

Swindon Borough Council

Media Guidelines for Councillors

(First approved by Standards Committee on 23 July 2007,
Last revised: 13 October 2010)

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 apart from quotes by the Council's committee chairs.
 - 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, services and events likely to be of current media interest.
- 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 Media Releases

- 3.1 Party Groups or Individual Councillors must not use photographs including employees and officers of the Council, in any matter other than as agreed with the employee or officer concerned. Any employee of the Council, who holds a politically restricted post, should not appear in any political document.
- 3.2 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, except in limited instances. 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 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 in whatever media they choose, but they must ensure the accuracy of the comment and 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.
- 4.5 The use of blogging and social media technology for networking is increasing and these are very effective methods of interacting with local people. When using blogging or social media sites all of the points 4.1 to 4.4 apply just as in any other form of personal or written statement. Further, in making any comment relating to the Council or its members or officers on any blog or social media site, the Councillor is strongly advised to make such comment in their name. Even where the Councillor chooses to use a pseudonym, they should not publish anything which could bring the Council, its members or officers into disrepute, and should be aware that Freedom of Information requests and computer tracking technology could result in their true identity being traced.

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.