

5.5. MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

REPORT AUTHOR Tom Volling, Senior Media and Communications Officer

MANAGER Lisa Golding, Manager People and Community Services

DEPARTMENT People and Community Services

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts the Media Relations Policy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Media Relations Policy seeks to encourage Councillors to be more involved in Council's corporate communications and work more effectively with media outlets.

The Media Relations Policy outlines a framework to ensure all media releases, statements and enquiries relating to Council activities are managed in a professional, accurate and timely manner.

BACKGROUND

Councillors have expressed a desire to be more involved in Council's media activity. Council currently has no policy framework to facilitate this.

The Media Relations Policy applies to all Councillors, contractors and employees of Douglas Shire Council. It seeks to promote consistent and accurate coverage of Council in traditional and digital media.

Council manages a number of communication channels including its official website, social media pages, e-newsletter and media releases.

This policy was first discussed at a workshop with Councillors on 17 May 2022. A draft policy was provided to Councillors on 10 June 2022 and the policy was further discussed at a workshop on 14 June 2022.

COMMENTS

The Media Relations Policy seeks to encourage Councillors to be more involved in Council's corporate communications and work more effectively with media outlets.

It is vital that all media enquiries be treated efficiently and courteously with due regard to the fact that all media work to stringent deadlines which require prompt responses.

Through this policy, Council aims to improve communication between Council and the local community. This policy is based on current best practice. Similar policies from neighboring Council's have been reviewed as part of the development of this policy.

PROPOSAL

That Council adopts the Media Relations Policy.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Nil

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Adoption of a formal process to guide interactions with media and social media, reduces the risk to Councillors, employees and contractors of Council of reputational damage from inconsistent and inaccurate messaging around Council activities.

Not adopting this policy will leave a gap in Council's policy suite. Council will continue to be at risk of not responding to media enquires in a timely manner and ensuring accuracy of the information provided.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic: Nil

Environmental: Nil

Social: Improve communications between Council and community.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2019-2024 Initiatives:

Theme 4 - Inclusive Engagement, Planning and Partnerships

In delivering for our communities, economy and environment, Douglas Shire will ensure open and transparent engagement and communication. We will develop robust strategic plans and we will partner with our community and key stakeholders.

Goal 1 - We will implement transparent decision making through inclusive community engagement and communication.

Theme 5 - Robust Governance and Efficient Service Delivery

Strong governance and financial management are the foundations of the way in which Council will conduct its business and implement the initiatives of the Corporate Plan.

Goal 1 - We will conduct Council business in an open and transparent manner with strong oversight and open reporting.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council can play a number of different roles in certain circumstances and it is important to be clear about which role is appropriate for a specific purpose or circumstance. The implementation of actions will be a collective effort and Council's involvement will vary from information only through to full responsibility for delivery.

The following areas outline where Council has a clear responsibility to act:

- Advocate** Council makes representation on behalf of the community on important issues, funding opportunities, projects and programs. Council will use its influence to seek the best outcomes for the community.
- Information Provider** Council provides the community with important information on services, events, policies, rules, strategies, and any other relevant data that helps the community to stay informed. In performing this role, Council seeks to be open and transparent.

CONSULTATION

Internal: The policy was first discussed at a workshop with Councillors on 17 May 2022.
The draft policy was presented to Councillors and discussed on 14 June 2022

External: Nil

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Nil

ATTACHMENTS

1. Media Relations Policy [5.5.1 - 4 pages]

MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

1. Purpose

This policy outlines a formal process to ensure all media releases, statements and enquiries relating to Douglas Shire Council are managed professionally and appropriately.

2. Scope and application

The Policy provides a framework to promote consistent and accurate coverage of Council through traditional and digital media.

Objectives

The Media Relations Policy has the following objectives:

- To promote good governance consistent with local government principles (Section 4 Local Government Act 2009).
- To ensure consistency by Councillors and staff in working with the media.
- To mitigate the risk of inaccurate or inconsistent information being communicated to the media.
- To clearly indicate Council's authorised spokesperson(s).
- To ensure appropriate authorisation and responsibility for information provided.
- To protect the reputation of the organisation.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- The Mayor is Council's official spokesperson on all matters.
- When the Mayor is unavailable or absent, the Deputy Mayor will be the official spokesperson on all matters.
- The Mayor may authorise Councillors to act as a spokesperson for the Council when appropriate.
- The Senior Media and Communications Officer, or delegate, is responsible for co-ordinating media liaison and issuing approved media releases and has been delegated authority to respond to media enquiries on behalf of Council.
- Councillors may speak to media to express their personal views only and must be clearly stated.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

It is vital that all media inquiries be treated efficiently and courteously with due regard to the fact that all media work to stringent deadlines which require prompt responses.

The Council's Media and Communications Unit has the expertise in media affairs and is well versed in handling inquiries from print and electronic media, and is responsible for the flow of a wide range of information between Council and the community.

All staff must direct any media enquiry to Media and Communications (usually through the Senior Media and Communications Officer) which has the programmes in place to provide responses to the media in a timely manner.

Council's depots and administration centre shall not be used for any media activity which does not benefit Council or may be for the personal advantage of an elected member or staff member.

All media activity at any Council worksite is to be coordinated through the Media and Communications Unit.

The Senior Media and Communications Officer shall issue statements only on matters of approved Council Policy, or at the Mayor's or the Chief Executive Officer's discretion, on issues of direct benefit to the Council as a whole.

Media releases must be approved by the Mayor, CEO, Manager or the delegated authority before posting on Council's website.

From time to time, it may be necessary for a Letter to the Editor to be written as an official Council communication to inform the community about a particular matter. Such letters must be issued through the Senior Media and Communications Officer subject to the approval of the Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer.

Staff

Council employees may speak to the media or write Letters to the Editor or engage in social media platforms as private individuals with the following restrictions:

- They do not comment on Council business or policy;
- They do not identify themselves as Council employees;
- Their comments are not likely to be perceived as representing official Council position or policy.

All new employees are to be made aware of Council's Media Relations Policy as a part of the induction process. Contractors or service providers employed by Council must refer all media enquiries relating to Council to the Senior Media and Communications Officer. (As per Staff and Supplier Code of Conduct).

Councillors

- Media releases, where appropriate and with the Mayor's approval, may include statements and input from Councillors, or recognised delegated spokespersons.
- With the exception of the Mayor, Councillors must not communicate with the public or media on behalf of the Council, unless expressly authorized by the Mayor or CEO to make that communication
- When communicating with the public or the media, Councillors must make it clear when they are expressing a personal opinion, and/or when they are speaking on behalf of Council.
- When communicating with the public or the media to express a personal opinion about a Council resolution, respect the democratic process by first acknowledging that Council resolutions represent the majority view of Council.
- The Media and Communications Unit shall not engage in any media activity which is deemed by the Chief Executive Officer to be specifically for the personal advantage of any elected member, or staff member.
- All media inquiries responded to by Councillors are to be emailed to the Media and Communications Unit.

SOCIAL MEDIA

All official Douglas Shire Council presences (e.g. Facebook or LinkedIn accounts) must be authorised by the Senior Media and Communications Officer.

Only publicly available information is to be disclosed and it is the responsibility of the publisher / editor to ensure that only this information is displayed.

Any information provided must be factually accurate and comply with all Council policies. Publishers / editors should only offer information on topics that fall within their area of responsibility.

Information posted must not be libellous, defamatory, abusive, obscene or discriminatory or infringe Equal Employment Opportunity, Fair Treatment policies, information privacy or conflict of interest policies or any other legislation.

An individual's personal information is not to be disclosed.

Out of courtesy, any press release and known media coverage are to be emailed to the relevant Councillors/Officers as a matter of policy.

Legislation

- Local Government Act 2009
- Local Government Regulation 2012 Related Documents

Related Documents

- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Acceptable Request Guidelines
- Advertising Spending General Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Supplier Code of Conduct

This policy is to remain in force until otherwise determined by Council.