

Swindon Borough Council
Media Guidelines For Councillors
Adopted by the Authority as from 1st May 2003
(Reviewed 18 April 2005)

1 Background

The role of the Communications Unit for the Council is to promote and inform residents about Council policies and, on occasions, to invite consultation responses. Given this role, it is essential that all reporting on issues is factual, balanced and not politically biased.

2 Council Press Releases

- 2.1 All press releases and publications issued by the Council should state the Council's policy in a clear, concise and positive manner.
- 2.2 Quotations from elected Members will be included on the following basis:
- * if the policy has been promoted by the ruling administration, then a quotation will be requested from the ruling administration lead Member or Leader.
 - * if the policy has been promoted by either or both of the two opposition parties, then quotations will be obtained from the relevant Member, e.g. the proposer of the motion or amendment.
 - * Members quoted will always be referred to by name and official title, e.g. Lead Member for XXX, Ward Member for ABC, etc.
- 2.3 Quotes from elected Members will be expected to positively promote the Council's policy.
- 2.4 The media team will normally seek quotes from the relevant elected Member. If the Member cannot be contacted, party political assistants will be invited to help.
- 2.5 Council publications will feature articles on all Council policies likely to be of current media interest, i.e. Publications will not 'over-promote' nor 'under-promote' any policy.
- 2.6 Elected Members and party political assistants will accept and respect the professionalism of the media team and will help them to get on with their day to day job.
- 2.7 All Council press briefings on major policy issues should be discussed with the Chief Executive and not the Press Office.

- 2.8 Ministers of State visiting Swindon for an event/support of a Council initiative should be featured in our releases with pictorial support - subject to the approval with the Central Office of Information.
- 2.9 Our local MPs should only be included in releases when they are supporting a specific Council policy or initiative which is relevant to them. In all instances, the relevant Member, Leader or Officer should take the lead role.

3 Party Political Group Press Releases

The Council's Press Office would welcome copies of releases sent out by the individual political groups for information.

4. Comments By Individual Members

- 4.1 As a Councillor or a Committee or Sub-Committee Member, Members will acquire much information that has not yet been made public and is still confidential. The Council's Code of Conduct makes clear that it is a breach of the Code to disclose such confidences. Accordingly, Members should never disclose or use confidential information for their personal advantage or of anyone known to them, or to the disadvantage or the discredit of the Council or anyone else.
- 4.2 Members will also come across confidential information from sources other than the Council. Members should not make public comment on rumours relating to Council business, or issues not formally in the public domain, such as would bring the Council into disrepute.
- 4.3 Subject to the above, Councillors are free to make whatever comment they may wish but they are advised to first clear with their group. Any quotation should make clear whether it is the Councillor's own view expressed or whether it is a view expressed on behalf of others.
- 4.4 If a Councillor is misquoted, or his/her views misrepresented, then the Member has a responsibility to seek in writing to correct the matter and, if appropriate, copy to others affected.

5 Complaints

- 5.1 If any political group believes that these guidelines have been broken, this should first be raised immediately with the Monitoring Officer, who will consult as appropriate with the Chief Executive and/or Director of Customer Communications.