

Date: 27 March 2007

Report: CORPORATE MEDIA PROCEDURE AND PROTOCOL

Purpose of the report

1. To consider and recommend a revised corporate media procedure and protocol for the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority which will replace the 1998 'Guidelines for Working with the Media'.

Strategic Planning Framework

2. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework and in particular 'to provide accessible, high quality communications and services that positively influence people's enjoyment and understanding of the special qualities of the Yorkshire Dales National Park' (Best Value Performance Plan 2006/2007).

Background

3. The Authority 'Guidelines for Working with the Media' were developed in 1998 following work by the Public and Media Awareness Sub-Committee and the National Park Purposes Committee following the creation of Authority as an independent local authority. Much has changed in the intervening years. For example:
 - the speed of communications has increased dramatically and new media channels are developing all the time (podcasting, internet news sites etc).
 - the Authority has a new Communications Team structure with a dedicated Media Officer whose role is primarily to undertake proactive media liaison work and to react to media enquiries.
 - the Authority's work and priorities have changed. Major projects such as Limestone Country Project have generated widespread media interest and the Authority is making a real effort to target new and non-traditional audiences through its outreach work.
 - the Authority has created a group of 'Member Champions' (2006) who will represent different areas of work. These individuals will increasingly be called upon to represent the Authority in the media where appropriate.

Nine years on it therefore seems sensible to review the existing media guidelines and to draw up a new '**Corporate Media Procedure and Protocol**' for the Authority.

4. Media portrayal of the Authority is critical to our reputation as a professional, respected organisation, and consequently working in close partnership with the media is essential. The media are also vital to our second purpose 'to promote understanding', and by promoting effective media partnerships we can utilise the power of the media to communicate to a wide audience.
5. Effective media management and coordination of all media responses via the Communications Team is a vital part of the Authority's communications procedures and it is of especial relevance for controversial and political matters. This procedure relies on the Authority dealing professionally and efficiently with journalists' requests. The Authority must provide journalists with the information they require within deadline in order to maintain and enhance its reputation.
6. Anyone speaking on behalf of the Authority is the representative of the whole organisation during that interview and should give the official Authority response and decision. If in doubt, individuals should liaise with the Communications Team and/or Senior Management Team as required. Members who are speaking as representatives of another body, for example, county, district or parish councils, should make this clear before commenting to the press.

Financial and staffing implications

7. Each individual will have different experience and skills. A limited rolling programme of media training for Member Champions and officers started in 2006 and will continue future years subject to budget.

RECOMMENDATION

8. That the proposed '**Corporate Media Procedure and Protocol**' be noted and recommended for adoption.

Kath Taylor
Communications Manager

Thursday 1 March 2007

Background documents:

Appendix: **Corporate Media Procedure and Protocol**

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Corporate Media Procedure and Protocol

Background and general underlying philosophy

Media portrayal of the Authority is critical to our reputation as a professional, respected organisation, and consequently working in close partnership with the media is essential. The media are also vital to our second purpose 'to promote understanding', and by promoting effective media partnerships we can utilise the power of the media to communicate to a wide audience.

Effective media management and coordination of all media responses is a vital part of the Authority's communications procedures and it is of especial relevance for controversial and political matters.

This procedure relies on the Authority dealing professionally and efficiently with journalists' requests. The Authority must provide journalists with the information they require within deadline in order to maintain and enhance its reputation. To this end, all media requests and liaison work will be managed by the Communications Team.

Anyone speaking on behalf of the Authority is the representative of the whole organisation during that interview and should give the official Authority response and decision. If in doubt, individuals should liaise with the Communications Team and/or Senior Management Team as required. Members who are speaking as representatives of another body, for example, county, district or parish councils, should make this clear before commenting to the press.

Corporate Media Procedure

1) Responding to media enquiries – reactive media liaison

- a) All media calls should be directed through the Media Officer in the first instance.

In the absence of the Media Officer (currently works Mondays, Tuesday mornings and Fridays), please contact another member of the Communications Team at Colvend.

Media Officer contact details:

Tel: 01756 751617

Email: media@yorkshiredales.org.uk

(NB: voicemail and email are checked regularly in absence of the Media Officer)

If a member of the media calls you direct, you have two options. You can either take some contact details and speak to the Media Officer before commenting or alternatively, if you feel comfortable about giving an official Authority response, you may speak to them directly. In either case, please make sure that the call is logged with the Media Officer for our records.

- b) The Media Officer (and other members of the Communications Team) will not pass any journalists through to any member or officer without informing him or her first.

In such cases the Media Officer will provide details of the journalist, who they work for, and their deadline. Where possible, the Media Officer will provide details of the likely angle of the article.

- c) All journalists will be dealt with courteously, professionally and to deadline.

If deadlines cannot be met, a holding call will be made.

This procedure relies on the Authority dealing professionally and efficiently with journalists' requests.

- d) "No comment" is not considered an acceptable response. In some instances a holding reply is, however, acceptable until a response can be agreed with the Media Officer.

2) News releases – proactive media liaison

- a) All Authority news releases will be written by the Media Officer (or, in his/her absence, by members of the Communications Team).

In the majority of cases news releases will include a quotation from an Authority spokesperson. Heads of Department will decide whether this spokesperson should be the appropriate Member Champion or an officer. In either case the member or officer quoted must be prepared (and available and able) to respond to any media enquiries.

Where an issue/piece of news is deemed to be particularly controversial, it is likely that the primary spokesperson will be the Chief Executive or Chair.

- b) All news releases will be checked with the person(s) quoted before distribution to the media. News releases will also be cleared with the relevant Head of Department prior to publication. The only exception to this will be simple news releases to promote the events programme etc which appear on a regular basis and do not therefore need to go through the full approval process.
- c) The Authority will not produce joint news releases ie. news releases with two logos. The only exception to this rule is press releases issued in partnership with the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust which may carry both logos and be issued by either organisation.

Releases may, however, be coordinated with partner organisations. Authority comment may be included in other organisations' media releases and quotations from external individuals may be included in Authority media releases as deemed appropriate by the Media Officer and lead officers. On some occasions, the Authority will send out a release on behalf of a partner organisation, for example, the RSPB, in order to make use of the Authority's extensive media mailing list but this will be published either as an Authority release or as a release from the other organisation.

- d) All Authority news releases will be circulated to the media by email. The Media Officer maintains a comprehensive media contact list which includes the local, regional, national and specialist press.

News releases will also be published on the Authority website – www.yorkshiredales.org.uk – as soon as possible.

The Media Officer also circulates news releases internally to all members and to any member of staff who makes a request to be listed on the internal circulation list.

3) Crisis management

- a) The Authority has a simple 10 step crisis communications plan which should be referred to in the event of an emergency, major incident or crisis.

4) Broadcast media – TV, radio interviews and filming

- a) As with other media enquiries these should be directed to the Media Officer, who will find the best person to carry out the interview.
- b) If you are approached by a TV or radio station for an interview or for assistance with filming, please make sure you inform the Communications Team so that this can be recorded in the media log, which in turn is used to monitor media coverage.

5) Requests for filming

- a) From time to time the Authority is approached by companies or individuals who want to film within the National Park. In the majority of cases the best approach is to put such enquiries through to the Media Officer (or Communications Team) who will make the necessary arrangements.

The procedure for dealing with such requests is:

- i) Establish where the filming will take place.
- ii) If appropriate put the film crew in touch with the local area ranger who may be able to help, although he/she is unlikely to be able to pass on contact details.
- iii) Inform the local area ranger that filming is likely to take place. He/she will be able to make a judgement on whether any checks are required in relation to potential damage filming may cause.
- iv) If the request is to film on National Park Authority-owned land, for example, Freeholders' Wood at Aysgarth Falls, a risk assessment will be required and staff at Aysgarth Falls National Park Centre (in particular the Lower Wensleydale Ranger) will need to be informed.

Note that it may be necessary to explain that the National Park Authority does not own the National Park and that the majority of land is in private ownership. Permission to film must therefore be sought from landowners rather than from the National Park Authority.

6) Reaction statements

- a) There will be situations where the Authority needs to prepare a reaction statement to be used in response to enquiries about particular circumstances or issues.

The Media Officer will monitor the need for such statements and will prepare them as appropriate. If an officer or member becomes aware of a situation which they feel is likely to generate media interest (especially if the situation is a controversial one), he/she should contact the Media Officer as soon as possible so that a statement can be prepared. Such statements will not be issued as news releases but will be used as required in response to particular media enquiries.

Approval processes for reaction statements will be the same as those applied to news releases.

7) Media support and advice

- a) The Media Officer (and in his/her absence the Communications Team) is available to give advice, support and briefings as necessary during working hours and at major media events out-of-hours.

As and when an issue arises which may necessitate out-of-hours contact, consideration will be given as to whether additional media cover is required, for example, through the Government News Network.

*Kath Taylor
Communications Manager
February 2007*