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1. Statement

At Ipswich City Council we value the role print, broadcast and digital media play in sharing news of the city's events, activities and milestones. This policy confirms our ongoing commitment to provide timely, accurate, relevant and consistent information to the community through positive working relationships with media organisations and via Council's media channels.

Ipswich City Council welcomes and encourages scrutiny from the public and from third party media organisations. As a matter of principle, this policy acknowledges that all information made public through official channels, including but not restricted to, Committee and Ordinary Council briefings, is open to media scrutiny. As a core principle, Council should be in a position to explain all publicly-available background, commentary, decisions, or other publicly-available material to the community, including through official Council media channels or via third party media organisations.

2. Purpose and Principles

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Ensure the community is aware of Council's Corporate Plan, strategies, policies, services, activities, and decisions.
- Ensure the timely, accurate, relevant and consistent provision of information to the community via Council's external communication networks including Council's media channels and external media organisations.
- Ensure an overall positive image and reputation of Council is maintained through our external communication networks.
- Provide clear direction on the responsibilities of Councillors, Council employees, and contractors in relation to official media comment.
- Encourage the sharing of Council's successes with the community.
- Ensure Council media resources are utilised effectively, efficiently and economically.
- Ensure Councillors, as elected representatives of the community, are aware of emerging media issues.

- Ensure Councillors have fair and equitable opportunity to engage with the community about divisional, committee and other community matters through Council's external communication networks, recognising the citywide role and responsibilities of all Councillors under section 12 of the Local Government Act 2009.
- Provide clarity with media statements and other external communications.

3. Strategic Plan Links

This policy aligns with the following iFuture 2021-2026 Corporate Plan theme/s:

- A Trusted and Leading Organisation

4. Regulatory Authority

- *Local Government Act 2009*
- Local Government Regulation 2012
- Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Media and Communications Procedure

5. Human Rights Commitment

Ipswich City Council (Council) has considered the human rights protected under the *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)* when adopting and/or amending this policy. When applying this policy, Council will act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and give proper consideration to a human right relevant to the decision in accordance with the *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)*.

6. Scope

This policy applies to all Councillors, Council staff and contractors of Ipswich City Council when responding to media enquiries or when seeking to make comment on behalf of Council or otherwise by a Councillor on a particular matter.

This policy specifies who is authorised to act as a Designated or Lead Spokespersons and the procedures to be followed for issuing of any proactive or reactive media statement or publication of any public facing document.

This policy applies to the preparation and issuing of any media statement which purports to represent a position or policy of Council.

This policy applies to all external communications undertaken by Council departments, branches and sections.

This policy enables information dissemination and discussion of topics relevant to Council's strategic and operational activities and objectives for the city.

This policy does not preclude Councillors from making their own statements or comments which may conflict with Council's position, or on matters that are not current Council programs or initiatives. In these scenarios, Councillors must be aware of their Code of Conduct obligations by ensuring that their comments are not portrayed by them as the official view of Council.

Nothing in the policy shall be interpreted as affecting the right of individual Councillors to raise or comment on issues of public importance or significance to them and to speak about such matters as elected representatives of the local community or in some other capacity.

7. Media Statements

Communications and Engagement Branch will manage proactive and reactive media statements to ensure a positive image and reputation is maintained through the Council's external communications.

During election caretaker periods, all parties must be mindful of the restrictions outlined in Section 10 of this policy.

7.1 Proactive Media Statements

Proactive media statements provide Council with an opportunity to share its successes with the community and to inform the community of issues, events and activities.

The Mayor, Councillors and authorised Council staff and contractors may seek advice and assistance regarding proactive media statements from Communications and Engagement Branch.

Council staff are encouraged to consider instances where their activities and achievements, and those of their team, branch and department could be shared with the community. Staff may raise these instances through normal operational processes for consideration by Communications and Engagement Branch.

7.2 Reactive Media Statements

Reactive media statements are prepared and issued in response to media enquiries or emerging community issues.

The Manager, Media, Communications and Engagement is responsible for ensuring media enquiries are responded to within a prompt timeframe.

Communications and Engagement Branch will manage the response to any media enquiry in accordance with this policy.

Communications and Engagement Branch will promptly advise the Office of the Mayor and any relevant General Managers, Committee Chairpersons, Deputy Committee Chairpersons and Councillors of all media enquiries regarding major matters.

Communications and Engagement Branch will also advise relevant Divisional Councillor(s) of any media enquiry regarding a matter in relation their division by email and SMS as soon as reasonably practicable.

Communications and Engagement Branch will promptly advise Councillors by email and SMS who are the subject of any media enquiry.

7.3 Roles and Responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities relate only to the preparation and issuing of media statements.

7.3.1 Designated Spokesperson

A Designated Spokesperson is a person authorised by this policy to make comment on behalf of Council on a particular matter.

The appropriate Designated Spokesperson(s) for a particular matter will be determined in accordance with this policy.

Media statements may include comments or quotes from one or more Designated Spokespersons in accordance with this policy.

Each Designated Spokesperson will be offered an opportunity to comment on a particular matter in a media statement.

A Designated Spokesperson may decline to provide a comment or quote on a particular matter.

All parties will be mindful of deadlines and endeavour to respond in a prompt manner to enquires made.

All parties will be mindful that a key purpose of this policy is to ensure all Councillors have fair and equitable opportunities to engage with the community about divisional, community and committee matters through the Council's external communication networks.

7.3.2 Lead Spokesperson

The Lead Spokesperson is the Designated Spokesperson responsible for authorising a media statement or response.

Where a matter has more than one Designated Spokesperson, the Lead Spokesperson will be assigned in accordance with sections 7.3.3 to 7.3.6 of this policy.

A Lead Spokesperson is not authorised to amend comments or quotes provided by any other Designated Spokesperson without the consent of that spokesperson.

Communications and Engagement Branch will consult with the Lead Spokesperson regarding any media release or response.

7.3.3 Mayor

As civic leader, the Mayor will be the Lead Spokesperson on major matters including those specified in section 12(4) of the Local Government Act 2009.

The Mayor may request media advice and assistance regarding such matters, including proactive media statements, from Communications and Engagement Branch.

Where these matters originate from, or relate to, a standing committee, the committee chairperson will also be a Designated Spokesperson. Where these matters originate from, or relate to, a particular division(s), the relevant divisional Councillor(s) will also be a Designated Spokesperson.

In the absence of the Mayor, or when the Deputy Mayor is the Acting Mayor, the Deputy Mayor will be Lead Spokesperson for matters such matters.

The Mayor may also delegate their Lead or Designated Spokesperson role on particular matters to the Deputy Mayor or other Councillor(s).

7.3.4 Committee Chairperson

The relevant standing committee Chairperson will be the Lead Spokesperson on matters arising from their committee portfolio to the extent that these are consistent with the responsibilities outlined in the Committee Terms of Reference document.

A Chairperson may request media advice and assistance regarding committee matters, including for proactive media statements, from Communications and Engagement Branch.

Where the Chairperson is unavailable, the Deputy Chairperson may be Lead Spokesperson. The Chairperson may also delegate their Lead Spokesperson role on particular committee matters to the Deputy Chairperson or other Councillor(s).

Where the Mayor is the relevant Committee Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson of that committee is also a Designated Spokesperson.

Where a committee matter relates to an issue, initiative or activity principally within or affecting a particular division, the Councillors representing that division will also be Designated Spokespersons.

Where a committee matter relates to an issue, initiative or activity on or near the boundary of divisions, the Councillors representing those divisions are also Designated Spokespersons.

7.3.5 Divisional Councillors

The relevant Divisional Councillors are Designated Spokespersons on matters that relate to an event, issue, activity or other matter principally within or affecting the division they represent or other matter initiated by them.

Divisional Councillors may request advice and assistance, including for proactive media statements, from Communications and Engagement Branch regarding events, issues, activities or other matters within or affecting the Division they represent.

7.3.6 Chief Executive Officer

Subject to any direction by the Mayor, the Chief Executive Officer will be the Designated Spokesperson for matters concerning Council staff and contractors, and for the operational activities of Council.

The Chief Executive Officer may determine if a matter is an operational matter.

The Chief Executive Officer may choose to delegate their Designated Spokesperson role on a particular matter.

The Chief Executive Officer (or delegate) is responsible for authorising the issuing of all media statements regarding operational matters.

7.3.7 Communications and Engagement Branch

Communications and Engagement Branch will manage requests received for advice and assistance from the Mayor, Councillors and Council staff to ensure Council resources are

utilised equitably, effectively and efficiently. Requests received may be reasonably prioritised, amended or declined owing to competing media priorities or resourcing issues, with the requestor advised.

Communications and Engagement Branch will seek any required technical or background information from the relevant areas of Council.

Communications and Engagement Branch will consult with the Lead Spokesperson regarding any proposed media release or response.

Communications and Engagement Branch will seek comment from the Lead Spokesperson and any additional Designated Spokespersons.

Communications and Engagement Branch will follow the Designated and Lead Spokesperson identification requirements according to Section 7.3 of this policy and the attribution requirements in Section 7.4 of this policy.

Communications and Engagement Branch will follow the authorisation process in Section 7.5 of this policy.

Communications and Engagement Branch will keep a register of all media enquiries and all requests for assistance received from councillors and any assistance provided.

7.3.8 Council Staff and Contractors

All media enquiries received by Council staff and contractors will be referred to Communications and Engagement Branch.

Council and contractor staff may not make any media comment on behalf of Council unless they have been nominated as a Designated Spokesperson for the matter by the Chief Executive Officer (or delegate).

Council staff and contractors are encouraged to consider instances where their activities and achievements, and those of their team, branch, and department, could be shared with the community.

7.4 Attribution

Comments will be attributed to the Designated Spokesperson(s) as detailed in Section 7.3 of this policy unless that spokesperson declines to, or is unable to, provide a comment within required timeframes.

Where all Designated Spokespersons are unable to provide comment, "Council spokesperson" will be attributed in any media response or release.

7.5 Authorisation

Communications and Engagement Branch must seek final approval of any media statement from the Lead Spokesperson.

Authorisation is not to be sought from any other party.

Preliminary approval of any quote or comment attributed to any official spokesperson should be sought from that spokesperson before final approval is sought from the Lead Spokesperson.

All parties will be mindful of deadlines and endeavour to respond in a prompt manner to authorisation requests.

Authorisation is not required for Councillor communication through non-Council social and digital media platforms, individual newsletters, media interviews, media releases or personal communications where the councillor is not seeking to represent the official position of Council.

Communications and Engagement Branch shall keep a register of all approvals.

7.6 Key Practice Guidelines

Statements issued on behalf of Council must:

- Be consistent with Council's current policy and position.
- Support the reputation of the city, its Council, Council staff and contractors.
- Be respectful of the Mayor, Councillors, the Chief Executive Officer, Council officers, and the community.
- Not commit the city or its resources without prior Council discussion and/or resolution.
- Not be in breach of any laws (such as privacy, defamation, racial vilification or equal opportunity) or the Code of Conduct.
- Avoid any admission of legal liability.

8. Community Matters Newsletters

As a specific channel of external communication, Community Matters newsletters will be provided across the city in both physical and digital format, at least four times per calendar year.

Newsletter facilitation and distribution will be undertaken by the Communications and Engagement Branch in consultation with the Mayor and Divisional Councillors.

During election caretaker periods, all parties must be mindful of the restrictions outlined in Section 10 of this policy.

8.1 Distribution

Community Matters newsletters must be approved and published by Council's Corporate communications team in consultation with the Councillors.

8.2 Content

Information within Community Matters newsletters must be consistent with the Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland, Council's Corporate Plan and other relevant Council policies.

A standard template will be provided that is consistent with the Information that will generally be considered acceptable for inclusion in a newsletter may include:

- Information about Council services, facilities, events or projects

- Matters of local community or citywide interest
- Information about Councillor community meeting times
- Information about community and sporting organisations, activities and events.

Each Community Matters newsletter will consist of 2 pages for Citywide initiatives, and 2 pages per division for divisional events or matters of local interest. The back page will be dedicated to promoting existing programs or initiatives of Council.

8.3 Exclusions

Community Matters newsletters must not contain information which is election campaign material or matters of particular political sensitivity.

Any information considered inappropriate for publication in a community newsletter by the Corporate Communications team will be provided to the CEO for review.

Should the Chief Executive Officer determine that the information is inappropriate for publication, the CEO will discuss the matter with the Mayor and/or relevant Councillor to determine the most appropriate action with the CEO exercising final approval.

8.4 Community Matters Newsletter Approval

Individual Councillors will provide final endorsement of the divisional pages and the Mayor will provide endorsement of the lead city pages.

The Chief Executive officer (or delegate) is responsible for final approval of publication.

9. Other External Facing Communications

Council departments, branches and sections are responsible for creating, publishing and updating an extensive range of public facing communications.

These communications include:

- Operational information on Council websites
- General interest articles on Council websites
- Posting to Council social media accounts
- Marketing and tourism publications (e.g. Discover Ipswich)
- Departmental publications (e.g. Environmental Matters newsletters)
- Flyers, newsletters and other materials that promote Council services, activities or initiatives
- Community consultation activities
- Commencement of an advertising campaign.

9.1 Content Approval

Content approval of public facing communications is to be sought through normal operational procedures.

9.2 Authorisation

Authorisation for publishing and updating public facing communications is to be sought from the Chief Executive Officer (or delegate).

9.3 Mayor and Councillors

The Mayor and Councillors are to be advised of any significant public facing communications prior to their release, updating or commencement.

Approval from the Mayor and Councillors is not necessarily required for publications of this type and generally there will not be a Designated Spokesperson.

10. Caretaker Period

The Local Government Act 2009 (the Act) prohibits the publication or distribution of election material during the caretaker period.

Section 90A of the Act defines the caretaker period for a local government as the period during an election for the local government that –

- (a) starts on the day when public notice of the holding of the election is given under the Local Government Electoral Act, section 25(1); and
- (b) ends at the conclusion of the election.

Section 90D of the Act defines election material as anything able to, or intended to:

- (a) influence an elector about voting at an election; or
- (b) affect the result of an election.

Council and Councillors must not issue direct any mail outs from Council during the caretaker period.

11. Monitoring and Evaluation

The success and effectiveness of the policy will be measured by:

- Information to the community that is timely and accurate, and which encourages discussion about Council decisions and policies
 - Information about the city and its people that encourages and promotes participation in an active, healthy and liveable community
 - Ensuring the community has access to Council decisions and policies, the reasons for those decisions, and the resultant outcomes
 - Ensuring information that encourages and promotes advancement towards the accomplishment of Council's social, cultural, economic and development goals
 - Ensuring Council media resources are utilised effectively, efficiently and economically
 - Ensure Councillors have fair and equitable opportunity to engage with the community about divisional and committee matters through our external communication networks
- Maintenance of audience across Council-owned external communication channels (relative to population).

12. Definitions

Council means Ipswich City Council.

Media includes television, print, radio, online and social media, as well as Council-branded or sub-branded social media, mastheads, magazines and media releases

Media Statement means a statement that provides an official statement of Council that is published to a Council website, social media channel or provided to external media organisations

Proactive media means external communication that is initiated by media release. It does not include general educational or communications that help Council achieve specific outcomes such as iFuture or the publication of an information brochure or flyer

Reactive media includes a media statement in response to external enquiries or anticipated community issues

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

13. Policy Owner

The General Manager (Community, Cultural and Economic Development) is the policy owner. The Manager, Media, Communications and Engagement is responsible for reviewing this policy.