



Handy Tips on Writing Press Releases

Before drafting the press release

- Think about when press releases will be most effective. It needn't be just after a Committee decision or an event. The Council's Executive team is keen for officers to celebrate a new achievement or improved service delivery through the press at any time;
- If you are concerned about sending out a press release before a decision has been taken at Committee, consider placing an embargo on the press release. Not something that is traditionally done in the Council, but it would allow media more time to take notice of the story and be prepared to do a follow-up. More chance that the story will go 'live' at the right time. If doing this, ensure that a clear time is on the press release so that the media know when they can go live with the story e.g. "not for release before midnight on 14th October 2009";
- Always ensure that the person who's named as being able to provide further information, will be available to do so once it has been sent out. (Could consider sending work mobile numbers to the press);
- Consider what the press might find interesting when writing a press release, rather than what we as officers do;
- Remember that the Shetland News aims to keep their articles to less than 600 words, so press releases must be kept short and to the point. Remember the old adage, 'Less is more';
- The media are always looking for a way to make a story interesting and something that will attract their readers' attention. If something is the first, most expensive, biggest, best, or has never happened before, it is much more likely to be printed;
- Different stories lend themselves better to particular media outlets. Some stories are better for radio. Be mindful of the media outlets available in Shetland, which are diverse for such a small place. (Shetland News, Shetland Times, SIBC, BBC Radio Shetland);

And

- Officers should remember that the press release is only the start of the story. Do not try to tell the entire story in the press release. If it is something that a reporter thinks will be interesting, s/he will look to find out more.

Drafting the press release – practical tips

- Write in Plain English – short sentences, no jargon etc. Think about how you would say something to someone in the pub;
- Use photos;

- Include short and interesting quote(s) from relevant person(s). A Councillor comment must be included in all press releases, with the exception of standard monthly releases;
- News story must always be in the first paragraph of the press release to its maximise impact. If the main point that you're trying to get across is hidden somewhere in paragraph 4, it's likely to be missed altogether;
- Next most important point should be in the second paragraph, next most important in the third and so on. Editors want to be able to work back from the end of the press release when editing;
- Avoid repetition when using quotes – if someone has said something, don't include the same point from someone else just for the sake of it. Try to ensure that they are adding something to the press release;

eg a quote is provided from someone who says that they are happy with something and the next quote has someone that essentially agrees with them;

- A human-interest angle can make a story more interesting. e.g. someone who has experienced the thing that's being reported or someone who's been affected and would be willing to be contacted;
- Probably looking at 150 words max. for an item on Radio Shetland. 1 introductory paragraph and then 3 short paragraphs is all they can fit in. It's therefore very difficult to fit in a lot of background information;

And

- Look to cover "who", "what", "when" and "where" in the press release.

After the story is out

- Consider going "off the record" with reporters if the circumstances feel right and there's a good relationship with the reporter. This can be very helpful for reporters in helping them understand the full picture;
- Be as open and as friendly as you feel you can. Media will be far more friendly if that kind of relationship is developed, instead of one where the media is viewed with suspicion;
- If something is the first in Scotland / North Scotland, consider involving TV or the national media. Example discussed whereby Shetland is the only rural area in Scotland to have achieved a Scottish Seaside award (for St Ninian's Isle). It's likely that this would have been picked up by Grampian TV if they had been alerted to it;
- The media always look for 1 mouthpiece to provide comment – not interested in having a group of officers available for comment at a press conference;

And

- Keep in mind the potential exposure / publicity that a positive news story can generate for an area. Could be picked up by national newspapers / TV.