



ONCHAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS

Aim: To ensure the reputation of the Authority is maintained and contact with the media is open, honest and transparent.

Media Contact Policy

Policy Date: January 2020
Review Date: January 2024

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Policy Review - History:

Please be aware that a hard copy of this document may not be the latest available version, which is available in the Authority's document management system, and which supersedes all previous versions.

Those to whom this policy applies are responsible for familiarising themselves periodically with the latest version and for complying with policy requirements at all times.

Acknowledgement to Douglas Corporation for sharing their policy and procedures.

Effective from:	Replaces:	Originator:	Page X of Y
February 2020	New	Chief Executive	1 of 7
Board Ratification:			03/02/2020

History or Most Recent Policy Changes – MUST BE COMPLETED		
Version:	Date:	Change:
1	27/01/20	New Document

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Onchan District Commissioners aims to build and maintain a positive reputation and has adopted a proactive approach in its relationship with the media.
- 1.2 This document provides information to Members and Officers on the basic protocol for working with the media as well as clear guidance in respect of roles and responsibilities.
- 1.3 The Authority welcomes enquiries from the media and will attend to media requests promptly and with courtesy, honesty and respect. The Authority believes that a good relationship based on trust, familiarity and confidence, is important between the Authority and the media.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of the Media Contact Policy are to:
 - (i) Ensure that the Authority complies with the principles of corporate governance, i.e. openness, accountability and integrity.
 - (ii) Ensure that the Authority communicates effectively with all its stakeholders.
 - (iii) Ensure all communication with the media is consistent, balanced, well-informed, timely, professional and appropriate.
 - (iv) Improve communication with customers and support the Authority's public relations.
 - (v) Limit the possibility of miscommunication and clearly indicate the Authority's authorised spokespersons.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

- 3.1 The Chief Executive/Clerk/Chairman will be the first point of contact for press enquiries (e.g. newspapers, radio and TV stations etc.) and are responsible to issue press releases and respond to queries.
- 3.2 With the permission of the Chairman/Chief Executive/Clerk the Lead Members may act as spokespersons for the Authority on agreed Authority policy matters within their delegated areas of responsibility under the Authority's Code of Conduct, and in accordance with the principles set down in this Media Contact Policy.
- 3.3 The Chief Executive/Clerk, in their absence whilst deputising, the Finance Manager/District Surveyor will be responsible for endorsing and overseeing the Media Contact Policy.
- 3.4 The Lead Members may act as spokesperson with the permission of the Chairman/Chief Executive/Clerk for matters relating to the civic role of the Chairman and in respect of non-contentious matters of Authority policy.

- 3.5 The Chief Executive/Clerk, and officers delegated by the Chief Executive/Clerk, may provide information to the media on agreed Authority policy matters and on operational matters of public interest.

4. Members and the Media

- 4.1 In their role as elected representatives, Members are free to talk to the media at any time on any issue of interest. However, whilst every Member has a right to express a private opinion on any issue, Commissioners must carefully identify the role in which they speak.
- 4.2 When Members speak 'for the Authority' they must express and support Onchan District Commissioners' entire policy on the issue at hand. Any Member who feels unable to speak in support of an Authority policy whilst formally representing the Authority faces a dilemma and must treat it in a similar fashion to a conflict of interest issue.
- 4.3 Whilst Members are encouraged to keep in regular contact with the local media in order to promote their community leadership role and the positive work they are carrying out in their community, Members should be sensitive to the fact that they are perceived to be speaking on behalf of the Authority. If writing or expressing a view that is not in accordance with the Commissioners' policy, it should be made clear that this is an independent opinion.
- 4.4 From time to time Members may be requested to contribute material for newspapers or participate in a broadcast interview. The views expressed should, where required under this Policy, be identified as the Member's own and must not include personal criticism of other Members or Officers.
- 4.5 Members are encouraged to consult with the Chairman and Chief Executive/Clerk prior to speaking to or issuing statements to the media, whether on an individual or Authority basis.
- 4.6 Defamation law applies to Members as it does for other members of the public. It could be considered defamatory to harm another person's reputation verbally or through the written word.
- 4.7 Members must not use the Authority's framework for media relations in support of election campaigning or for individual political gain.
- 4.8 Any Member in a position as spokesperson and who considers that training in media relations would be useful is encouraged to contact the Chief Executive/Clerk.

5. Media Enquiries

- 5.1 Officers should direct all media enquiries to the Chief Executive/Clerk for appropriate action which may involve contacting the Chairman and/or the Lead Member dependent on circumstances. Members are encouraged to direct queries to the Chief Executive/Clerk, and/or the Chairman of the Authority in the first instance, dependent on the level of query.

- 5.2 In respect of day-to-day management and operational matters, the Chief Executive/Clerk may delegate Officer(s) to speak to the media.
- 5.3 Members and Officers are encouraged to co-operate at all times with media outlets subject to the provisions in this policy and to be proactive, as opposed to reactive in their use of the media. The wording 'No comment' is to be avoided – Members and Officers should indicate that an official response will be provided as soon as possible.
- 5.4 As soon as Members or Officers become aware of an issue likely to attract media attention, either positive or negative, then the Chief Executive/Clerk and Chairman should be alerted.
- 5.5 Contractors or service providers employed by the Authority must refer all media enquiries relating to the Authority to the Chief Executive/Clerk.
- 5.6 All requests for filming of Authority services or filming on Authority property must be referred to the Chief Executive/Clerk in all instances when there is a likelihood of Authority services being impacted or the Authority's reputation being affected. The Chief Executive/Clerk may authorise filming where there is likely to be minimal implications.

6. Media Releases

- 6.1 Officers and Members should ensure that information provided to the Chief Executive/Clerk is correct. Officers should prepare and draft information so that a speedy and accurate response can be provided. Where resource permits, Officers are encouraged to provide a draft press release which can then be formatted/approved by the Chief Executive/Clerk.
- 6.2 The Chief Executive/Clerk will prepare releases, for approval by the Chairman, and any Lead Member quoted in such release.
- 6.3 Once approved, statements will be issued to all Members electronically prior to general release to the Island's media. Releases will also be published to the Authority's website.
- 6.4 Members and Officers should treat all media outlets equally and should avoid giving one outlet preferential treatment. Media releases will be distributed to all media outlets at the same time.
- 6.5 Where media releases are jointly issued with partnering organisations agreement from those organisations must be obtained.

7. Emergency Planning

- 7.1 Specific procedures for media and public communications are contained within the Authority's Emergency Plan.

8. Social Media

- 8.1 In respect of Social Media and the interaction with media relations, it is inevitable that once an item of interest is available in the public domain, then queries and comments may be generated via social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter.
- 8.2 The Authority's Social Media accounts are monitored on behalf of SMT. Where significant issues are raised these will be referred as soon as practicable to SMT for management of any media relations elements. Where immediate action is required because of incorrect or reputationally-damaging posts, then the Chief Executive/Clerk will take immediate action to block or terminate posts.
- 8.3 For Members and Officers, the advice contained within this Policy equally relates to communications on social media.

9. Equal Opportunities

- 9.1 When drafting and issuing press releases or selecting photographs, Members and Officers should be mindful of equal opportunity and diversity principles.
- 9.2 Publicity should avoid the stereotyping of roles and should demonstrate the Authority's commitment to promoting equality and diversity. This applies to services and opportunities to people irrespective of age, sex, race, and disability.

10. Safeguarding

- 10.1 All persons or organisations dealing with the media on behalf of the Authority must be aware of the Authority's current policies and procedures in relation to Safeguarding.
- 10.2 In particular respect of photography and the use of images of children:
- (i) Written consent from parent/guardian must be obtained for a child to be photographed or videoed, specified for the purpose of use.
 - (ii) Children's names should not be used in photograph captions without consent.
 - (iii) Avoid the use of images accompanied by personal information, for example, on the Authority's website or via social media if consent has not been given.
 - (iv) Professional photographers or press invited to attend Authority events must provide a written statement advising of their child protection policy.
 - (v) Photographers must not be allowed unsupervised access to children nor should photography sessions outside an event or at a child's home be permitted.

11. Data Protection

- 11.1 Members, Officers and all persons or organisations dealing with the media on behalf of the Authority must comply with Data Protection legislation. Advice may be sought from the Data Protection Officer.

12. Officers of the Authority

- 12.1 All officers should seek consent from their Chief Executive/Clerk prior to speaking to an external media representative. Information or statements provided to the media must be in accordance with the principles and procedures set down in this Media Contact Policy.
- 12.2 Officers may not provide any comment or information to the media with the intention of contesting or undermining Authority policy or casting Onchan District Commissioner, Members or Officers in a negative light.
- 12.3 Officers may speak or write to the media or write as private individuals with the following conditions:
- (i) They do not comment on Authority business or policy.
 - (ii) They are not identified as Authority employees.
 - (iii) Their comments are not perceived as representing official Authority position or policy.
- 12.4 Where Officers have provided personal or Authority mobile telephone contact details to third parties whilst engaged in Authority business, for example to Police or other Emergency services, it should be made clear that this number must not be passed on to the media (or any other organisation) without consent.

13. Review and Circulation

- 13.1 All new employees are to be made aware of the Authority's Media Contact Policy as part of the induction process.
- 13.2 This policy will be reviewed in line with the Authority's Code of Conduct.