

Swindon Borough Council

Suggested Revised Media Guidelines for Councillors

1 Background

- 1.1 The role of the Communications Service for the Council is to promote and inform residents about Council policies, services and to invite consultation responses. It is essential that all reporting on issues is factual, balanced and not politically biased and complies with the Code of Conduct on local council publicity issued by the Secretary of State under Section 4 of the Local Government Act 1986.

2 Council News Releases

- 2.1 All news releases and publications issued by the Council should cover the Council's policies and services in a clear, concise and positive manner.
- 2.2 Quotations from elected Members can be included on the following basis:
- That they positively promote the Council's policies and services.
 - All quotations by Members should be cleared by the appropriate Cabinet Member and / or Leader of the Council.
 - Members quoted will always be referred to by name and official title, e.g. Cabinet Member for XXX.
- 2.3 Council publications will feature articles on all Council policies and services likely to be of current media interest, i.e. publications will not 'over-promote' nor 'under-promote' any policy.
- 2.4 Ministers of State visiting Swindon for an event/support of a Council initiative can be featured in Council releases with pictorial support, subject to the approval of the relevant Government press office and the Leader of the Council.
- 2.5 Reference to 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 Cabinet Member or Leader of the Council should agree the release before it is issued.
- 2.6 Officers should not be quoted in Council news releases, undertake interviews or respond to media enquiries without clearance from the Communications Service. The Communications Service will make every effort to contact the relevant Cabinet Member before a decision is made.

3. Party Political Group Press Releases

- 3.1 The Council's Communications Service welcomes timely 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 it 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 Head of Communications.