

<b>Meeting Name:</b>	Audit, Governance and Standards Committee
<b>Date:</b>	13 November 2024
<b>Report title:</b>	Review of Communications Protocol
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>	N/A
<b>Classification:</b>	Open
<b>Reason for lateness (if applicable):</b>	N/A
<b>From:</b>	Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Assurance)

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the committee consider the attached Communication protocol at Appendix A.
2. The committee agree to recommend the amendments to the Communications protocol to Council Assembly.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3. The Communication protocol was introduced in May 2004. It was introduced as a requirement of the constitution and to support legislation and provide clarity about communication issued by the council.
4. The Audit, Governance and Standards Committee have a role of advising the council on the revision of this protocol. The protocol will be further considered by the Constitutional Steering Panel and agreed by Council Assembly.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

5. Members will recall that in the last major revision was in 2017. The protocol has been regularly reviewed but no significant changes were made.
6. The main changes include a new introduction, including the statutory requirement in an appendix, provisions concerning visits by ministers, shadow ministers and other politicians.
7. There are changes to the Obligations on officers in relation to documents being prepared for public consumption, to assist officers in preparing communications. There are also changes to members' postage.

8. There are a number of housekeeping changes, concerning titles, other legislation and gender-neutral language; links have also been added to the document.
9. A marked-up copy of the proposed communications protocol is attached as Appendix B.

### **Policy framework implications**

10. This protocol is a key document that establishes how the council's communications will be managed and governed and exists to protect the reputation of the Council, to aid the promotion of key service campaigns and, on occasion, to protect the Council from inaccurate media (broadcast, print and online news websites) reports.
11. Good media relations are essential to protecting reputation. Officers and Councillors can be called on to help and explain the Council's activities. This protocol sets out some of the key ways this is done.

### **Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts**

12. Good communication between the council and the public are very important in aiding the decision-making process and helping to boost public confidence in the Council. The code of recommended practice states that: "Publicity about local authorities and the services they provide should be freely available to anyone who wishes to receive such information in a format readily accessible and understandable by the person making the request or by any particular group for which services are provided."
13. The council has a duty under the Equality Act (2010) and the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Government Publicity to ensure that information about council services is made available to all audiences.

### **Climate change implications**

14. There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.

### **Resource implications**

15. There are no direct resource implications in this report, as this can be managed within relevant departmental budgets.

### **Consultation**

16. There has been no consultation on this report.

## **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

### **Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Assurance)**

17. There are no specific legal matters.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Communications Protocol	Legal Services, Southwark Council, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Norman Coombe 020 7525 3433

## APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Proposed revised communication protocol
Appendix 2	Marked up communication protocol with tracked changes

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Doreen Forrester-Brown, Assistant Chief Executive Governance & Assurance	
<b>Report Author</b>	Norman Coombe, Specialist Governance Lawyer, Legal Services	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	30 October 2024	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Assurance)	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Resources	No	No
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	1 November 2024	