

Report for: ACTION/INFORMATION
Item Number: 5

Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	NO
Title	Media Protocol for Advertising Parish Council Vacancies
Responsible Officer(s)	Andrew Elkington, Head of Policy and Performance
Contact officer, job title and phone number	Andrew Green, Community Partnerships Co-ordinator 01628 682940
Member reporting	Cllr. Christine Bateson
For Consideration By	Big Society – Increasing Democracy Sub Committee
Date to be Considered	5 th December 2013
Implementation Date if Not Called In	
Affected Wards	All wards with a town or parish council
Keywords/Index	Big Society, Town and Parish Councils, Elections

<p>Report Summary</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This report presents a draft media protocol for advertising parish council elections. 2. It recommends that members should agree the draft protocol for discussion with the District Association of Local Councils (DALC). 3. The recommendation is being made to support the Council's commitment to the Big Society and to encouraging democracy. 4. If adopted, the recommendation will be implemented within existing budgets. 5. The protocol has been proposed in response to difficulties that arose in relation to recent vacancies on Wraysbury Parish Council.
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If recommendations are adopted, how will residents benefit?	
Benefits to residents and reasons why they will benefit	Dates by which they can expect to notice a difference
Forthcoming vacancies will be effectively advertised and promoted increasing the likelihood of contested parish elections.	

1. Details of Recommendations

1. That members should agree the draft protocol as a basis for discussion with the District Association of Local Councils (DALC).

2. Reason for Decision and Options Considered

Options	Comments
The Council and DALC do not have an agreed protocol for advertising and promoting local elections.	There will potentially be misunderstandings and disagreements about how local elections are advertised and promoted.
A protocol for advertising and promoting local elections is agreed with DALC.	This will increase the chances of effective communication agreed by all parties.

3. Key Implications

Key implications are set out in the original report.

4. Financial Details

The protocol would be delivered within existing budgets.

5 Legal Implications

None

6. Value for Money

None

7. Sustainability Impact Appraisal

This recommendation has no direct impact on sustainability issues.

8. Risk Management

Risk	Uncontrolled Risk	Controls	Controlled Risk
The Council and parish councils currently have different views re the extent to which contested elections should be	High	The protocol can only be agreed with the active co-operation of DALC and town, parish councils.	Medium

proactively encouraged.			
Town and Parish Councils may not be prepared to agree a media protocol.	High	Every effort will be made to work with local parish councils, to draw from experience and best practice outside the council and involve all relevant parties but the council reserves the right to issue its own press releases if issues can not be resolved between the relevant parties.	Low

9. Links to Strategic Objectives

Improving local democracy contributes to the Council’s Big Society objectives and to the working for safer and stronger communities objective.

10. Equalities, Human Rights and Community Cohesion

There are no equalities or human rights implications arising from these recommendations. Effective representative democracy can contribute to community cohesion.

11. Staffing/Workforce and Accommodation implications:

None

12. Property and Assets

None

13. Any other implications:

None

14. Consultation

The protocol would need to be agreed in consultation with DALC on behalf of town and parish councils.

15. Timetable for Implementation

It is proposed that consultation would be completed by the time of the next Big Society Panel.

16. Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Media Protocol

17. Background Information

17.1 The protocol has been prepared in response to recent misunderstandings concerning vacancies on Wraysbury Parish Council.

17.2 The clerk to Wraysbury Parish Council suggested that communications relating to parish vacancies should be covered by an agreed media protocol.

17.3 The current version has been drafted as a basis for discussion between the parties.

18. Consultation (Mandatory)

Name of consultee	Post held and Department	Date sent	Date Received	See comments in paragraph:
Internal				
Cllr Burbage		27/11/13	28/11/13	
Cllr Bateson		27/11/13		
Andrew Elkington		27/11/13	28/11/13	
Maria Lucas		27/11/13		
Andrew Brooker		27/11/13		

Report History

Decision type:	Urgency item?
Non-key decision	No

Report no.	Full name of report author	Job title	Full contact no:
	Andrew Green	Community Partnerships Coordinator	01628 682940

Schedule for writing and reviewing report

Stages in the life of the report (not all will apply)	Date to complete
1. Officer writes report (in consultation with Lead Member)	
2. Report goes for review to head of service or DMT	
3. To specialist departments: eg, legal, finance, HR (in parallel)	
4. To lead member	
5. To SMT or CMT	
6. To the leader	
7. To overview or scrutiny, if a cabinet report	
8. To cabinet	

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

Proposed Media protocol

Casual Vacancies on Town and Parish Councils

This protocol is an agreement between

- The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
- District Association of Local Councils
- Individual Town and Parish Councils across the Royal Borough

The Protocol is intended to provide a co-ordinated approach to media handling and communications when casual vacancies occur on town or parish councils.

This protocol does not preclude individual partners issuing their own communications but it does ensure that such communications are shared with the other parties and, where necessary, agreement/support obtained.

Objective

This media communications protocol has been developed to ensure that communications are carried out professionally, effectively, by agreement and by the most relevant officers in each organisation.

It is aimed at achieving efficient sign-off of agreed communications whilst allowing each party to issue their own communications where they do not affect the other party to the agreement.

Scope

This protocol covers all external communications relating to a vacancy arising on a parish council.

The key stages at which communication will be required are:

- Advertisement of the vacancy & arrangements for securing an election (Noting that the deadline for securing 10 signatures needed for an election is 14 days from the date of the notice).
- Notice of election & deadline for nominations (Noting that the deadline for receiving nominations is 19 days before the poll date announced in the notice of election).

Collective communications

- Joint Communication from both organisations will normally be issued by the Royal Borough
- Both partners should agree to the communications content and format
- All partners must be given sufficient time to allow for draft communications to be checked within their respective organisations and for feedback to be given.

- **But it must be recognised by both parties that the statutory deadline for securing the ten signatures necessary to secure an election is and that speed is of the essence.**
- Circulation should be to the agreed email check/sign-off list (see below).
- Cut off times for communications feedback will be set and those who have not responded by that time will be deemed to have agreed.

Individual partner communications

Each party has its own established communications procedures and staff authorised to communicate on its behalf.

This protocol is flexible and recognises that individual partners have authority to issue communications that relate to their own specific communities and target audiences.

The Council reserves the right to issue its own communications in relation to town or parish vacancies where it is not feasible to secure sign off from the relevant town or parish council within the necessary timescale.

Where this occurs the Council will ensure that the relevant town or parish council is kept fully informed.

Email check list and sign off

The Council will pass proposed communications to the clerk and the chairman of a relevant parish council. It is the Council's expectation that the communication can be signed off by either or both on behalf of the parish council.

Communications checklist

Draft communications will be circulated for sign off to:

- Business and Community Partnerships Manager
- Returning officer
- Elections Team
- Relevant Parish Clerk/ Parish Chairman
- Leader's Office
- Cllr. Bateson
- Cllr. Burbage