
MEMORANDUM

November 23, 2010

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Corporate Management Team
Mairi Welman
Marg Coulson
Brent Toderian

FROM: Penny Ballem, City Manager

SUBJECT: Media Access to Staff

Dear Mayor and Council - you will have seen in the media and on the blogs that there are some concerns being expressed by media that they are not permitted to access staff in the City. I think it is fair to say that we dropped the ball yesterday on an issue with Frances Bula, however I want to reassure you that there is no new approach to how staff interact with the media.

Providing the media with access to staff in order for them to provide technical or background information prior to a report going before council is our standard practice. We have clarified with the media that it is not appropriate for staff to be interviewed for attribution regarding a report before the council meeting. As staff we are very clear on the need not to pre-empt council debate and discussion. Furthermore, we try and ensure staff are available at the time of the council meeting once council has debated the issue and given direction. That's the time when staff can be quoted. Clearly there was some lack of clarity on our end on this yesterday and for that I apologize.

As a matter of procedure, we do ask staff to direct any media requests to Communications before engaging with media. This applies to all levels of staff including myself. This is something we consider standard practice for any large organization. The direction that staff have received at City Hall is that they are to check in with Corporate Communications when they receive calls from the media. This allows us to handle calls appropriately so that the media does not receive contradictory information from different staff which unnecessarily creates issues for us all.

In the past few years City Hall has become very accessible to the media. I and all members of the senior management team make a point of being available for interviews and we respond to media calls as quickly as possible. We have created a new media room and updated the

Document2

press conference area. We're working on a number of fronts to improve the way Communications functions.

Now that we have a new Director of Communications in place, we are working to clarify and update our policies which date back to the mid 1990's in many cases. This will also help make things clear for staff. In the meantime, based on the amount of press our issues are getting and the frequent quotes and background information which has been clearly provided by staff, I think it is safe to say that we appear to be working hard to provide a good level of service to our colleagues in the media. Our Director of Communications has written to the reporters involved and apologized for the confusion.

Please let me know if you have any further concerns. Pb