

Media Relations Policy

Local Government Act 2009

1. Policy Statement

Townsville City Council (Council) is committed to providing effective media relations as a means of communicating Council's services, programs facilities and activities to the Townsville community.

2. Principles

This policy is consistent with the Local Government Principles according to section 4(2) of the *Local Government Act 2009*:

- transparent and effective processes and decision-making in the public interest;
- sustainable development and management of assets and infrastructure, and delivery of effective services;
- democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement;
- good governance of, and by, local government; and,
- ethical and legal behaviour of Councillors, local government employees and Councillor advisors.

Through this policy, Council aims to:

- provide timely, accurate, relevant and consistent information to the community through positive working relationships with media organisations and via Council's media channels;
- enhance and protect the image and reputation of Council by maintaining a professional, informative and courteous relationship with all levels of media;
- ensure Councillors are aware of emerging media issues; and,
- provide clear guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of Councillors and Council workers for engaging with the media.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all facets of Council's activities where media relations are appropriate and/or necessary.

This policy applies to all Councillors and Council workers.

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4. Responsibility

Role	Responsibility
Councillors	The Mayor and Divisional Councillors are responsible for adhering to this policy where it applies to their activities, ensuring clarity between their personal actions and opinions and formal engagement or media relations activities undertaken by Council.
Councillors and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	Councillors and Council's CEO are responsible for complying with this policy and representing Council's position/s accurately and responsibly when interacting with the media.
CEO and Managers	Council's CEO and managers are to ensure that this policy is understood and adhered to by all Councillors and workers.
General Manager, Communications and Engagement	responsible for overseeing the organisation's proactive and reactive media activities and requests as coordinated by the Media Team.
Media Team	responsible for managing proactive and reactive media activities and requests to ensure a positive image and reputation is built through Council's external communications.
Workers	responsible for referring any matters or enquiries relating to media to Council's Media Team and ensuring workers are not representing or acting on behalf of Council unless delegated by the CEO.

5. Definitions

Term	Definition
Committee Chairperson or Member	refers to elected members of Council, who in their capacity as councillor, also hold a position on a specific committee, board or group.
Councillors	refers to elected members of Council, including the Mayor and Divisional Councillors.
Divisional Councillors	refers to elected members of Council, who represent a specific division within the local government area.

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Term	Definition
Employees	includes any persons employed directly by Townsville City Council but does not include volunteers, contractors, labour hire or contract personnel.
Manager	an individual responsible for overseeing and coordinating specific functions, departments, teams or projects within Townsville City Council.
Media Opportunity	refers to a planned event, interview, or activity designed to generate media coverage, attract attention from journalists and promote a specific message or cause.
Media Relations	means the transmission of information from Council to external audiences via the media through media releases and media announcements about Council decisions and projects, subject to available resources and Council priorities.
Media Release	means a written or recorded communication issued to the media to inform them of information the organisation has deemed as possessing news value with the objective of achieving a positive promotional or publicity opportunity.
Proactive Media	means external communication that is initiated by media release or Council led and coordinated media opportunity.
Reactive Media	includes a media statement or media opportunity in response to external enquiries or anticipated community issues.
Spokesperson	is a person who speaks as a designated representative of Council.
Townsville Local Disaster Management Group (TLDMG)	means multi-agency group established by Council in accordance with section 29 of the <i>Disaster Management Act 2003</i> (DM Act) to assist Council with its management of disaster events. Functions of the TLDMG are given in section 30 of the DM Act.
Workers	includes employees, contractors, volunteers and all others who perform work on behalf of Council.

6. Policy

Media relations will be managed by Council's Media Team in accordance with this policy. This includes the distribution of media releases, media alerts and media kits and the coordination of media opportunities on behalf of Council and Councillors.

Council's Media Team is the point of contact for all media enquiries.

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All matters regarded as an issue or crisis must be referred immediately to the General Manager Communications and Engagement.

The approval process for all media dealings is managed by the Media Team and must include approval by the subject matter expert, relevant Director and intended Councillor acting as spokesperson. This may also include oversight by the Mayor and CEO.

6.1. Authorised Spokespeople

The following table outlines the authority of various roles or teams to act as official Council spokespersons.

Role	Authorisation
Mayor	<p>The Mayor is the official Council spokesperson on all matters concerning Council decisions, actions, policies, and community-related issues. This includes at civic occasions, community events and major Council announcements.</p> <p>When the Mayor is unavailable or absent, they may delegate as appropriate to another Councillor.</p> <p>The Mayor must represent Council's position on these matters accurately and responsibly when interacting with the media.</p>
Committee Chairperson or Member	<p>As appropriate and at the discretion of the Mayor, Councillors who hold a position on a specific committee, board or group are authorised to speak on topics relating to their committee position.</p>
Divisional Councillors	<p>Divisional Councillors are not authorised spokespersons for Council, unless delegated by the Mayor. However, Divisional Councillors are the spokesperson on local divisional issues and are permitted to make statements of personal opinion or in reference to matters relating to their respective divisions to the media (refer to section 6.2).</p> <p>They must represent Council's position on these matters accurately and responsibly when interacting with the media and be mindful of the timing of information they release to avoid pre-empting official Council announcements.</p>
CEO	<p>The CEO is the official Council spokesperson on all matters relating to Council's operations including staff, administrative and industrial matters.</p> <p>The CEO may also act as spokesperson on technical and legislative matters affecting policy or may delegate to another officer as appropriate.</p> <p>The CEO is the primary spokesperson for Council operational matters but may delegate responsibility to other Council employees.</p> <p>The CEO must represent Council's position on these matters accurately and responsibly when interacting with the media.</p>

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Role	Authorisation
Workers	Council workers, including Directors, are not authorised to speak directly with media representatives about Council business without approval from either the CEO to act as delegated official spokesperson (for employees only) or by the General Manager Communications and Engagement to act as a subject matter expert. If approval is granted to serve as a Council spokesperson, any comments should be limited to factual information - not opinion or supposition.
Media Team	The Media Team may provide information to the media which is freely available to the public. This information may be provided in order to improve or clarify the media's understanding of an issue. No other worker may make statements to or provide information to the media or publicly (including on social media) where their statements may be seen as speaking on behalf of Council.
TLDMG <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chairperson Local Disaster Coordinator 	During activation of the TLDMG, the TLDMG Chairperson is the official spokesperson on all matters concerning TLDMG decisions, actions and issues. The TLDMG Chairperson may also delegate responsibility to the Local Disaster Coordinator or other subject matter experts from lead agencies who are members of the TLDMG. During activation of the TLDMG, the Mayor remains the official spokesperson for all matters relating to Council.

6.2. Media Management for Councillors

The Media Team is only responsible for media relations relating to Council business; it is not responsible for media relations respective to the business of individual Councillors.

Contact and requests for media support should be as per the procedure outlined in s170A of the *Local Government Act 2009* and Acceptable Request Guidelines for Councillors.

Councillors should inform the CEO and the General Manager of Communications and Engagement of any media activity or contact.

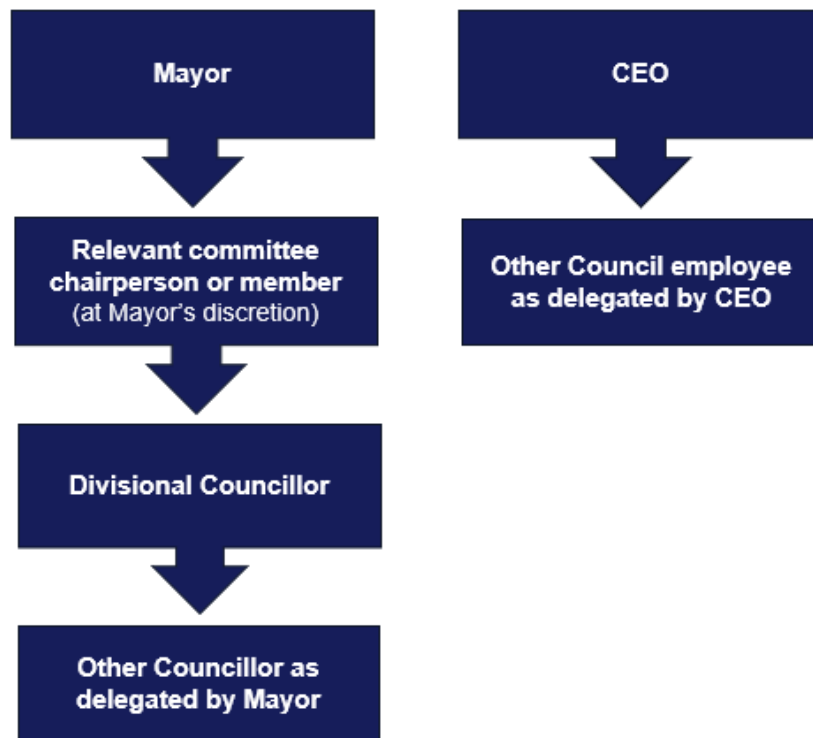
Any media relations involving a Councillor (unless related to a personal or private matter) should involve the Media Team to ensure alignment with Council messaging and protocols.

Only the Mayor and CEO are authorised to speak to the media on behalf of Council. Councillors are permitted to make statements of personal opinion or in reference to matters relating to their respective divisions to the media.

Councillors will be provided any information given to the media in relation to issues or events, within their respective divisions as soon as practically possible.

Where a significant project is occurring within a division, Council's Communications and Engagement Team will provide any key messages or proposed media statement to the Divisional Councillor, as well as the Mayor. Examples may be major road upgrades, new community infrastructure, emerging issues, public safety or key events.

6.2.1 Hierarchy of Speaking Delegation



6.2.2 Councillor Use of Social Media

Councillor use of social media must be in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland. Any suspected breaches may be referred to the Office of the Independent Assessor as required under the *Local Government Act 2009*.

6.2.3 Expression of Personal Opinion and Timing of Information Released

When communicating with the public via media or social media to express a personal opinion about a Council resolution, Councillors must respect the democratic process by first acknowledging that the Council resolutions represent the majority view of Council.

All Councillors must ensure that when making personal comments to the media or on social media, they clearly distinguish between their own personal opinion and agreed Council decisions.

All Councillors have a responsibility to ensure that any comment made to the media or on social media in their capacity as a Councillor is accurate, not prejudicial to Council's legal standing and is not in any way defamatory to other Councillors, workers or any other persons.

Councillors must be mindful of the timing of information they release to avoid pre-empting official Council announcements. Premature disclosures can undermine Council's ability to communicate strategically, create confusion and diminish the impact of key messages. Ensuring a coordinated approach to announcements allows for clear, consistent and effective communication with the community.

Council's Communications and Engagement Team will provide both media and social media training including updates on trends for Councillors as requested.

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7. Legal Parameters

Disaster Management Act 2003

Information Privacy Act 2009

Local Government Act 2009

Local Government Regulation 2012

Right to Information Act 2009

8. Associated Documents

Acceptable Request Guidelines for Councillors

Civic Protocol Policy

Code of Conduct

Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland

Delegations Policy

Disaster Management Policy

Townsville Local Disaster Management Plan