

MEDIA POLICY

Type:	Council Policy – Media, Marketing and Events		
Owner:	Communications and Engagement Officer		
Responsible Officer:	Chief Executive Officer		
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1 PURPOSE

Katherine Town Council values the role print, broadcast and digital media play in sharing news of Council events, activities and milestones for the Katherine community and stakeholders. Council seeks to enhance and protect its good reputation, meeting Council’s commitment to communicate its many and varied decisions, activities, services, major projects, and policy initiatives to the community.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear framework for engaging with all media organisations, including print, radio, television and digital media, to ensure that Council meets the community’s expectations relating to accuracy, relevance and accountability.

2 SCOPE

This policy applies to Elected Members, Council employees, contractors, and volunteers associated with Katherine Town Council and relates to policy and operational matters for all verbal, printed, electronic and online communications with the media.

During the election caretaker period, employees and Councillors should also refer to Council’s Caretaker policy and in conjunction with this policy.

3 DEFINITIONS

Media means print media (such as national or local newspapers, magazines, newsletters, brochures etc.) broadcast media (including radio and television broadcasters and internet publishers) and social media.

Social media means the wide and evolving range of online interactions and behaviours on many different online platforms including social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or Reddit; professional networking sites like LinkedIn; video sharing sites and apps like YouTube and TikTok; blogs; online forums and communities and comments sections on news articles.

Media relations are a key part of Council's operations, an important source of information for the community, and a significant part of Council's role as a community leader and advocate within the Katherine region. Council recognises that traditional media (print, television, magazine, radio) and social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) provide opportunities for Council to communicate and engage with the community and stakeholders.

Council will be accurate, constructive, helpful and informative when responding to media enquiries. Council will openly discuss matters of public interest with the media unless disclosure of certain information contravenes Council's obligation of confidentiality or privacy, duty of care, or could infringe other laws or regulations that govern its operations.

Council employees will not give off-the-record comments regardless of the situation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Only the Mayor, Chief Executive Officer or other Elected Members and officers authorised by the Chief Executive Officer may speak to the media and comment publicly on Council business.

If a Council employee is asked to comment on any Council matter via the media (including social media) or other public forums and they are not authorised to do so, they should decline and refer the matter to their manager or the Chief Executive Officer.

During the caretaker period prior to an election, all media comments will be made by the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the Caretaker policy.

RESPONSE TO MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Council will strive to respond to enquiries as quickly as possible. The aim is to reply to enquiries within 48 hours of being received. In the event that a response time cannot be met due to the complexity of the request or the need to seek information from a cross-section of departments, the Communications Officer will contact the journalist and advise of an alternative timeframe.

All enquiries will be acknowledged by the Communications Officer when received.

To meet these response times, Council employees are asked to place priority on responding to enquiries allocated to them by Council's Communications Officer.

MEDIA ACCESS TO COUNCIL PROPERTY

Requests from media outlets to film or photograph Council staff, facilities, meetings and events must be referred to the Communications Officer for determination by the Chief Executive Officer in consultation with relevant Council staff.

ROLE OF THE COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

All media enquiries must be referred to, coordinated and managed, by the Communications Officer who will write, and seek necessary approvals, for media releases and statements and liaise directly with the media to follow up and coordinate enquiries.

The Communications Officer will provide advice and support to all Council departments to create newsworthy opportunities and target media appropriately. Council-initiated news stories must be coordinated and managed by the Communications Officer.

The Communications Officer will support the Mayor in their role as Council spokesperson. This includes liaison with media and ensuring the Mayor is appropriately briefed/supported as spokesperson.

COMMUNICATION METHODS

Council utilises a variety of communication tools to provide the media and community with timely information.

Media Releases

A media release is the starting point for gaining editorial on an issue or event. Journalists and editors receive the media release and decide if they want to write a story based on the information provided. The story angle taken by a journalist may differ from the one presented in the media release. Council has no influence on editorial decisions.

All media releases are written by the Communications Officer, endorsed by the Chief Executive Officer and approved by the Mayor. All Councillors, the Executive Leadership Team, and managers will receive a copy of media releases.

Council treats all media outlets equally and avoids giving one outlet preferential treatment. As such, media releases are distributed to all media outlets at the same time.

Website

Council's website is the key communication tool and hosts a range of content specific to the services, operations, events and programs offered by Council. Council's website also provides an avenue to distribute information to the community and display information required by legislation.

Social media

Council has official social media accounts used to share information with the community and answer general queries. Council's Communications Officer will manage Council's official social media accounts and all content will have received approval.

Council will not solicit or pay for any followers (or similar) on any Council-managed social media accounts.

Council officers will not assist any Councillor with the creation or operation of any private social media account, unless approved by the Chief Executive Officer.

Publications

Council issues various print form and digital publications, as well as other editorial and advertising content on a regular basis.

Newsletter

Council publishes a monthly newsletter that includes project updates, current and completed works, news stories, upcoming events and more. This is a free subscription service.

ELECTED MEMBERS AND THE MEDIA

Councillors must abide by the Elected Member Code of Conduct when engaging with the media. In recognising that an individual Councillor may have a view that differs from the official Council position, Councillors who express personal views should qualify their remarks to indicate this is a personal view.

When approached by the media, Councillors have the following options available to them:

- Decline to make comment and refer the journalist to the Mayor to make official comments
- Refer the enquiry to the Communications Officer for an official response to be prepared, or
- Make comment (but not as the official spokesperson).

The Mayor can invite other Councillors to participate in any media engagement opportunity. Such media engagement may be conducted jointly with the Mayor and other eligible Councillors, and could typically involve:

- A public, media or event spokesperson role (as an MC, or to deliver a speech)
- Participation in a staged media opportunity or event (a photo shoot, radio or TV interview), or
- Being quoted in a proactive Council media release or media response (approved by the Mayor).

5 ASSOCIATED POLICIES/DOCUMENTS

- Caretaker policy
- Social media policy
- Privacy policy

6 REFERENCES AND RELATED LEGISLATION

- *Local Government Act 2019*
- *Information Act 2002*

Revision History

Version	Approval date	Details of change	Responsible officer
1	23/01/2023	Created	CEO
2			
3			