

Ref: (LG24/0164)

15 August 2024

Peter Newport
Sent via email to peter.newport@crux.org.nz

Dear Peter,

REQUEST FOR OFFICIAL INFORMATION – PARTIAL RELEASE OF INFORMATION

Thank you for your request for information held by the Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC). On 3 July 2024 you requested the following information under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA):

- How much money has the QLDC spent with Allied Press from 1 January 2023 to the present day - broken down by ODT, Wānaka Sun and Mountain Scene.
- What is the cost of the four page advertorial content being published by the Mountain Scene and Wānaka Sun - per issue and as per the annual budget.
- What was the exact procurement process used to support this expenditure and select the supplier?
- Has QLDC considered the consequences of this expenditure on the ability of these news publications to report fairly and accurately on council policy and decisions - what measures has QLDC taken to address mitigate this risk?
- What amount of money has QLDC spent with other local media platforms in the same time period - including the Wānaka and Queenstown Apps, the Lakes Weekly Bulletin.
- Has QLDC considered that expenditure on print media may represent poor value to ratepayers given the decreasing physical distribution of local newspapers and the move of audiences to digital media?
- What specific audience and distribution data/business case has been used to support the spending decisions referenced in this request.

On 31 July 2024, we sent you a letter extending the time to respond to **16 August 2024**.

QLDC response

Please see our response below:

To address your request, we consulted the QLDC Finance and Communications Team who assisted in providing the following response:

- ***How much money has the QLDC spent with Allied Press from 1 January 2023 to the present day - broken down by ODT, Wānaka Sun and Mountain Scene.***

\$ 212,241.55. Please note this is the total spend across a range of media accounts. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide a breakdown by publication of the costs requested and have provided the explanation for the refusal later in our response under section 17(f) of the LGOIMA.

- ***What is the cost of the four page advertorial content being published by the Mountain Scene and Wānaka Sun - per issue and as per the annual budget.***

We are unable to provide this information as per-issue and our rationale for the same has been explained later in our response under section 17(2)(b)(ii) of the LGOIMA. Expenditure is within the budgets approved through the Annual and Long Term Plan processes.

- ***What was the exact procurement process used to support this expenditure and select the supplier?***

There hasn't been a formal procurement process for this activity noting that Allied Press is part of the All of Government media suppliers list. The activity is generally non-discretionary (e.g. mandatory public notifications), there are limited print media suppliers that meet the criteria for circulation under the LGA, and we use all of them (including Allied Press) so as to meet the requirements of our Communications Policy to treat all media equally and invest budget accordingly (in this instance the requestor of the information operates online only media and doesn't meet the LGA requirements).

- ***What amount of money has QLDC spent with other local media platforms in the same time period - including the Wanaka and Queenstown Apps, the Lakes Weekly Bulletin.***

\$577,761.69. This is the total spend on advertising only and we are unable to provide the breakdown for the other local media platforms and our rationale for this has been provided later in our response under section 17(f) of the LGOIMA.

- ***Has QLDC considered the consequences of this expenditure on the ability of these news publications to report fairly and accurately on council policy and decisions - what measures has QLDC taken to address mitigate this risk?***
- ***Has QLDC considered that expenditure on print media may represent poor value to ratepayers given the decreasing physical distribution of local newspapers and the move of audiences to digital media?***
- ***What specific audience and distribution data/business case has been used to support the spending decisions referenced in this request.***

The below response covers the above three questions of your request.

QLDC has not completed any evaluation of risk with regard to the news publications and their ability to report fairly and accurately on council policy and decisions. If people believe any media publication is not acting fairly or accurately that is a matter for them to address with the publication and, if necessary, the NZ Media Council. QLDC continues to take a multi-channel approach for its communications to reach as great an audience as possible, for example the Let's Talk Kōrero Mai newsletter is produced now as a reduced insert with the full version as an online alternative which is publicised through social media, Council's website and through a direct email list. QLDC also continues to place notifications in print as this is a requirement of the Local Government Act 2002 s5(b) which defines "public notice" as one that is published in at least (i) 1 daily newspaper circulating in the region or district of the local authority; or (ii) 1 or more other newspapers that have a combined circulation in that region or district at least equivalent to that

of a daily newspaper circulating in that region or district. There is also a frequent legislative requirement for councils to make information “publicly available” which the Ombudsman defines as being available to the general public which they can reach reasonably and without administrative burden. This supports QLDC’s multi-channel approach to make information as accessible as possible, for example making hard copies of information available in a library where an individual may not have internet access.

We trust this response satisfactorily answers your request.

Decision to withhold remaining information requested.

We have good grounds under the LGOIMA for withholding/redacting some of the information requested. We consider it is necessary to withhold the information on the basis of the following grounds:

- s 7(2)(b)(ii) - would be likely unreasonably to prejudice the commercial position of the person who supplied or who is the subject of the information; or
- s 17(f) - that the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research

Section 7(2)(b)(ii) of the LGOIMA provides that withholding information is necessary if making the information available would be likely unreasonably to prejudice the commercial position of the person who supplied or who is the subject of the information. In this case, we considered the cost of the four page advertorial content per issue to be commercially sensitive information because it is commercial information specific to the individual media platforms.

We have to refuse your request regarding the breakdown of the total spend in accordance with section 17(f) of the LGOIMA, which applies where the information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research. Identifying the information would require manually reviewing individual purchase orders and invoices for the requested period which would unreasonably affect regular operations for the relevant team.

Public interest considerations

We consider the interests of the public when making decisions to withhold requested information, including considerations in favour of release, whether the disclosure of the information would promote those considerations, and whether those considerations outweighed the need to withhold the information.

Promoting the accountability and transparency of local authority members and officials is in the public interest, as is the general public interest in “good government”. Where possible, we have favoured the release of information. However, Council does not believe there to be any public interest in releasing any commercial details of media platforms engaging with the council.

We conclude that the important section 7 withholding interests identified [e.g. (commercial sensitivity, substantial collation)], which relate to a subset of the information within the scope of your request, are not outweighed by a countervailing public interest requiring release.

Kind regards,
Poonam

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