

AMENDMENTS TO CONSTITUTION – CORPORATE PRESS AND MEDIA PROTOCOL

Executive Summary

Woking Borough Council does not currently have a Corporate Press and Media Protocol. A Protocol is required to establish good practice regarding the management of media relations at the Council, especially following government intervention in May 2023. The Protocol will ensure that the Council uses its marketing communications resources to support open, accessible, and responsive communications.

The Protocol sets out the roles and responsibilities of the marketing communications team in managing media relations and ultimately the reputation of the Council. Importantly, the Protocol sets out the procedures and processes when proactively and reactively dealing with the media. It will apply to members of the Executive and Council Officers who may be contacted by local, regional, national or specialist media, and covers print, digital and broadcast media.

The Protocol, attached as Appendix 1, was considered at the meeting of the Corporate Governance Working Group held on 11 October 2023 and it was agreed to recommend the amendments to the Standards and Audit Committee for recommendation thereon to Council at its meeting on 30 November 2023. An extract from the minutes of the meeting is set out below, with the recommendations from the Working Group beneath:

“6. Media Protocol

The Chairman welcomed Andy Denner to the meeting for the item on the Media Protocol and noted that the supplementary report contained amendments requested following consultation with the Commissioners. The Protocol was required to establish good practice regarding the management of media relations at the Council and took account of the Government intervention from May 2023.

Andy stated that information would be added to the start of the document to highlight that the Protocol would not apply to Councillors' rights to publish comments and speak to the press as they see fit, as suggested by the Chairman. The Council's Social Media policy would also be able to provide guidance to Members and it was stated that it was not for officers to deal with that activity, unless a formal complaint against a Councillor was received under the Members' Code of Conduct.

The Group was advised that complaints had been made in the past by some residents regarding social media posts from Planet Woking, which was now being looked after by Green Infrastructure and Marketing Communications following the cessation of the contract with an external agency.

It was noted that social media would also assist with extending the reach of public consultations undertaken by the Council.

The Group agreed the recommendations.”

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL That

- (i) the Corporate Press and Media Protocol (Appendix 1) be adopted;**

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- (ii) the authority delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make minor amendments to the Constitution be noted, including amendments to references within the document and section numbering; and
- (iii) the Monitoring Officer be instructed to make the agreed changes to the Constitution.

The item(s) above will need to be dealt with by way of a recommendation to Council.

Background Papers: None.

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Amendments to Constitution – Corporate Press and Media Protocol

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council must comply with the publicity provisions set out in the Local Government Act 1986. Section 2 of the Act places a prohibition upon Councils that they "shall not publish any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to support a political party".
- 1.2 In addition, Councils are required by Section 4 of the act to have regard for the [Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity](#) when making any decision on publicity.
- 1.3 A Protocol is required to establish good practice regarding the management of media relations at the Council, especially following government intervention in May 2023.

2.0 Corporate Press and Media Protocol

- 2.1 The Protocol will ensure that the the Council uses its Marketing Communications resources to support open, accessible, and responsive communications.
- 2.2 It sets out the roles and responsibilities of the marketing communications team in managing media relations and ultimately the reputation of the Council. Importantly, the Protocol sets out the procedures and processes when proactively and reactively dealing with the media.
- 2.3 It will apply to Councillors and Council Officers who may be contacted by local, regional, national or specialist media, and covers print, digital and broadcast media.
- 2.4 The Protocol also ensures that the Commissioner team has the appropriate oversight and opportunity to review and provide comment on press releases and public statements before they are issued to the media.
- 2.5 Adherence to the Protocol will ensure consistency of standards, accuracy of information and appropriate political and officer input with a view to protecting and enhancing the reputation of Woking Borough Council.

3.0 Implications

Finance and risk

- 3.1 There are no financial implications.
- 3.2 There are no risk management issues arising from this report.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 3.3 There are no equalities or human resource implications associated with this report.

Legal

- 3.4 Legal Services have been consulted and have not raised any concerns.

6.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 6.1 Discussions have been made with the Chief Executive, Leader of Woking Borough Council and Commissioner Team.

REPORT ENDS