

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to ensure effective communications that protect and enhance the reputation of Council, inform the community, promote a positive image of the Whitsunday Region and raise awareness about Council services and activities.
- 1.2. This Policy establishes protocols for managing communication between Council and the media to ensure coordinated, coherent, accurate and reliable presentation of Council information, so that Council maintains credibility, integrity and customer confidence, and so that Council's corporate values and brand are reinforced.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy is applicable to all councillors, including the Mayor, and all employees when responding to media enquiries or when seeking to make public comment on behalf of Council.
- 2.2. This policy specifies who is authorised to act as the official spokesperson for Council and the procedures for issuing media statements or publishing any public facing document.
- 2.3. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Social Media Policy.

3. Policy Statement

- 3.1. Council encourages open, prompt and accurate communication with the media to promote a positive, progressive and professional image of Council, and to inform the public.
- 3.2. Council intends to provide relevant, timely and accurate comment and information to media outlets when requested.

4. Guiding Principles

Communications Team

- 4.1. Councillors and employees should advise the Communications and Marketing Team when approached by the media for information or comment, even when a previous delegation has been authorised.
- 4.2. The Communications and Marketing Team are responsible for approved media statements and media releases to communicate matters that align with the Purpose of this policy and Council's goals, including:
 - i approved policy and organisational decisions;
 - ii updates on organisational strategic direction;

STRATEGIC POLICY

Media Relations (GOV- 06)

Endorsed by Council

27 November 2024

- iii information that advances the reputation and upholds the integrity of Council or the region as a whole;
 - iv information that increases transparency with the community; and
 - v information that promotes the achievements and activities of Council and the wider region which are in the public interest.
- 4.3. The release of information must adhere to the privacy principles outlined in the *Information Privacy Act 2009*.
- 4.4. Nothing in this policy prohibits Councillors or staff from issuing general promotional material and information relating to the activities and events for the programs and services under their jurisdiction that have been published or approved as per Council's processes.

Official Spokesperson(s)

- 4.5. The Mayor is the official spokesperson for Council on all issues. Given the Mayor is elected by the whole of the region, the Mayor is often requested to comment in addition to, or instead of, other spokespeople (as listed below).
- 4.6. If the Mayor cannot serve as Council spokesperson, the opportunity is offered first to the Deputy Mayor, and then to an appropriate Councillor. The Mayor can also delegate the role of spokesperson in relation to a specific issue to the CEO or a senior officer.
- 4.7. A Councillor may also provide comment on local issues, in addition to the Mayor. However, given the Mayor is the official spokesperson, a Councillor should inform the Communications and Marketing Team prior to offering comment to the media.
- 4.8. Councillors should clearly articulate that personal comments incongruent with Council's position are theirs alone.

Mayor & Councillors

- 4.9. When making comment to the media, the Mayor and/or designated Councillor should ensure that they clearly distinguish between personal opinion and the official position of Council expressed through resolutions of Council or agreed Council decisions.
- 4.10. Comments to the media should not:
- i pre-empt decisions of Council or undermine the decision making process;
 - ii unduly or unfairly criticise Council or Council Officers; or
 - iii disclose confidential material.
- 4.11. This policy is not intended to limit a Councillor from communicating with or engaging with their constituents. Councillors are actively encouraged to do this, provided that the

Councillor Code of Conduct requirements are complied with. In doing so, Councillors should identify that they are not speaking on behalf of Council.

Employees

- 4.12. The CEO (or their delegate) and the Communications and Marketing Manager are responsible for coordinating all media enquiries on operational matters.
- 4.13. Council employees should engage with the media about any Council-related matter without authority from the CEO or Communications and Marketing Manager.

Emergency or Natural Disasters

- 4.14. The Whitsunday Region is prone to emergencies and natural disasters including cyclones, fires and floods.
- 4.15. Both Council and the media have an important role to play inform the public in times of disaster.
- 4.16. During times of disaster:
 - i information provided by Council should be accurate, timely and as clear as possible;
 - ii information provided by Council should be consistent with information and advice provided by other relevant agencies and stakeholders, including the State Government, emergency services and the Bureau of Meteorology;
 - iii speculation or the release of unconfirmed reports should be avoided; and
 - iv updates should be provided via multiple media channels, including social media, TV and radio (simulcast if possible).
- 4.17. Where information is released via social media, efforts should be made to clarify when information is no longer accurate or has been superseded (e.g. by editing posts to identify that the information is no longer current).

Record Keeping

- 4.18. All media releases, responses to media or external requests for statements or information should be recorded and stored according to Council's records management policy and procedures.

Non-Compliance

- 4.19. Non-compliance with the provisions of this policy may result in disciplinary action being taken in accordance with Council's policies and procedures.

STRATEGIC POLICY	
Media Relations (GOV- 06)	
Endorsed by Council	27 November 2024

5. Related Polices and Legislation

- Confidentiality for Councillors Policy
- Code of Conduct for Councillors
- Code of Conduct (Staff)
- Community Engagement Strategy
- Social Media Policy
- Information Management Policy

6. Definitions

CEO means the Chief Executive Office of Council.

Comment includes but is not limited to public speaking engagements, comments to radio, television, press, online media outlets, social media, views expressed in letters to newspapers or in books, journals and notices where it is expected that the publication or circulation of the comment will spread to the community at large.

Communication refers to all forms of communication with the media and similar outlets including, but not limited to, interviews, press statements, emails, letters, phone calls and messages.

Council means Whitsunday Regional Council.

Councillor means all elected representatives who hold (current) office with Council, including the Mayor.

Employee means a person who carries out work in any capacity for Council, including for example temporary, or permanent employees, contractors, sub-contractors, employees of a labour hire company, outworkers, trainees, apprentices, volunteers and work experience students.

Media means all forms of published or broadcast content such as newspapers, radio, television, magazines, media releases, social media, plus digital media platforms including blogs and online news sites. Media includes all organisations involved in publishing (external) media content, including freelancers.

Spokesperson a person who speaks as a designated representative of Council.

COUNCIL POLICY			
Date Adopted by Council	27 November 2024	Council Resolution	OM2024/11/27.9
Effective Date	27 November 2024	Next Review Date	27 November 2028
Responsible Officer(s)	Communications and Marketing Manager	Revokes	CP_OMCEO_03