

Mid Ulster District Council Media Protocol

Introduction

While the Council will make decisions as a corporate body, individual elected Members have a right to express their own views and engage in their own communications' activity, via a variety of channels, including the news media and social media.

However, to ensure that the Council is given the opportunity to be proactive in its communications and to control the timely release of information, elected Members are asked to observe a media protocol.

The protocol reflects the Council's 'member-led' approach in terms of its communications' work.

Protocol

- Councillors undertake to respect the confidentiality of Council business to be discussed 'in committee'.
- Councillors undertake to respect any embargo associated with any formal corporate announcement concerning a major decision or significant achievement.
- Normally, the Chair will act as the Council's official spokesperson when:
 - corporate decisions or announcements are being made public
 - the Council is issuing a statement in response to a media enquiry concerning a significant corporate issue.
- On occasion, when significant or major corporate decisions or announcements are being made the Chair and the Deputy Chair may both contribute to news releases and statements being issued by the Council.
- In the absence of the Chair, the Deputy Chair will act as the Council's official spokesperson as outlined above.
- Following ratification of decisions by the Council, Committee Chairs will act as official spokespeople when announcements are being made public relating to business which is the remit of the Committee concerned.
- Committee Chairs will act as official spokespeople when the Council is issuing news releases or making announcements concerning business which is the remit of the Committee concerned.
- On occasion, when significant or major announcements are being made regarding the business of a Committee, the Chair and the Chair of the appropriate Committee may both contribute to news releases and statements being issued by the Council.

- On rare occasions and with approval of the Chief Executive or appropriate Director, a Council officer may undertake media interviews or act in the capacity of a spokesperson. This would normally be in circumstances where a specialist knowledge is required to undertake an interview or where the officer is representing the Council at an event (e.g. tourism show).
- Normally, the Councillor acting as official spokesperson will feature in any accompanying photograph issued by the Council. In photocalls to which the media are invited, all Members (of the Council or the relevant Committee) will be notified of the date, time and venue.
- In photo calls organised by other bodies to which the media are invited and which are being held to promote significant partnership projects, the Chair, Deputy Chair, members of the relevant District Electoral Area (DEA) and Party leaders, will be notified of the date, time and venue.
- Council news releases and media statements will reflect the Council's corporate position.
- All members will receive copies (by email) of news releases issued by the Council.
- If using social media channels during those parts of meetings which are open to the public, Councillors will adhere to data protection principles, respecting the privacy of those members of the public and staff who may be present, particularly with regard to the publication of images.
- When in doubt or unsure of the Council's position on any issue, Councillors will seek advice from the Chief Executive to ensure the accuracy and consistency of information being communicated.

Further Advice & Guidance

While Members will have access to their own sources of advice and guidance on media issues, the following may be useful:

NILGA: The 2019 Councillor Guide
(available to download at www.nilga.org/resources)

Local Government Association Checklist For Councillors: Social Media
www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support/digital-communications/social-1

Members can also seek advice and guidance on corporate media issues from the Council's Marketing and Communications service.

The service provides corporate responses to media enquiries, monitors media coverage of the Council and coordinates the release of information to the media, ranging from newsworthy stories on every day, operational issues to significant announcements. The service also manages the Council's social media channels.

Staff from the service also ensure that the appropriate spokespeople are used and that any written statements issuing in the name of a councillor are approved in advance.

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