

## Kent County Council

### PROTOCOL FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS AND SELECT COMMITTEE TOPIC REVIEWS

This protocol has been written as a basis for all communications between Select Committee Topic Review Members and the media. It will ensure that the corporate communications team is able to maximise opportunities for scrutiny to publicise its work and promote the transparency of the Council's decision-making process.

- Select Committee Members should not approach the media direct to discuss the topic review. Media activity should be co-ordinated through the corporate communications team who will make arrangements and ensure that the appropriate Member(s) is put forward.
- The Select Committee Chairman should be the official spokesperson for the topic review, unless another more suitable spokesperson has been identified by the Chairman.
- Chairmen of Select Committee's will be expected to attend or have attended media training.
- *There is potential, on rare occasions, for conflict between scrutiny and cabinet on issues. Ensuring a professional reputation of the council in the eyes of the public is paramount and conflicting statements may make the council appear inept or divided. Care should be taken, on all sides, to avoid this situation from arising. But in such circumstances Corporate Communications would present factual information to the media fairly representing both the Scrutiny and Cabinet viewpoints.*
- The corporate communications team should be advised of any media enquiries received by Select Committee Members to offer guidance and help if required and to monitor responses.
- Press releases for Select Committee will be drafted by a member of the corporate communications team, in consultation with the Research Officer for the review and approved by Select Committee Chairman, in consultation with The Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager.
- Press releases will be fair and representative of the views of the Select Committee. On occasions they may include the views expressed in minority reports if those views differ from the main report.
- The media are invited to attend all formal meetings of Select Committee unless matters of an exempt nature are to be discussed.
- When the report of the Select Committee is ready to go into the public domain a member of the corporate communications team, in consultation with the Research Officer to the Select Committee drafts a press release. Where possible the press release should include input from a 3<sup>rd</sup> party who has been involved with the review. The Press release should be approved by the Select Committee Chairman (with the nominated official spokesman, where

appropriate) in consultation with the Overview, Scrutiny and Localism Manager. An embargoed copy of the press release should be sent out with an electronic copy of the report, to the media a day before the public domain with an embargo on it. There may or may not be a press conference but the Chairman, relevant members make sure they are available for interviews.

- *Corporate Communications officers are permitted to refuse to prepare press releases, deal with media enquiries or arrange media interviews in the following cases:*
  - (i) *If the press release or enquiry is political in any way.*
  - (ii) *If the information in the press release is deemed libellous or malicious*
- Corporate Communications officers will not organise interviews between media and individual members of the Select Committee unless there is explicit agreement by the Select Committee Chairman.
- Press releases will not be issued as a matter of course after Select Committee meetings simply to record the proceedings. Post-meeting publicity will, however, be given where there is good reasons for doing so e.g. to promote opportunities for public consultation.