RIPON CITY COUNCIL

Our Approach To The Media

Protocol for Elected Members and Officers

Item	Detail
Adopted by Full Council	7th July 2025
Previous version	10th March 2014
Current update	9th July 2025
Date of review	July 2030

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Every organisation has a reputation - sometimes good, and sometimes bad. Much of Ripon Council's reputation is formed by the things we do, by what people hear about us from their friends and families and what they see in the media.

1.2. People who have different types of relationship with us have different opinions about our reputation. For example, the leaders of public sector partners may have a view on our reputation as an organisation to work with, commercial organisations may be more interested in our reputation as an organisation to do business with, whilst local resident's focus may be on the services we provide for them.

1.3. Having a good reputation makes it easier to form relationships. It opens doors to people because they recognise that contact with us is likely to be a rewarding and worthwhile experience. This is important on many levels. It helps the Council be influential – encouraging people to take our views seriously and recognise that we are a voice worth listening to.

1.4. At a local level it enables us to be influential amongst our partners and it helps local people appreciate that their council is working hard on their behalf, treating people fairly and providing good quality value for money services, in return for the precept they pay, and led effectively by the councillors they elect.

1.5. Whilst there are many things that can affect the Council's reputation, the media is undoubtedly one major contributory factor, and therefore these guidelines are designed to help Ripon City Council to manage its media relationships.

2.1. This protocol illustrates how routine media activities are carried out by Ripon City Council. All City Council media activity must comply with relevant legislation and follow the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity issued under the Local Government Act 1986.

2.2. The Code of Recommended Practice sets out rules around content and style of publicity, dissemination, advertising and promotion of individual Councillors.

2.3. The primary purpose of this policy is to ensure that:

- The Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks;
- The reputation of the Council is not adversely affected;
- Officers can use the media to communicate more effectively;
- The Council is able lead and work with partners to positively promote Ripon City.

2.4. The principles of this policy are:

- Any individual or organisation involved in Council media activity will ensure it is accurate, timely, cost effective and proactive wherever possible.
- We communicate in the ways that work best for our audiences, finding opportunities for information sharing and dialogue, and using Plain English at all times.
- We aim to ensure that our activities have maximum impact and do not duplicate what already exists elsewhere.

3.1. The Clerk will act as the Communications lead for press liaison build positive relationships with local, regional and national media, including specialist and trade press.

3.2. The Communications lead will work with the Councillors and partner organisations, taking a proactive campaign-based approach, wherever possible, to present stories that bring Ripon City Council's key priorities to life.

3.3. Working with the media can take many forms including:

Press Releases – these are the most common way of providing the media with information about the activities of the Council.

Media Interviews – often broadcast media will request to interview a Councillor or member of staff. This may be face-to-face or by phone

News Conferences – these are usually only used to announce something major or in the event of a major incident or emergency. A news conference will usually include a question and answer session and one-to-one interviews at the end.

4.1. **Roles and Responsibilities** - the Clerk will act as the Communications lead and therefore the point of contact for the media on all Ripon City Council issues. The Clerk will act as the Monitoring Officer to ensure that the Council complies with the requirements of the law and any relevant statutory Codes of Practice.

4.2. Where any matter of concern arises in relation to media communications, proposed or otherwise, this will be brought to the attention of the Monitoring Officer. If necessary, breaches of this policy will be dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedures or the Councillors' Code of Conduct, whichever is appropriate.

4.3. **Media Responses** – most news outlets expect a response the same day and it is usual for journalists to expect a response within an hour or two. To offer the best possible service, the Communications lead will usually agree an approach, response and / or quote by email for approval by the Committee Chair / Mayor as deemed appropriate. In exceptional circumstance it may be necessary for the Communication lead to attribute quotes to a Council spokesman.

4.4. **Quotes** – the Communications lead has a responsibility to ensure that the Council's communications reflect the democratic accountability of our organisation. A quote from the principal person should generally be included within the first paragraphs of the media release with quotes from other commentators following on. Generally quotes of 3 sentences or less will have more impact than longer quotes. The following are identified as the principal person and should be quoted and put forward for media interviews:

- **The Mayor** – the chair of the Council will be quoted in media releases or statements where the matter is of Council-wide significance or crosses several Council areas. The chair of the Council will also be quoted when others are unavailable.

  If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor will assume the responsibilities as described for the Mayor, if available. In the event of the Mayor or Deputy being unavailable, another member of the Council will be quoted.

If the Mayor is approached by the media he/she is empowered to speak on behalf of the Council if an immediate response is required.

- **Chairs of Committees, Boards, Panels and Steering Groups** – if the Communications lead receives a media enquiry about service delivery, they will discuss the issue with the Leader of the Council or relevant Chair and work with them and/or the Deputy Chair as appropriate to agree a statement or quote.

  Chairs / Deputy-Chairs are quoted in relation to activity and decisions in their portfolio areas. They are supported in their committee role and not in their role as a member of a political party. In the absence of the Chair and / or Deputy-Chair another member of the Committee, Board, Panel, or Steering Group can be quoted or take part in media activity.

- **Employees** – All employees and Municipal Officers will immediately pass media enquiries on to the Communications lead. Employees should not make any comments directly to the media.

4.5. **Reporting Legal Proceedings** – as a general rule, we do not comment on active court cases except to confirm factual details that are listed as part of court proceedings, or that were raised in open court. The Clerk will provide advice as required.

4.6. **Sign-off Approvals** – All media releases require principal person (Mayor / Chair / Deputy Chair of the Committee, Board, Panel or Steering Group or Clerk) and Communications lead sign-off before issue.

4.7. When deadlines are pressing, media activity for the Council can be signed off by the Communications lead.

4.8. Media activity dealing with controversial or legal matters, including court cases, will also be reviewed and approved by the monitoring officer.

4.9. **Distribution** – all media releases are emailed from the email addresses: chief.officer@riponcity.gov.uk to media contacts, posted on the Council's website in the news section and copied to all Councillors.

4.10. **Embargoes** – these are used when we have a big announcement to make and journalists need time to prepare background information, or when we are working in partnership with another organisation.

4.11. **Record Keeping** – all media enquiries and responses are sent to and from the email addresses: or chief.officer@riponcity.gov.uk and are recorded and kept and filed onto a monthly database.

5.1. In emergency circumstances, the normal media approvals process as set out will not apply. The Communications lead will approve media activity.

6. LETTERS

6.1. Responding to readers' letters in newspapers can be an opportunity for the Council to put its case. Sometimes, a response may be sent to clarify the situations and facts. Responses are agreed by the Communications lead in conjunction with the principal person.

7. SOCIAL MEDIA

7.1. Facebook and/or Twitter and other social networking sites provide the opportunity to issue information quickly. These sites allow us to identify and respond to trends and potential issues, answer questions directly, ask for information and feedback, and demonstrate and encourage support for local organisations, events, campaigns and individuals. A separate protocol for Social Media is available.

7.2. An acceptable use policy is in place, and a link is displayed on the front pages of Ripon City Council's Facebook and Twitter Accounts. Offensive, party political or other inappropriate posts will be removed.

7.3. The Council does not respond to posts on social media, using it as a 'notice board'.

7.4. Where a Councillor has their own social media account, it is good practice for the Councillor's profile to state their role as Ward Councillor and that the views expressed are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Ripon City Council.

7.5. Employees of the council shall not interact with Councillors on social media in any form.

8. PHOTOGRAPHY

8.1. Ripon City Council uses photography to illustrate aspects of its work where appropriate. Sometimes, the Council may use stock images from commercial on-line libraries. We may either send out a photograph that illustrates a story, or offer the media a new photo opportunity to highlight the work of the Council. The aim is to use photography to help tell the story and achieve the best impact for the target audience. In using photography to illustrate stories equalities issues are always taken into account.

8.2. When original photographs are commissioned or used by Ripon City Council, the copyright status will be advised on the media release.

9. MEDIA HANDLING IN THE RUN UP TO ELECTIONS OR REFERENDA

9.1. Although the laws relating to political neutrality in using the media apply at all times, in the run up to an election period, specific guidance may be issued. Queries in relation to this should be addressed to the Returning Officer at Harrogate Borough Council and / or the Monitoring Officer at Harrogate Borough Council.

10. MEDIA HANDLING DURING EVENTS

10.1. Large scale media events require a co-ordinated approach to media enquiries and handling in the run up to the event and to manage media attendance on site at the event. In these circumstances the Communications lead will be responsible for:

- Creating a media plan
- Notifying the media about the event
- Arrange and issue media passes ahead of the event if required
- Collate requests for interviews and photography ahead of the event
- Liaise with other agencies and partners to manage planned media requests
- Authorise media entry to the event
- Give appropriate instructions to the media at the event
- Manage any unplanned media requests at the event
- Lead the de-brief after the event

10.2. In the case of a crisis situation at a Ripon City Council organised event the Crisis Communication Plan, if adopted, shall take precedence.

11. PARTNERSHIP WORKING

11.1. We will work with our partners equally and ensure that the Council is well represented in all partnership activities. We will identify opportunities to make the Council's involvement visible and recognisable, and help support partnerships to take a pro-active approach to present stories that bring Ripon City Council's key priorities to life.

12. REVIEWING THE POLICY

12.1. This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis and extended as and when new tools and technologies emerge. If you have any queries regarding social media sites and their usage that are not covered in this policy please contact the Monitoring Officer.