporate overview of all council activity is available and considered in protecting the council's reputation.

Any media enquiries received by employees outside the communications team should be referred to the communications team who will liaise directly with the media whilst remaining in contact with the relevant service-based officers and, where appropriate – lead councillors. We value the contribution our Officers make to media enquiries and will ensure that the most appropriate Officer is contacted as and when required.

Proactive campaigns and media releases

Where possible a named lead councillor, Officer/Executive Director should be quoted in media releases or campaign materials issued by the council's communications team in line with the appropriate responsibility area linked to the topic.

- Lead Councillor for the specific topic should be quoted or their depute where agreed and where appropriate
- Leader of the Council for especially high profile issues
- Area Leader or Depute Area Leader if the topic is specifically related to the area committee
- The Provost for all civic matters
- The relevant spokesperson from partner organisations if the release / campaign is about a joint venture between the council and its partners

No dual council quotes should be used. For example, if the Leader is quoted then the lead councillor for the topic should not be and vice versa. This is to ensure clarity from a public relations and accountability perspective and it also avoids mixed messages and reduces the scope for quotes to be mixed, matched and taken out of context (or journalists playing one spokesperson against another). It also ensures that the communications team can function in the most practical way, ensuring that releases are issued in a timely manner and are not subject to unrealistic approval processes, particularly in the case of joint media releases developed with partners, in which partner organisations would also need to be quoted. This approach ensures the most efficient, accountable and high impact media relations service possible.

It should be noted that as the new Lead Councillor portfolio areas may overlap a number of service areas, the Lead Councillor for a specific topic will be the

Councillor whose portfolio area and job description most closely matches the campaign or media release topic.

*Where Elected Members wish to put out a proactive media release, this can also be dealt with by the council's communications team unless the release is of a political nature, in which case this cannot be dealt with by the council's communications team because of the legal restrictions on political activity by council employees.

Executive Directors should be made aware of any such requests affecting their area.

Approvals – all media releases should be approved by the lead council officer or the Head of Service or Executive Director and the quoted spokesperson. (Approvals are also required by partner organisations where relevant.)

Reactive statements and responses

It is extremely important from a public relations and accountability perspective that the council does not appear faceless. All media responses should be issued in the appropriate name in order that the council appears (and is) transparent and accountable for its actions. Research shows that the public are more likely to believe something attributed to a real person rather than an anonymous spokesperson and therefore reputation is better managed by quoting real people. Many of the media enquiries received by the communications team tend to be of an operational nature and can be potentially negative. Therefore all reactive responses should be provided to the media in the name of:

- the relevant Executive Director or Head of Service unless:
 - the enquiry is directly linked to a proactive campaign in which case the lead campaign spokesperson should be afforded the opportunity to respond
 - the enquiry was originally instigated by a councillor or a politician in which case the lead councillor for the particular issue should be afforded the opportunity to respond

Approvals – all statements and responses should be approved by the lead council officer or the Head of Service and / or the Executive Director and copied to relevant others for information.

Events and Invitations

Many of the council's services organise and manage events on a regular basis. The communications team can provide advice on events management. Services should make the communications team aware of the event within a reasonable timescale, to allow for adequate time to prepare a draft media release, where appropriate. In addition, it is the responsibility of the service to manage the invitation process and to ensure that all relevant parties are advised of and invited to events at the earliest opportunity. This ensures that officers and councillors have sufficient time to prepare for the event.

Whilst not set in stone, as a guide to council officers planning events, it is recommended that the following councillors are invited to events:

- the relevant Lead Councillor and Depute Lead Councillor
- the relevant ward members
- in the case of extremely high profile events, the Council Leader and the Provost where appropriate

Where uncertain, services organising events can seek advice from the communications team in advance of issuing invitations to councillors.