

## **Appendix: Communications Protocol**

### **1. Publicity**

Members need to comply with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity which prohibits authorities from publishing any material which appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party. Publicity cannot be used as a means to publicise individual Councillors, except where they are acting to represent the Council as a whole

The Head of Communications can advise Members on how to deal with press enquiries, and how to arrange publicity for events which can be properly publicised. Members should seek advice before releasing information to the Press which they have obtained in their role as Members. They have a remit to discover and make public inefficiency and poor public service: however they should be careful where a matter they wish to make public relates to identifiable officers, and seek advice from the Head of Communications or the Borough Solicitor & Secretary in those cases.

### **2. The role of the Communications Unit**

The Communications Unit works on behalf of the Council and not for any political party. The purpose of its work is to provide high quality information about the Council, its policies and its services and to maintain public confidence and where appropriate to protect and to promote the Council's reputation. It aims to encourage public participation and the creation of local partnerships.

Publicity and information will cover areas such as why the Council makes the decisions it does, and why other proposals are rejected. The Communications Unit will feature the decisions of the Council – i.e. those decisions made by the Council Assembly, Executive, Scrutiny, Planning or Licensing Committees or Community Councils, or those actions which have been taken within the broad policy framework already set by the Council, subject to any call in arrangements.

### **3. Scrutiny**

Publicity about scrutiny will concentrate on factual information about which scrutiny exercises the Council is conducting, who is involved, the process they will follow and the decisions they take. Where scrutiny suggests a course of action that differs to or challenges one agreed by the Executive or any other council decision making body, this would be made clear in publicity – together with the process for resolving the difference.

### **4. Obligations on Officers in relation to documents being prepared for public consumption**

When considering whether a communication or publicity is safe to be put out officers should ask themselves whether the communication or publicity is objective, balanced, informative and accurate? If the answer is an unequivocal yes then the communication or publicity is safe to be put out.

Where Officers are uncertain as to whether a communication or publicity is appropriate they should seek advice from the Communications Unit and the Borough Solicitor & Secretary in those cases.

In particular officers should seek advice from the Borough Solicitor and the Communications Unit on putting out a document for public consumption if:

- an election or by-election is due
- the publicity or statement tries to influence public opinion
- the publicity or statement tries to promote a particular candidate or party
- the material promotes a view of a matter of political controversy
- the publication is being distributed to all households in the borough

If something cannot go out as a Member has suggested then Officers can explain why and offer an alternative form of words. Again the Communications Unit or the Borough Solicitor can offer you guidance on what would be appropriate.

## 5. **Key Spokespeople**

The role of the spokesperson is to present facts about Council decisions, the context in which they were taken, actions, and issues faced by the Council.

Members who are key Council spokespeople are the Leader and Deputy Leader and Executive members within their portfolio, the chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Planning chair, Licensing chair, chair of the relevant Community Council and Standards chair. They will be quoted or featured in publicity where it relates to their responsibilities on the Council.