

Policy



STRATEGIC

MEDIA RELATIONS

Head of Power

Local Government Act 2009

Key Supporting Council Document

Lockyer Valley Regional Council Corporate Plan (2022-2027): Lockyer Leadership and Council: “Actively engage with the community to inform council decision making processes and communicate on decisions made,” and, “Commit to open and accountable governance to ensure community confidence and trust in council and our democratic values.”

Definitions

Council staff	Employees, contractors, volunteers and all others performing work on behalf of council. The policy applies regardless of whether staff are on duty or not.
Media	Includes formal media channels such as print, television, radio.
Council	Lockyer Valley Regional Council (LVRC)

Policy Objective

The aim of this policy is to ensure Council provides timely and accurate information to the media in a way that is professional, enhances Council’s public image, limits the possibility of misinformation and maintains positive relations with the media.

Policy Statement

Lockyer Valley Regional Council (Council) encourages open, honest, meaningful and prompt communication with the media.

The Mayor is the official spokesperson for Council. The Mayor and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) are authorised to comment on Council's behalf. Where a councillor has portfolio responsibilities they are able to comment on behalf of Council with regard to a matter within their portfolio of responsibility noting the process below. The Mayor is to be notified where practicable prior to councillors making statements to the media on portfolio matters. In addition, major announcements are to be made by the Mayor or delegate.

All media is to be coordinated through the media and communications business unit. Where a councillor or staff is approached directly by the media, they must refer those requests, where practical, to the media and communications business unit. Likewise, external media are expected to liaise through Council's communications and media team. The media and communications business unit may seek a content expert from within Council to provide content advice to the media on approval from the Mayor and/or CEO. The content expert is not permitted to discuss Council policy or speculate on future decisions.

Outside portfolio responsibilities, councillors are not permitted to comment to the media on behalf of Council unless authorised to do so by the Mayor or Mayor's authorised delegate. Council acknowledges that as elected representatives, the media will from time to time call on councillors for personal comment on Council matters. A councillor wishing to make statements on Council matters to the media must, where prior approval to make a statement is given, inform the journalist:

- that comments are made as an individual
- that comments made do not necessarily represent the views or beliefs of Council or other councillors
- if the matter is before Council and if the matter has or has not been determined by Council.

It is important to note that Parliamentary privilege does not extend to local government. That is, statements made in Council Chambers are open to civil prosecution. When making a statement, either in or out of Council Chambers, councillors are reminded that defamation laws apply, and it could be considered defamatory to harm another person's reputation either in written form or verbally.

Councillors electing to make personal statements on Council matters must consider the broader ramifications of such statements. Negative comments on Council initiatives could damage teamwork, credibility and unity within the organisation.

Council will only write a media release for Council initiatives and projects or for external organisations where Council is a partner or where Council officially supports a particular project. Generally, Council does not promote non-Council programs and activities unless Council has an intrinsic involvement in the program or activity or considers such promotion to be of high community value.

Council staff are not permitted to discuss Council matters with the media either during work hours in a work capacity or out of work hours in a personal capacity unless authorised to do so by the CEO.

Where a staff member is contacted by the media, they must be polite, courteous and refer the media to the media and communications business unit. If no one in the media and communications business unit is available at the time, email the media person's name, media outlet they represent, nature of the call and deadline to the media and communications business unit via comms@lvrc.qld.gov.au. Where the issue is urgent, refer the media person to the CEO.

No media statement is to be released without approval from the Coordinator Engagement and Communications and the CEO and Mayor or their authorised delegate(s).

Media Response Times

The media and communications business unit will provide a same day response to a media outlet wherever it is practical to do so. Council's response times are subject to time and resources needed to collate and gain approvals for the requested content. There may be occasions where Council is already intending to publish a media release and will continue to do so rather than providing customised responses to specific media outlets.

Council Caretaker Period

In accordance with s90D of the Local Government Act 2009, a local government must not publish or distribute election material that is able or intended to influence an elector about voting in an election or affect the result of the election. For example, anything that raises the profile of a councillor or Council accomplishment. Council may continue to publish information of community interest and value where the publishing of such information is not intended to raise the profile of councillors seeking re-election.

Council will not attribute comments to councillors or use photos of councillors in any Council publication including social media published during the election 'Caretaker Period', as defined in the Local Government Act. Any such information already published will remain published.

No response will be made to any political comments posted on Council's social media channels and any such comments will be removed. Content of a political nature posted to Council's social media sites will be removed, as will posts which tag Lockyer Valley Regional Council or mention the organisation. Council Officers shall not 're-tweet', 'post' or 'share' political content during the Caretaker Period.

Generally, during the caretaker period, media releases and comments provided to external media must relate directly to Council's day to day operational business, be of genuine public interest, not be presented in any way that might favour or disfavour an individual candidate and be attributed the Chief Executive Officer or a 'spokesperson'. Council reserves the right to correct misinformation published during the Caretaker Period.

It is acknowledged that external media may request to directly interview councillors during 'caretaker period'. Where a councillor elects to speak to the media during 'Caretaker Period' they must make clear to the media they

are speaking as an individual and not on behalf of Council. Council staff should not be involved in the preparation of content or scheduling of such interviews. Generally, for election related matters, external media should contact councillors directly so that staff are not involved.

Human Rights Commitment

Council is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights. Council has an obligation under the *Human Rights Act 2019* to give proper consideration to human rights when making a decision, and to act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights. To the extent that an act or decision under this policy may engage human rights, Council will have regard to the *Human Rights Act 2019* in undertaking the act or making the decision.

Related Documents

Human Rights Act 2019

Local Government Act 2009 (Section 90D)

Local Government Regulations 2012

Local Government Electoral Act 2011

Local Government Electoral Regulation 2012