

Item No. 13.	Classification: Open	Date: 17 July 2023	Meeting Name: Audit, governance and standards committee
Report title:		Review of Communication Protocol	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Assurance)	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the committee notes this report and considers changes to the communication protocol.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The council has a communication protocol that is included in part 6 of the constitution. The protocol is reviewed periodically by the committee with a view to any amendments needing to be signed off by council assembly. The protocol was last amended in 2019 with a few minor changes.
3. The communication protocol provides guidance to members and officers about the ways in which publicity will be issued or produced by the council, and on how council resources can be used by members. It makes reference to the statutory requirement regarding publicity, and to the Government Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority publicity. There is no statutory requirement for a communication protocol but it is considered to be good practice and helpful to clarify expectations of members and officers.
4. The Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Assurance) as Monitoring Officer has reviewed the current code, in consultation with the Head of Communications and Corporate Consultation, and is proposing a number of changes to the protocol as shown in the tracked changed version attached as Appendix 1.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

5. Changes proposed by the Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Assurance) involve the following:
 1. A reordering at the beginning of the protocol to make clear a summary of the principles on which it is based and to add the legal provisions as an appendix.
 2. Further clarification of the section on visits by government and shadow ministers and other politicians to the council, and to council events. This makes it clear that politicians cannot be invited to speak at council events where their views are likely to affect support for a political party. It also clarifies that council resources cannot be used to facilitate visits by a delegation from a political party from another country.

3. Further clarification of the guidance relating to postage.
4. Updating and clarifying some of the references and the wording.
6. The Head of Communications is currently considering changes to update the section on social media with a view to this being incorporated in a final version.
7. The committee is asked for any comments or observations on the protocol so that these can be taken into account in any further proposals. These will then be put to the Constitutional Steering Panel prior to submission to the Council assembly for sign off.
8. A comparison with a sample of constitutions of some other London local authorities has been undertaken. Although not headed as “communication protocols” these include similar protocols relating to publicity, and guidance relating to the members’ use of council resources. Nothing particularly different has been identified from these that is recommended for inclusion in the Southwark protocol.

Policy framework implications

9. This report is not considered to have direct policy implications.

Community and equalities (including socio-economic) impacts

10. When issuing publicity in any particular situation, council officers will be mindful of the public sector equality duty, giving due to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between people with protected characteristics and others.

Health Impacts

11. There are no specific identified health impacts resulting from the matters addressed in this report, so a health impact statement is not considered necessary.

Climate change implications

12. There are no specific climate change issues arising from the matters dealt with in this report.

Legal implications

13. The specific legal context is referred to in the protocol itself. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 states that a local authority shall not publish, arrange for the publication of or assist others to publish any material, which in whole or in part appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party. A code of recommended practice for local authority publicity was issued by the Government in 2011.

Financial implications

14. The resources needed for dealing with communications in accordance with

the protocol will be contained within departmental budgets, unless special provision is needed in any particular case.

Consultation

15. There has not been any consultation in relation to this report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
1	Tracked changed Communication Protocol

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Doreen Forrester-Brown Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Assurance)		
Report Author	Allan Wells, Specialist Governance Lawyer		
Version	Final		
Dated	27 June 2023		
Key Decision?	No		
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER			
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included	
Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Assurance)	Yes	Incorporated	
Strategic Director of Finance	No	No	
Cabinet Member	N/a	N/a	
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		28 June 2023	