



MEDIA RELATIONS PROTOCOL

Title	Media Relations Protocol
Who should use this	All Staff
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Approved by Management Team	
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1	NEW – OCTOBER 2015	
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MEDIA RELATIONS PROTOCOL

1. AIM

- 1.1 The aim of the Media Relations Protocol is to establish an agreed protocol for managing and implementing the professional relationships, working practices and operational activity between Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board, and officers and representatives of the media whether local press, national media, broadcast media, specialist publications or online media.
- 1.2 It provides guidance and best practice advice regarding both proactive and reactive media relations, photo opportunities, and for example working with the media in the run-up to elections or Revaluations with a view to ensuring a corporate and consistent approach to working with the media at all times.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The media has an important role to play in ensuring local residents, partners, customers, stakeholders are well informed about Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board's policies, priorities, services, activities, vision and values.

3. WHO AND WHAT DOES IT APPLY TO?

- 3.1 This protocol applies to all officers and elected members when speaking on behalf of the Board.

4. THE LEGAL CONTEXT

- 4.1 Through the Local Government Act 1986, specific legislation exists governing the publicity activities of local authorities. Under Section 2 of the Act, it states that a local authority shall not "publish or arrange for the publication of any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party."
- 4.2 In addition, the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity is issued under section 4(1) of the Act and all publicity the Board produces – which includes news releases and statements issued to the media – should comply with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.
- 4.3 The Code itself is contained within the 1988 Department of the Environment: Circular 20/88, which applied in England, Scotland and Wales when published. While there have since been updates to the Code for local authorities in England and Wales, the 1988 Code still applies within Scotland.

The key message contained within the Code – in addition to the political neutrality of Board publicity – is that publicity is a corporate function.

5. PRINCIPLES

- 5.1 The following principles will apply to all dealings between the Board and the media:
- South Ayrshire Council's communications team – who are available as required 24 hours a day, seven days a week – will be the primary point of contact in an advisory capacity between the Board and the media for both proactive and reactive issues.
 - Employees who are contacted by the media should immediately direct the query to the Assessor or the Head of Valuation Services & Assistant ERO.
 - The Board will be open and honest in all communications with the media, taking account of legal, privacy or commercial considerations.
 - The Board will provide information to the media in a timely fashion.
 - The Board will present information to the media in a clear, simple and user-friendly way.
 - The Board will never say 'no comment'.

6. MEDIA RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

6.1 Proactive news announcements

- 6.1.1 News releases are issued by the Board to the local, professional/specialist and national print, broadcast and online media with the aim of increasing awareness and understanding among appropriate target audiences of the Board and its work.
- 6.1.2 The types of issues promoted via proactive news releases include raising awareness of a particular issue or event.

6.2 Media enquiries

- 6.2.1 SAC communications team is available to assist with Board media enquiries and is available 24 hours a day, seven days per week.
- 6.2.2 Board members approached by the media for an official Board comment should discuss the request with the Assessor. SAC communications team, can provide advice, support and guidance on how best to respond.
- 6.2.3 Media enquiries received by officers should be directed to the Assessor or Head of Valuation Services and Assistant ERO.
- 6.2.4 Most media enquiries will require a quick response, particularly when originating from the national or broadcast media. All Staff are required to support the SAC communications team to ensure the Board has the right of reply and provides an appropriate and accurate response within the required deadlines.

- 6.2.5 Media statements and responses will generally be attributed to either the relevant officer (in response to queries regarding operational matters) or Board members.
- 6.2.6 All quotes included in media responses will be cleared by the named individual to whom the quote is attributed. Where this cannot be achieved within the required timescales, the quote will be cleared with the Chairman/Vice Chairman of the Board, Assessor or Head of Valuation Services & Assistant ERO.
- 6.2.7 Media enquiries that are deemed to be political will be referred to the Assessor for a decision.
- 6.2.8 As part of our commitment to being open and transparent when responding to media enquiries, the Board will never say "no comment". While there may be times when information cannot be released because of legal, privacy or commercial considerations, we should always explain this and provide a general comment on our policies/procedures.
- 6.2.9 'Off the record' briefings should be avoided at all times as the information can still be used by the media.

6.3 Potential media issues

- 6.3.1 If officers are aware of any issues within the Board that has the potential to become a media story, they should notify the Assessor or Head of Valuation Services as soon as possible, even if out-of-hours.
- 6.3.2 The Assessor/Head of Valuation Services/SAC communications team can prepare draft media lines to take and provide support and guidance on managing the media issue and facilitating any broadcast media interest as required.

6.4 Publicity ahead of elections

- 6.4.1 Once a Notice of Election is called, there are strict guidelines in relation to any publicity and media activity undertaken by the Board from then until the day of the election itself.
- 6.4.2 These are detailed in South Ayrshire Council's pre-election period guidance, which applies to all elections and by-elections: Council, European Parliament, Scottish Parliament and UK Parliament as well as referendums. The South Ayrshire Council guidance, which is equally relevant and applicable to Board Activities states:

"Public and media statements (reactive and proactive) will continue to be made during a Council pre-election period. Great care should be taken to ensure that any content is clearly and directly relevant to the service or issue being discussed and reflects the Council's agreed position. Unless exceptional circumstances apply, statements will be attributed to or delivered by the relevant Executive Director (or nominated chief officer) rather than elected members during the pre-election period."

6.4.3 Based on this guidance, normal practice during any election period is for proactive news announcements and reactive media statements to include quotes from the Assessor and no quotes from, or photographs of elected members, should be issued during this time. Further advice and guidance is available from SAC Communications Team.

6.5 Filming/interviews

6.5.1 All filming requests must be directed to the Assessor for consideration. Interview requests for comments from the Board must also be directed to the Assessor for consideration.

7. MEDIA MONITORING

7.1 The communications team of South Ayrshire Council monitors media coverage relating to the Board and can provide support and advice on how to respond to any inaccuracies in the reported information.

7.2 The SAC communications team manages the Board's licence with the Newspaper Licensing Agency (NLA) and holds some electronic copies of press clippings of articles related to the Board. Under the terms of the NLA licence, no other copies of press articles can be produced.

8. CONTACTS

8.1 This protocol sets out a defined approach to Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board's contact with the media; however, it won't necessarily cover every eventuality. Further advice, information and support on media issues are available from the communications team 24 hours a day.