

WEST  
DUNBARTONSHIRE  
COUNCIL

# Media Protocol 2017

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## Introduction

This policy is intended to give clarity to Elected Members and Council Officers on how West Dunbartonshire Council will work with the media, and how they may be involved in that process. Elected Members and Officers should observe this policy as Best Practice.

## Protocol in relation to publicity

Council publicity is strictly controlled by provisions in the Local Government Act 1986 and the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 1988. The Code of Conduct for Councillors, as defined by the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Act 2000, is also relevant. All media work carried out by the Council follows the provisions of these acts and the code. The general points of the code are outlined as:

- **The Council is prevented from publishing, or helping others to publish, material which may appear to affect public support for a political party.**
- **Any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.**
- **Corporate Communications can only publicise the views of the Council.**
- **The Leader of the Council has a wide-ranging remit and can be quoted in media material, and undertake media work across all areas of the Council's services as required.**
- **On occasion, if the Leader is unavailable within the expected timeframe, the Deputy Leader or relevant Convener will undertake media work across all areas of Council services as required.**
- **Conveners and Depute Conveners will be quoted on matters which relate to their individual Committees and will be pictured and quoted accordingly.**
- **The Provost and Depute Provost will represent the Council for civic and ceremonial functions and will be pictured and quoted accordingly. The Bailie will represent the Council at culturally significant events not within the remit of the Provost's Office, and will be pictured and quoted accordingly.**

## Working with the media and deadlines

Media handling is an important and specialist skill and Corporate Communications is the first point of contact for all media enquiries.

The only staff authorised to speak on behalf of the Council are the Chief Executive, Senior Management Team and Corporate Communications. Any exceptions to this must be agreed in advance by Strategic Leads and Corporate Communications.

Any employee responding to a journalist in their capacity as a Trade Union Official or professional group representative should clearly state that they are acting in that capacity and not as a Council employee.

The growth of digital and citizen journalism requires swift responses to media enquiries. Senior Officers are required to support Officers from Corporate Communications by providing information quickly to ensure deadlines are met. This ensures the Council does not lose its right to reply and has the opportunity to provide an accurate, balanced and positive account of its actions.

## Responding to media enquiries

All responses to media enquiries are sought from Senior Officers with a suggested draft response provided by Corporate Communications wherever possible to the Officers and passed to the relevant Strategic Lead for approval before issue.

In some circumstances, a quote will be attributed to the Chief Executive, Council Leader or Convener but not to other Elected Members. Strategic Leads will be quoted where the subject is complex or technical in nature.

The Council Leader and Committee Conveners will be sent a copy of the response to a media enquiry relating to their service by Corporate Communications following issue. This operational detail is for information only and designed to keep them informed of their service area.

## Political media enquiries

Journalists contacting Communications with enquiries that are deemed to be political will be advised to contact the Leader of the Administration or Leader of the Opposition for their response.

Elected Members should make their own arrangements for issuing party political material to the media and ensure that the material does not use the Council's brand identity.

## Media interviews

All requests for interviews should be directed immediately to Corporate Communications. Corporate Communications will obtain approval from the relevant Strategic Director or Strategic Lead for Officer interviews. The Chief Executive will be informed of any requests by the national media for interviews.

## Media releases

Media releases will be issued by Corporate Communications to inform the public about Council decisions and provide information about Council services.

Information should be provided to Corporate Communications well in advance of an article being required to allow sufficient time to prepare the release and seek approval.

Editorial control rests with Corporate Communications and they will decide the most appropriate and effective style and format for information to be issued, taking into consideration the subject matter and intended audience. Quotes will be attributed to the Council leader, Convener, Vice-Convener or where appropriate the relevant Strategic Lead.

Prior to issue, Corporate Communications will obtain approval from the appropriate Strategic Lead or Strategic Director, and where appropriate, the service Convener. Following issue to the media, releases are posted on the Council website and intranet, and highlighted across the Council's social media channels. They are also sent to all Elected Members and Chief Executive. Individuals, such as MSPs and MPs, can request to be included on the media distribution list.

Corporate Communications does not provide general media support to individual Elected Members in their ward role. We are happy to provide media advice on non-political communications such as how to promote a community event in a ward.

## Educational establishments

Schools and Early Learning and Childcare Centres should seek approval from the Head Teacher and Corporate Communications prior to contacting the media with a good news release.

## Photo calls

Corporate Communications will arrange all photo calls and invite Councillors, Conveners, Depute Conveners and the media to attend. Service areas will be responsible for inviting any other guests and will be advised by Communications.

Priority when agreeing the date and time will be given to the availability of the Convener.

Typically only the Council Leader or Deputy Leader and/or Convener and Depute Convener will be invited to attend photo call events on behalf of the Council. However, in situations where the story has a strong local, rather than Council-wide, interest - such as a new school or community centre opening - all ward members will be invited to attend. Official openings will be performed by the Convener, Vice Convener, Leader or in the case of a civic event, the Provost.

On occasions when ward members are invited, group photographs will be taken of

all Councillors and other political figures in attendance who have been invited.

Only guests invited to attend by Corporate Communications or Officers from the relevant service area will be included in the photographs. Councillors should not extend the invitation to others in their group or other political figures. No separate group photographs of Councillors will be taken. Corporate Communications is empowered to set up an additional shot at the photo call of the Council Leader and/or Convener if it is requested by the media or there is a strong view that it may lead to more extensive coverage for the Council. The clear instruction from national media organisations is that they are more likely to use to use photographs which feature fewer individuals.

Elected Members may contact the media independently to promote activities they are undertaking but would not have the support of Communications for this.

## Social media

Social media is one of the most effective and efficient means for the Council to share information and communicate with the communities it serves. The Council's main corporate social media sites are managed by Corporate Communications and these are the preferred channel for promoting Council activity digitally. Social media management is a skilled and specialist area and requires a distinct and tailored approach to content. All requests for information to be publicised via the Council's main social media channels should be directed to Communications. Editorial control rests with Corporate Communications who will decide the most effective and appropriate style and format for information to be issued, taking into consideration the subject matter and intended audience.

## Ministerial visits

Corporate Communications should be notified immediately of any Ministerial visit and these will be co-ordinated by the team's Events and Engagement Officer who will liaise with the Scottish Government or UK Government to arrange the visit and also discuss any planned media coverage.

Typically only the Leader, Deputy Leader and/or Convener and Depute Convener will be invited to attend such an event on behalf

of the Council. The only exception is if the Minister is opening or launching a service of particular local interest such as a school or community centre opening, in which case, wherever possible, all ward members will be invited to attend.

## Emergency media relations

The Council, as part of its Emergency Plan, has a Civil Communications Plan which outlines how media enquiries and requests will be managed in the event of an emergency. This is available on the intranet at: <http://intranet.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/transformation/people-technology/health-and-safety/civil-contingencies/>

## Equality and diversity

Across all of its work the Council will abide by its commitment and duty to eliminate discrimination, promote equal opportunities and promote good relations as required by the Equality Act 2010.

A recommendation is also made that anyone who is involved in communicating with the media on behalf of the Council should attend equality training to ensure that the Council fulfils its commitment and duty to eliminate discrimination, promote equal opportunities and promote good relations.

# Contacting Corporate Communications

For assistance, advice and guidance, please call **01389 737225** during office hours or email: **[communications@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:communications@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)**

Outwith office hours, email the team or contact via the Council website:  
**<https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/contact-us/other-council-services/corporate-communications/#email>**

In an emergency call Corporate Communications Co-ordinator Amanda Graham on **0798 440 1719**.

*For more information contact:*

**Amanda Graham, Corporate Communications Co-ordinator**

**Tel: 01389 737527**