



POLICY ON EMPLOYEE CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA - REVISED

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this Policy is to clearly outline the role of employees of the Comhairle in their contact with the Media, the employees authorised to speak on certain issues and to distinguish where an employee has rights as an individual to comment publicly on local authority matters in their private capacity.
- 1.2 This Policy covers all employees of the Comhairle, and breach of this policy may be considered as a disciplinary matter.
- 1.3 Media in this respect covers verbal and written communication for Television, Radio, all publications and the Internet.

COMMUNICATION FUNCTION

- 2.1 It is of great benefit to the Comhairle to enjoy good working relationships with all areas of the Media. However to develop and maintain successful Media relationships is a skill and all officers who, as part of their role, can expect to be involved in Public Relations should receive specific training in this respect.
- 2.2 Press statements on matters of Policy should be dealt with by Elected Members. Where the issue is the responsibility of a particular Committee it should be the Chair of that Committee, or his/her delegated spokesperson, who responds. Where the enquiry is about a general Policy of the Comhairle, the Convener or Vice-Convener should respond. Members may in exceptional cases delegate this task to specific senior officers.
- 2.3 In order to co-ordinate the Comhairle's relations with the Media and to help avoid clashes, the Communications Officer should be notified by fastest means possible of any Media enquiry. This will enable:-
 - (i) a record to be kept of why the Media have been in touch, what it was in connection with and what was said,
 - (ii) information to be available for Members or Officers to check if there is renewed contact, and
 - (iii) the Communications Officer to respond where necessary.

OFFICERS DELEGATED TO UNDERTAKE MEDIA FUNCTIONS

- 3.1 The Chief Executive will delegate specific responsibility to a Chief Officer for overall responsibility for contact with the Media. This role is discharged through the Communications Officer.
- 3.2 Heads of Department will keep the Communications Officer briefed on all issues of major importance to the Comhairle in relation to actual or anticipated Media contact.
- 3.3 Heads of Department may authorise officers of an appropriate level within their departments to give interviews to the Media. This will normally be delegated down to Head of Service level but some postholders have Public Relations specifically within their role.

- 3.4 Heads of Department must ensure that all officers authorised to speak to the Media have their name and area of responsibility lodged with the Communications Officer and Head of Democratic and Legal Services for the purposes of the 'Politically Exempt' register.
- 3.5 Officers other than those duly authorised shall not have contact with the Media in connection with official business of the Comhairle. This is also referred to at Paragraph 11 'Contacts with the Media: Code of Conduct - Comhairle nan Eilean Siar'.
- 3.6 Heads of Department must ensure that all employees within their department know who is authorised to speak to the Media within their department and what to do if the person is not available.
- 3.7 The Director of Education may authorise Head Teachers to give interviews to the Media on matters which the Director considers to be non-contentious and merely matters of information and fact.
- 3.8 Notwithstanding, Head Teachers have a duty to promote their school in a positive light and are expected to have regular contact with the Media on school operational matters (e.g. prizegivings, school sports, school trips and fundraising and community activities).
- 3.9 It is recognised that any officer may occasionally be called upon to speak to the media in a private capacity. This may be as a representative of a community group or as a member of the general public. Officers speaking or writing in a private capacity are to make this clear to the media organisation involved and are not permitted to use Comhairle facilities, buildings etc. as a venue for this activity unless this is specifically authorised by the Chief Officer concerned. Officers are not permitted to use confidential information gained solely as a result of their employment with the Comhairle to undertake contact with the media

GAELIC INTERVIEWS

- 4.1 Mindful of the Comhairle's policy on the use of Gaelic, it's the intention of the Comhairle to provide media comment through the medium of Gaelic wherever possible.
- 4.2 Gaelic interviews on an issue within a particular department's functional responsibility shall be conducted by the appropriate officer nominated by the Head of Department.
- 4.3 If there is no officer available, this should be referred to the Communications Officer who will try and make alternative arrangements.
- 4.4 The same general rules apply to Gaelic interviews as apply to all other interviews.

PRESS RELEASES

- 5.1 Press releases will only be issued by the Communications Officer and the Communications Officer retains the right to amend any submitted press releases if they do not comply with the corporate standard. All issued Press Releases will be uploaded to the Intranet and Internet as soon as they have been issued.
- 5.2 There are also a number of points which should be borne in mind by officers responding to the Media. Any comments or views are expressed on behalf of the Comhairle. Where an issue of some sensitivity is concerned, care should be taken in forming any comments. Where a press release has been issued on the Comhairle's behalf any additional comment necessary should accord with the spirit and tone of the release. Officers (and Members) can check with the Communications Officer to see if a release has been issued. Copies of all press releases issued will be kept by the Communications Officer.

MEDIA TRAINING

- 6.1 All employees including all Officers, Head Teachers and Teaching Staff who have contact with the Media must receive training prior to taking on this role.

- 6.2 Any requests for training should form part of the SDA process but can, in addition to this, be lodged with the Communications Officer who will undertake to arrange such training.
- 6.3 Training will cover how to cope with Media contact and what to expect and not to expect from members of the Media.

UNION REPRESENTATIVES

- 7.1 The Policy recognises that employees of the Comhairle who hold a position with a Trade Union group can be authorised by that external body to speak to the Media on matters in which the Trade Union have an interest. This Policy recognises the rights of Trade Unions to express their views.

DATA PROTECTION ACT

- 8.1 In accordance with the Data Protection Act, if a press release names or provides details of an employee's personal life such as home address or family details, the consent of the employee will be obtained and a copy of the press release provided. Such consent is not necessary where the information contained in the press release relates to the employee's normal duties.

COMPLAINTS

- 9.1 Any complaints regarding the operation of this Policy should be made, in the first instance, to the Director of Corporate Services.