

Media Policy

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| Strategic Pillar | Community, Arts & Recreation |
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1 OUTCOMES

- 1.1 Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council (QPRC) has an important relationship with the media. Effective media engagement can assist Council to keep the community informed, explain decisions and to promote community confidence in Council and its decisions.
- 1.2 Council is committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of media engagement:
- **Openness** - we will ensure that we promote an open exchange of information between our council and the media.
 - **Consistency** - we will ensure consistency by all councillors and staff when communicating with the media.
 - **Accuracy** - the information we share with the media will be a source of truth for our council and community and we will prioritise the need to correct inaccuracies when they occur.
 - **Timeliness** - we will ensure that we respond to media enquiries in a timely manner.

2 SCOPE OF THE POLICY

- 2.1 This policy is based on the NSW Office of Local Government Model Media Policy.
- 2.2 This policy applies to all Council officials, members of Council's committees, including s.355 committees, contractors and delegates.
- 2.3 It does not apply to the submission of personal letters to the editor or promotional material where the user makes no reference to Council or any of Council's employees, contractors, other Council officials, related entities or any other person or organisation providing services to or on behalf of Council.

3 DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 Council business — any activity, function, role, resolution, decision or statutory obligation undertaken by Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council.
- 3.2 Council official — include councillors, members of staff of Council and other approved delegates, including volunteers and chairs of Council committees.
- 3.3 Media — various means of published communication, including but not limited to television, radio, newspaper, journals, newsletters, magazines and on-line news websites, which are published or circulated in the community.
- 3.4 Offensive language – contains
- (a) inappropriate or vulgar language
 - (b) profanities
 - (c) discriminatory content
 - (d) slanderous or defamatory content

- (e) content that is deemed to be offensive to stakeholders, including obscene or sexually explicit language
- (f) content that is derogatory to QPRC and/or its stakeholders

3.5 Publication — the distribution of information via print or electronic media including, but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, journals, radio, television, newsletters and the internet.

4 LEGISLATIVE OBLIGATIONS AND/OR RELEVANT STANDARDS

4.1 Council complies with the following legislative and mandatory directives impacting on local government operations:

- *Copyright Act 1968*
- *Defamation Act 2005*
- *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*
- *Local Government Act 1993*
- *State Records Act 1998*
- Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW

4.2 This policy is to be read in conjunction with the following QPRC documents:

- Code of Conduct
- Public Interest Disclosures Policy
- Statement of Business Ethics
- Complaints Management Policy
- Records Management Policy
- Privacy Policy and Plan
- Social Media Policy

5 CONTENT

5.1 Council encourages open communication with the community through a range of media channels, with an emphasis on promoting a positive, progressive and professional image of Council and staff.

5.2 The Mayor and the General Manager are the official spokespersons of Council.

5.3 To ensure that information released publicly about Council is accurate, reliable and in the best interests of the organisation, all staff media contacts are to be coordinated through the QPRC Communications and Engagement team, regardless of whether the media representative has contacted another member of staff in the first instance. The Communications and Engagement team will liaise with the relevant party (Mayor or General Manager) to coordinate a response.

5.4 The Mayor may delegate to the Deputy Mayor to act as Council's spokesperson. The General Manager may delegate the responsibility for responding to media enquiries to relevant staff members.

- 5.5 In the case where a member of staff is the subject matter expert and is the most appropriate person to undertake a media interview, the Communications and Engagement team will liaise directly with the staff member.
- 5.6 Council officials should refrain from using the media to make negative comments which are likely to undermine public confidence in the Council or local government generally.
- 5.7 Staff should make factual comments and must not make political or controversial statements in the media about Councillors, Council business, decisions or events.
- 5.8 Confidential information must not be released by Council or Council officers to the media.
- 5.9 In all forms of communication, staff and councillors are expected to adhere to the highest standards of ethical practice and professional competence.
- 5.10 Council will openly discuss matters of interest with the media unless disclosure of certain information contravenes Council's obligations of confidentiality, privacy, duty of care, or could infringe other laws or regulations that govern Council's operations.
- 5.11 Councillors are entitled to enter into public debate in their private capacity and make comment on Council affairs, provided they clearly state that such public comment reflects their personal opinion and not that of the Council or a committee of the Council.
- 5.12 Individual staff should not be identified by any Councillor or any authorised staff in any media comment.
- 5.13 If, in the opinion of the General Manager, it is deemed that an individual staff member should be identified for the legitimate purpose of the communication, then such identification may only occur after consultation with the relevant staff member to ensure there are no unintended consequences. The identified staff member must be referred to in the context of their formal position in the organisation.
- 5.14 In the event that information is published and is incorrect or has a personal or corporate reputational risk, the General Manager will investigate the matter, and if necessary, issue a statement that conveys the correct information.

6 USE OF MEDIA DURING EMERGENCIES

- 6.1 During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, QPRC Communications and Engagement team and the General Manager will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of Council.
- 6.2 Councillors, Council staff and other Council officials must not provide comment or information to the media that is inconsistent with official advice issued by the Council and any other agency coordinating the emergency response.

- 6.3 Training on media engagement during emergencies will be provided to councillors and relevant staff and other Council officials.

7 STANDARDS OF CONDUCT WHEN ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA

- 7.1 Council officials must comply with Council's code of conduct when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a council official.
- 7.2 Council officials must not share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms that:
- a. are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other council officials or members of the public
 - b. contains profane language or is sexual in nature
 - c. constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW, or is unlawfully discriminatory
 - d. is contrary to their duties under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by the Council to ensure workplace health and safety
 - e. contains content about the Council, council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive
 - f. divulges confidential Council information
 - g. breaches the privacy of other council officials or members of the public
 - h. contains allegations of suspected breaches of the Council's code of conduct or information about the consideration of a matter under the Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW
 - i. could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment
 - j. commits the Council to any action
 - k. violates an order made by a court
 - l. breaches copyright
 - m. advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business.

8 MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN THE LEAD UP TO ELECTIONS

- 8.1 This policy does not prevent the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a council or any other election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.
- 8.2 Any media comment provided by the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a council, or another election must not be provided in an advertisement, newspaper column, or a radio or television broadcast paid for by Council or produced by Council or with Council resources.

9 COMPLIANCE WITH POLICY

- 9.1 Media content created and received by council officials (including Councillors) acting in their official capacity is a council record and may be subject to information access applications made under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*. These records must also be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* and the Council's approved records management policies and practices.
- 9.2 A breach of this policy, that if substantiated, may be a breach of the Code of Conduct.