

Cambridge City Council protocol on media relations and filming, recording and photography at council meetings

1. News releases sent to the media

News releases may be used to publicise executive councillor decisions, new council policies or projects, major, sensitive or controversial issues or other initiatives.

All news releases should be issued proactively and in a timely way to capture media attention. A well-timed news release is more likely to engage reporters and to set the tone for positive media coverage. News releases issued before or immediately after a decision or event will be of more interest to reporters and therefore have greater impact.

News releases issued by the council should adhere to the following protocol:

1. Officers draft the news release to include a quote attributed to the appropriate executive councillor(s) or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee and director or head of service(s);

Note: Generally executive councillors will be quoted although the council's constitution also allows for news releases arising from scrutiny committee decisions and also regulatory committee decisions. In these instances the chair of the scrutiny committee or regulatory committee may be quoted and be consulted to approve the final draft. Directors or head of service quotes may be included in addition to, but not instead of, a councillor quote.

2. Consult corporate marketing if advice on content and format is needed;
3. Draft news release to include contact details for the appropriate officer, executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee and minority group spokesperson(s);
4. Draft must be agreed by head of service or director;
5. Draft must then be agreed by executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee;
6. Final version issued to media;
7. Final version sent to all councillors by email immediately after release;
8. Final version sent to corporate marketing for inclusion on council's website immediately after release.

Note: News releases publicising event programmes for the Corn Exchange do not require executive councillor agreement.

2. Responding to media enquiries

The media may make contact with officers on issues. Officers should give factual information and should refer the media to the executive councillor and minority group spokesperson(s) for opinion and further comment.

Request for interviews

The media may approach officers for interview on a particular issue. The opportunity to take part in an interview should first be offered to the relevant executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee. If the councillor is not available officers may conduct the interview only after gaining director or head of service level permission to do so.

If an interview request is declined the media should be notified in good time. Saying “no comment” is not an acceptable response. The media must be provided with a written news statement on the issue as a minimum (see process below). Consult corporate marketing if further advice is needed.

News statements

These are issued in response to media enquiries and may often address specific or sensitive issues requiring a quick reply in order to meet media deadlines. News statements issued by the council should adhere to the following protocol:

1. Officers draft news statement to include a quote attributed to the appropriate executive councillor(s) or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee and/ or director or head of service(s);
2. Consult corporate marketing if advice on content and format is needed;
3. Draft news statement to include contact details for the appropriate officer, executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee and minority group spokesperson(s);
4. Draft must be agreed by head of service or director;
5. Draft must then be agreed by executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee;
6. Final version issued to media;
7. Final version sent to corporate marketing for information.

Note: Generally executive councillors will be quoted although the council's constitution also allows for news statements arising from scrutiny committee decisions and also regulatory committee decisions. In these instances the chair of the scrutiny committee or regulatory committee may be quoted and be consulted to approve the final draft. Directors or head of service quotes may be included in addition to, but not instead of, a councillor quote.

If an executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee is unavailable to approve the news statement and there is a risk of the media deadline being missed the director and/ or head of service has discretion to have the quote attributed to themselves and to issue the news statement without approval from the relevant councillor.

3. Letters to media organisations

Occasionally it may be appropriate to send a letter to a media organisation for example to respond to an inaccurate report or to clarify the council's position on a

sensitive issue. Letters sent to media organisations should adhere to the following protocol:

1. Officers should discuss with corporate marketing the reasons for writing the letter;
2. Officers draft the letter and attribute it to the appropriate executive councillor(s) or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee and/ or director or head of service(s) including contact details;
3. Draft must be agreed by head of service or director;
4. Draft must then be agreed by executive councillor or chair of the scrutiny committee or chair of the regulatory committee;
5. Final version issued to media;
6. Final version sent to corporate marketing for information.

4. Party political publicity

All news releases, news statements and letters to the media issued by the council must adhere to the code of recommended practice on local authority publicity. This means councillors must not produce party political publicity on council paper or using council facilities (including officer assistance). Publicity material must comply with the relevant restrictions on political publicity which are contained in section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986, as amended by section 27 of the Local Government Act 1988. This states councils shall not publish any material, which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect support for a political party. The head of legal services may be consulted for further advice.

5. Publicity in the run-up to elections

The council's employee code of conduct stresses that staff must be, and be seen to be, politically neutral at all times. In the run-up to an election it is essential that officers do not act in any way that could call into question their political neutrality, or give the impression that they are offering assistance to a political party in its election campaign.

The run-up to an election formally starts when the notice of election is published. The head of legal services will circulate detailed guidance to staff in good time before the notice of election to explain the publicity restrictions.

6. Filming, recording and photography at council meetings

Before the meeting

Filming, recording and photography at council meetings is allowed subject to certain restrictions and prior agreement from the chair of the meeting. Requests to film/ record/ photograph, whether from a media organisation or a member of the public, must be made to the democratic services manager at least three working days before the meeting.

The democratic services manager will advise the applicant of the following restrictions:

1. Any filming/ recording/ photography must take place from positions in the meeting room approved by the chair. This must be done before the meeting starts to ensure the view of members, officers, public and media

representatives is not obstructed. The time at which the filming/ recording/ photography takes place must also be approved by the chair;

2. The use of flash photography or additional lighting in connection with recording/ filming will be permitted for periods of up to two minutes. The point at which this happens during the meeting must be agreed with the chair as part of the permissions process;
3. The use of additional lighting in connection with recording will be treated in the same way as flash photography;
4. If the chair feels the filming/ recording/ photography is disrupting the meeting in any way the operator of the equipment will be required to stop. Anyone undertaking filming/ recording/ photography must comply with any requests made by the chair of the meeting;
5. The applicant must agree to ensure the film/ record/ photographs will not be edited in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings. This includes refraining from editing the views being expressed in a way that may ridicule or show a lack of respect towards those being filmed/ recorded/ photographed;
6. The applicant must agree to share the film/ recording/ photograph in its original and unedited form with the council's democratic services manager on request.

Having briefed the applicant the democratic services manager will invite the applicant to provide the following details as part of the formal request to film/ record/ photograph:

- a. The name, organisation and contact details of the applicant making the request;
- b. What the film/ recording/ photographs will be used for;
- c. When the applicant wishes to film/ record/ photograph during the meeting;
- d. How this information will be retained;
- e. The name of the meeting, the venue and the date;
- f. What will be captured (which parts of the meeting, which speakers and which observers);

When the formal request is received the democratic services manager will consult the chair of the meeting on the detail of the specific request. The chair will then decide whether to grant permission.

If permission to film/ record/ photograph is denied the reasons for refusal will be given and a note of the request will be made on the meeting agenda.

The democratic services team will ensure signs are put in place before the meeting starts to remind attendees that filming/ recording/ photography may take place. Meeting agendas will also carry this message.

During the meeting

The chair will announce at the beginning of the meeting that permission to film/ record/ photograph has been requested and permitted. The chair will ask any members of the public whether or not they agree to be filmed/ recorded/ photographed.

This will be done on an opt-in rather than an opt-out basis to ensure individuals do not feel pressurised.

Anyone seated in the public area or anyone attending the meeting to speak will have the opportunity to express his or her wish not to be filmed/ recorded/ photographed and to be guided to seating areas away from the area being filmed/ recorded/ photographed. If a member of the public is attending to speak at the meeting and prefers not to be filmed/ recorded/ photographed their wish will take precedence.

At all times the wishes of those who chose not to be involved will take precedence. [Councillors are excluded from this provision]

If the chair feels the filming/ recording/ photography is disrupting the meeting in any way or any pre-meeting agreement has been breached the operator of the equipment will be required to stop.

If someone refuses to stop recording when requested to do so, the chair will ask the person to leave the meeting. If the person recording refuses to leave then the chair may adjourn the meeting or make other appropriate arrangements for the meeting to continue without disruption. These will be in line with disorderly conduct procedures set out in the constitution.

Anyone asked to leave a meeting because they have refused to comply with the chair's requests may be refused permission to film/ record/ photograph at future council meetings.

The chair of the meeting has a right to withdraw consent to film/ record/ photograph at any time during the meeting.

Media and public exclusion

The media and public may only be excluded from a meeting in respect of business relating to confidential or exempt information if a resolution is passed under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972. The media and public will be told about the nature of the exclusion relating to the business to be discussed. No filming/ recording/ photography will be permitted during this exclusion. All cameras, recording and sound equipment must be removed from the meeting room.