

	
Audit & Governance Committee	28th June 2011
Report of the Leader of the Council	

Media Protocol

Summary

1. This report proposes a change to the existing Media Protocol to ensure that communication of Council policies and activities is open and transparent and that there is clear accountability for all Council decision making. The report has been considered at Cabinet on 21st June 2011 and will be recommended to Council on 30th June for agreement.

Background

2. The existing Media Protocol was enshrined in the constitution at the beginning of the previous administration in 2003. It prohibited members from being quoted in press releases which relate to the policies and activities of the Council. Instead, officers or unnamed spokespeople have been quoted when setting out the decisions taken by elected members.

Proposal

3. A review has been undertaken of media protocols in use in other local authorities. This has revealed that City of York is unique in not using quotes from elected members. Common practice throughout the country is to name elected members in communications about the work of the Council.
4. This position is inconsistent with a modern, open, democratically elected organisation which promotes accountability and transparency.
5. The proposed new Media Protocol is attached at Annex A. It sets out revised arrangements where in future, Cabinet Members rather than officers will be quoted on matters of policy and delivery. This will give residents clarity about who is accountable and responsible. Officers will only be quoted where the issues are factual or technical.

6. The Communications and Media team will at no time be involved in developing party political material and their independence and integrity will be preserved at all times.
7. The Media Protocol has been enshrined in the constitution. Normally changes to the constitution are reserved for full Council. However, the Monitoring Officer has the authority to make changes to the protocols embedded within the constitution with the approval of the person with the authority to do so.
8. This position lacks clarity so for the sake of complete transparency, the changes to the Media Protocol are therefore being presented both for Cabinet's approval and for a recommendation to Council on June 30th 2011. The Audit and Governance committee will also consider the revised protocol on June 28th 2011.
9. It is unusual for a Media Protocol to appear as part of the constitution of a Council. It is unsatisfactory to have uncertainty as the status of this protocol and it is therefore proposed to recommend to Council that the revised protocol clearly sit outside the constitution.

Corporate Priorities

10. The clear and open communication of council policy and activity is essential to deliver the Council's priorities.

Implications

11.
 - (a) Financial - None
 - (b) Human Resources (HR) - None
 - (c) Equalities - None
 - (d) Legal – contained within the report
 - (e) Crime and Disorder None
 - (f) Information Technology (IT) None
 - (g) Property - None

Risk Management

8. The practice of not quoting Cabinet Members in press releases could lead to the failure to clearly communicate who is responsible for Council decisions, fails to hold elected Members to account for their decisions and could lead to misunderstandings which in turn could lead to reputational damage. The revisions included in this report mitigate this risk

Recommendations

9. Members are asked to:
- a) Recommend the revised Media Protocol to Council on June 30th 2011
Reason: To ensure greater transparency and accountability
 - b) To recommend to Council the removal of the Media Protocol from the constitution.
Reason: To ensure that future practical amendments can be made to the policy without disproportionate bureaucratic decision making.

Contact Details

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Wards Affected: List wards or tick box to indicate all			All	√
For further information please contact the author of the report				

Background Papers:

Annexes

Annex 1 – Revised Media Protocol