

Corporate Communications and Marketing

Style Guide for Press Releases

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Version 1.



Press Release Style Guide

Cherwell District and South Northamptonshire Council Style Guide for Press Releases

Structure

- Standard press releases should not exceed one side of A4 paper.
- Press releases should be clear, concise and understood by the public with no prior knowledge or understanding of the subject. Ensure someone reading for the first time could understand by using clear, simple language and avoid council jargon.
- Headlines should be short, sharp and interesting.
- Introductions should not be direct repetition of the headline; they should expand upon the point made.
- Press releases should never begin with “Cherwell District Council” or “South Northamptonshire Council”. The first word and paragraph is important so be creative.
- Introductions should not be longer than 30 words.
- Government acts or laws should never be included within an introduction.
- Paragraphs should be kept short; no more than two sentences each.
- All contact details including web addresses, postal addresses, phone numbers and email addresses should be included in the final paragraph.
- Words should not be abbreviated unless in a quote. For example use “could not” instead of “couldn’t”. It retains a professional style.
- Do not use “you” – this is a more informal style suited to social media. Instead use “residents”, “people” and “members of the public” etc to keep the release formal.
- When including contact details be mindful not everyone has internet access; include online details first to encourage self-service but ensure a phone number is also included for those without access to online services.
- Use Notes to Editors for additional information such as photo captions, additional quotes and background notes.
- When including photographs, be sure to caption from left to right with the first and surnames of those pictured along with their relevant title. For children under 16, parental or guardian consent will be required and should be obtained using a photo consent form.
- Do not use bold, italics or underline content; if the press release is well written the point should be emphasised without the need to decorate the text

Quotes

- All press releases should include a member quote (unless in purdah, in which case a lead officer should be quoted instead).
- Quotes should appear no later than the third or fourth paragraph.
- Quotes should be included using “quotation marks” at the beginning and very end of the speech to identify the start and finish.
- If a quote continues into a second paragraph, the first paragraph should not be closed; instead insert new quotation marks at the beginning of the second paragraph to show continuation and only insert end quotation marks once the speech has finished, ie:
 - Joe Bloggs said: “Open the quote with quotation marks.
“If the quote continues into a new paragraph then insert new quotation marks at the start of the sentence and only insert quotation marks at the very end.”
- Punctuation marks at the end of a quote, such as a full stop or question mark, should be contained inside the quotation mark.”
- The only exception to this is paraphrasing when a partial quote is included within a sentence. In instance the punctuation marks should be outside of the quote to show this is summary, not a verbatim account. Ie:
 - In giving his account, Joe Bloggs said the idea of a seven-day working week was “absolutely preposterous”.
- Press releases should not include quotes from more than two people. If more than two people need to be quoted, include additional quotes under Notes to Editors.
- If more than one person is quoted, quotes should not appear back-to-back; they should be separated by at least one paragraph of written text.
- Contact details should never be included within a quote.

Dates, times and numbers

- Numbers one – nine should be written as words while 10 and above should be numbers.
- Use a 12 hour clock when referring to times and separate hours and minutes with a full stop ie 10.30am.
- When writing dates, order as day, date, month and year ie Monday, 1 January 2016
- Do not add letters after dates ie use:
 - 1 instead of 1st

- 2 instead of 2nd
- If the date being referred to has past, make clear by using the word “last” and then the date in brackets ie last Thursday (1 January).
- If the date being referred to is in the next week include the day then the date in brackets ie on Monday (1 January).
- If the date being referred to is further advanced than the next seven days, write the date in full ie Monday, 1 January.
- Reference to the year only needs to be referred to if it could lead to confusion. A common sense approach is required. Ie if talking about the general election which takes place in one month’s time, no year would be needed. If making reference to an election several years away, then the year could need including.
- Sentences should never start with a number digit ie 1, 2, 3.
- Where possible, avoid using a number to start any sentence; add a prefix or description ie rather than “100 people attended the job fair” reverse to say “the job fair was attended by 100 people”.
- If it is unavoidable to start a sentence with a number, make sure the word is written out, even if higher than 10. Ie Ten people attended.
- When referring to percentages, never use the symbol; always write in full ie 12 per cent.

Council & Government references

- When introducing Cherwell District Council or South Northamptonshire Council for the first time, use their full and proper title. Abbreviations can be made their after ie “Cherwell” or “South Northants”.
- When introducing councillors for the first time, introduce by title, name and then role. Ie:
 - Cllr Joe Bloggs, leader of Banburyshire Council
 - Cllr Emma Dale, Cherwell/ South Northant’s lead member for planning
- When using a member title, use “Cllr” as opposed to “councillor”.
- After introducing a councillor, any further reference should use title and name only ie Cllr Bloggs.
- Cherwell District Council and South Northamptonshire Council are proper nouns* and should be capped up. Only proper nouns, which are the names of organisations, people or places, should be capped up.

- When referring to “the council” this is a common noun* – it is referring to a generic body and is not the name of an organisation. Therefore should be lower case. This is per dictionary and Local Government Association guidelines.
- The same rules apply when referring to councillors; when introducing individual councillors by name, such as Cllr Jo Bloggs, this is the name of a person so should be capped up. When referring to the councillors, this is generic and should be lower case.
- When referring to Central Government or the Government, this should be capped up as it is the name of an organisation.
- With the exception of the Returning Officer at elections, council job titles should always be lower case, ie
 - leader of the council
 - joint chief executive
- When referring to an MP, introduce by name and then job title. ie:
 - Joe Bloggs, MP for Banburyshire
- Titles for Government ministers and the Prime Minister should always be capped up ie:
 - Joe Bloggs, Minister for Housing
 - Prime Minister David Cameron

*Nouns refer to a person, animal, place, thing or idea. Only proper nouns, which are the names of organisations, people or places, should be capitalised. All other nouns, known as common nouns, should be lower case.

Apostrophes

- Apostrophes are possessive; they indicate ownership. Misusing apostrophes can completely change a point or meaning so it is vital they are used correctly.
- Placing an apostrophe before the ‘s’ means it belongs to a single person/ thing ie:
 - The resident’s complaint (one complaint made by one resident)
- Placing an apostrophe after the ‘s’ means it belongs to more than one person/ thing ie:
 - The residents’ complaint (one complaint made by several residents.)
- Exceptions to the rule apply when the word is already representative of more than one person/ thing. In this instance the apostrophe still comes before the ‘s’ ie:
 - The children’s toys (toys belonging to more than one child)

- Apostrophes are also used to indicate a missing letter or letters ie:
 - It's (it is)
 - Can't (cannot)
 - Wouldn't (would not)
- The only time the word "it's" should have an apostrophe included is if it is abbreviating "it is". If the sentence still makes sense by using "it is" instead of its then the apostrophe should remain. If it does not make sense then it should be removed ie:
 - The cat bit its own tail (the cat bit it is own tail – does not make sense so no apostrophe)
 - It's raining outside (it is raining outside – does make sense so use an apostrophe)

For clarity on any of the point included within the style guide contact a member of the Cherwell District Council and South Northamptonshire Council communications team.