

# Southampton City Council: Media Protocol



## Protocol objectives

1. To clarify roles and responsibilities.
2. To highlight the need for information sharing between service areas, Cabinet Members and other affected teams /partner organisations prior to briefing Communications on requirements.
3. To establish a clear sign-off process on all communications relating to the media including invites, releases and statements.
4. To gather and update information from councillors and officers on their preferred methods of contact when signing off time sensitive media relations activities.
5. To highlight the importance of a named deputy for when officers and councillors are on holiday, sick or out of the office.
6. To highlight the need to respond to media enquiries in a timely manner – often within the same day to meet lunchtime or evening media slots/print deadlines.



## Routing all media enquiries

All media enquiries should be directed to the Communications team via the following methods; **communications@southampton.gov.uk, 023 8083 2000 or 07901 008786.**

Media enquiries can come into any part of council, especially to Cabinet Members, CMT members, managers, Democratic Services and PAs to the councillors. When this occurs enquiries should always be passed back to the Communications team to manage. Media enquiries should not be directed to email addresses of individual officers within the Communications team - the generic email and phone number above must always be used.



## Collective responsibility for speed of response and sign off

All Cabinet Members, CMT members, Heads of Service and managers will need to be contacted by the Communications team in relation to media enquiries, often at short notice. It is therefore important that in these circumstances individuals preferred methods of contact, their ability to read releases on mobile phones, and their deputies are known by the Communications team. It is essential that the names of deputies are provided to ensure periods of holiday, sickness and absence do not delay media response times. It is the responsibility of CMT, Heads of Service and managers to ensure they provide this information to communications.



## Media enquiry categories

### Category A

Request relates to a topic with implications for serious reputational damage such as a major incident. Approved response required from Leader and/or Chief Executive within one hour. Response to be copied to Director of Corporate Services, Chief Financial Officer, and Assistant Chief Executive.

### Category B

Request relates to a topic with implications for some reputational damage or is an opportunity to promote a high profile council initiative. Answer is not currently in the public domain. Approved response required from CMT member or relevant Cabinet Member within four hours. Response to be copied to Director of Corporate Services and Assistant Chief Executive.

### Category C

Request relates to a topic without a risk for significant reputational damage, or is not related to a council priority. Approved response required by CMT member or relevant Cabinet Member within 24 hours.

### Category D

Request relates to information already in the public domain or to a pre-approved statement. Communications to issue response, then notify the appropriate CMT member and relevant Cabinet Member that this has been done.

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## Protocol for managing requests from print/web based press

### ENQUIRY:

The on-duty Senior Communications Officer (SCO) takes an enquiry from the media, logs it on Vuelio (a media relations management system) and advises the relevant Cabinet Member, CMT member and senior manager that a statement needs to be supplied and the time-frame for response.

### INFORMATION GATHERING:

The service area provides feedback to the enquiry within the appropriate timescale for the category of enquiry (between one and 24 hours), where possible in written bullet points. Any accompanying tables or additional data should be provided along with an explanation.

### RESPONSE:

The on duty SCO drafts a release based on the information provided. The on duty SCO will also draft a statement from the lead Cabinet Member for the service area. On occasion, statements may be attributed to council officers if they are operational and service-related. The relevant Cabinet Member and CMT member should approve of this approach. Statements should never be attributed to a council officer/ council spokesperson if they are policy related. The exception to this rule is during the pre election period when CMT members and senior managers will be the default spokespersons.

### CIRCULATION & SIGN OFF:

When seeking sign off for a release the SCO will aim to email it first to the relevant senior manager and CMT member for approval prior to going to the Cabinet Member for approval. Due to very short time scales this is not always possible and therefore it is also acceptable to send releases to a Cabinet Member at the same time as a senior manager and CMT member. If the subject matter is cross cutting the senior manager must tell the SCO who else to copy the release to for comment and approval i.e. other senior managers, partners etc. If the release could present a reputational risk it must be submitted to the Leader, Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Chief Financial Officer, and Assistant Chief Executive for comment and approval. Wherever possible all approvals must be confirmed by email.

### ISSUING TO THE MEDIA:

Once a statement or release is approved by all necessary parties the on duty SCO will issue it to the media via Vuelio. The system will also send a copy to Council's Management Team and Cabinet for information.



## Protocol for managing requests for interviews from broadcast media

### ENQUIRY:

The on-duty SCO takes a request from the media for an interview and advises the Cabinet Member, CMT member and senior manager. In some circumstances the CMT member or senior manager will be requested for interview. This should only occur when the Cabinet Member desires support or when the matter is purely operational. Council officers should not speak to the media on any policy related subjects or issues. Email confirmation from the Cabinet Member that they are happy for a council officer to be interviewed on their own must be obtained.

### INFORMATION GATHERING:

The senior manager briefs the on duty SCO, CMT member and Cabinet Member on the topic providing relevant written material. If the subject matter presents a reputational risk, the senior manager must ensure all material provided to the on duty SCO has been checked with the Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, and Chief Financial Officer.

### INTERVIEW ORGANISATION, PREPARATION, & TRAINING:

Once the Cabinet Member, CMT member or senior manager has agreed to do an interview, the on duty SCO works with their PAs to organise and communicate the agreed time and location. Where required, the Communications Manager will organise additional media training for individuals.

### INTERVIEW & DEBRIEF:

The agreed individual undertakes the interview with the media. The on duty SCO may not be able to attend the interview in person due to other communications commitments. The interviewee reports back to the on duty SCO after the interview to de-brief how it went. This can be done by email.

Note: The term Cabinet Member includes the Leader of the Council for enquiries relating to their portfolio area.