

# MEDIA POLICY

<b>Responsible Department:</b>	Corporate and Commercial Services
<b>Responsible Section:</b>	Customer and Information Services
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Manager Customer and Information Services

## Objective

- Provides a robust framework for the administration and management of their interactions with the media. It also sets standards of conduct for all council officials who are required to interact with media in their official capacity.
- Recognises that councils interact with media differently depending on factors such as a council's size and resources and the demographics of a local government area.
- Ensures a degree of flexibility by including optional and adjustable provisions which enables each council to tailor the policy to suit its own unique circumstances.

## Introduction

Effective media engagement can assist councils to keep their community informed, explain decisions and to promote community confidence in the council and its decisions.

Media has evolved over time to include both traditional and non-traditional forms. The advancement of technology and the development of non-traditional media means that the media now has unprecedented reach and accessibility. Anyone with a computer or hand-held device can access media platforms and actively engage in content which has the potential to be viewed and shared by hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

How a council is portrayed in the media impacts greatly on how the organisation is perceived. Media can be an effective tool to promote council programs, events, and initiatives. In addition, media can be invaluable in times of crisis or emergency when information needs to be communicated to the public.

Despite its obvious benefits, media also presents a variety of challenges and risks. These include:

- maintaining the accuracy, reliability, and integrity of information
- ensuring confidential information is managed appropriately, and
- the increased exposure and risk to reputation where information is not managed appropriately.

# Policy

## 1. Definitions

Term	Meaning
<b>Media</b>	Print, broadcast, and online media used for communicating information to the public, including, but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, internet publishers, radio, and television broadcasters.
<b>Council official</b>	In the case of a council – means councillors, members of staff and delegates of the council (including members of committees that are delegates of the council);
<b>Media coordinator</b>	Means a person appointed under clause 4 of this policy
<b>Media</b>	Means print, broadcast and online media used for communicating information to the public, including, but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, internet publishers, radio, and television broadcasters
<b>Personal information</b>	Means information or an opinion (including information or an opinion forming part of a database and whether or not recorded in a material form) about an individual whose identity is apparent or can reasonably be ascertained from the information or opinion
<b>Social media</b>	Means online platforms and applications, such as but not limited to social networking sites, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites, and message boards, that allow people to easily publish, share and discuss content. Examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to facebook, twitter, snapchat, linkedin, yammer, youtube, instagram, flicker and wikipedia.

## 2. Application

- 2.1. This policy applies to engagement between council officials and the media.
- 2.2. This policy does not apply to social media use.

## 3. Engagement Principles

- 3.1. Four 'principles' of media engagement:
  - (a) Openness;
  - (b) Consistency;
  - (c) Accuracy; and
  - (d) Timeliness.

## 4. Media Coordination

- 4.1. The General Manager, or their delegate, will be Council's Media Coordinator.
- 4.2. The Media Coordinator's role is to:
  - (a) be the lead point of contact for all media enquiries, requests for interviews, requests to film or photograph council staff, facilities or events for news and current affairs purposes
  - (b) be responsible for preparing all media statements prior to their release
  - (c) delegate to staff members to respond to media enquiries where appropriate
  - (d) maintain a register of delegated staff
  - (e) maintain effective oversight of delegated staff
  - (f) revoke a staff member's status as a delegated staff member when required
  - (g) ensure that media statements are approved by the Mayor and/or General Manager prior to their release

- (h) develop and/or approve media training and/or induction to be provided to delegated staff and/or councillors
- (i) maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses
- (j) ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias
- (k) ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly
- (l) provide guidance to councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation, and
- (m) ensure that all media releases are published on the Council's website.

## 5. Who Can Engage with the Media

### The General Manager

- 5.1. The General Manager is the official spokesperson for the Council on operational and administrative matters.
- 5.2. The General Manager may delegate to other council staff to speak on their behalf where appropriate, (for example, where the delegated staff member has professional expertise regarding the subject matter, or the general manager is unavailable).

### The Mayor

- 5.3. The Mayor is the principal member and spokesperson of the governing body of the Council, including representing the views of the Council as to its local priorities (section 226(c) of *the Local Government Act 1993* (NSW)).
- 5.4. If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as the Council's spokesperson.
- 5.5. The Mayor may delegate their role as spokesperson to other councillors where appropriate, (for example, where another councillor is best placed to comment, because the issue is of particular interest to them, or it is within their area of expertise).

### Councillors

- 5.6. As a member of the governing body and as a representative of the community, councillors are free to express their personal views to the media.
- 5.7. When engaging with the media councillors:
  - (a) must not purport to speak for the Council unless authorised to do so;
  - (b) must clarify when speaking to the media that they are expressing their personal views as an individual councillor and that they are not speaking for the Council (unless authorised to do so);
  - (c) must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council;
  - (d) must not disclose council information unless authorised to do so; and
  - (e) must seek information and guidance from the Media Coordinator where appropriate before providing comment to the media to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered reputational or other risks.
- 5.8. In the interests of promoting a positive, safe, and harmonious organisational culture, councillors should endeavour to resolve personal differences privately and must not prosecute them publicly through the media.
- 5.9. Where councillors become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Media Coordinator.

### Council Staff

- 5.10. Council staff must not speak to the media about matters relating to the Council unless authorised by the Media Coordinator to do so.

- 5.11. If Council staff receive a media enquiry or they are invited to comment to the media on a matter relating to the Council, they must refer the enquiry to the Media Coordinator.
- 5.12. Council staff are free to express their personal views to the media on matters that do not relate to the Council, but in doing so, must not make comments that reflect badly on the Council or that bring it into disrepute.
- 5.13. If authorised to speak to the media, Council staff:
- (a) must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
  - (b) must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the Media Coordinator, and
  - (c) must seek information and guidance from the Media Coordinator where appropriate before providing comment to the media to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered reputational or other risks
- 5.14. Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Media Coordinator.

### **Administrative tone**

- 5.15. All media engagement by council officials must be conducted in a professional, timely and respectful manner.

### **Induction and training**

- 5.16. Council officials who engage or are authorised to engage with the media must receive training on media engagement.
- 5.17. Media engagement training will be provided to councillors as part of their induction or refresher training or as part of their ongoing professional development program.

### **Councillors' questions about media engagement**

- 5.18. Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this policy to the Media Coordinator.

## **6. Standards of Conduct When Engaging with the Media**

- 6.1. Council officials must comply with the Council's code of conduct when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a council official.
- 6.2. Council officials must not share information or make comments to the media that:
- (d) are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other council officials or members of the public;
  - (e) contains profane language or is sexual in nature;
  - (f) constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of Council's Code of Conduct, or is unlawfully discriminatory;
  - (g) is contrary to their duties under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth) and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by the Council to ensure workplace health and safety;
  - (h) contains content about the Council, council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive;
  - (i) divulges confidential Council information;
  - (j) breaches the privacy of other council officials or members of the public;
  - (k) contains allegations of suspected breaches of the Council's code of conduct or information about the consideration of a matter under the Procedures for the Administration of the Council's Code of Conduct;
  - (l) could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment;
  - (m) commits the Council to any action;
  - (n) violates an order made by a court;

- (o) breaches copyright; or
- (p) advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business.

## 7. Use of Media During Emergencies

- 7.1. During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the Media Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of the Council.
- 7.2. Councillors, Council staff and other Council officials must not provide comment or information to the media that is inconsistent with official advice issued by the Council and any other agency coordinating the emergency response.
- 7.3. Training on media engagement during emergencies will be provided to councillors and relevant staff and other Council officials.

## 8. Media Engagement in the Lead up to Elections

- 8.1. This policy does not prevent the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a council election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.
- 8.2. Any media comment provided by the mayor or councillors who are candidates at a council election must not be provided in an advertisement, newspaper column, or a radio or television broadcast paid for by the Council or produced by the council or with council resources.

## 9. Records Management

- 9.1. Media content created and received by council officials (including councillors) acting in their official capacity is a council record and may be subject to information access applications made under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (NSW). These records must also be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* (NSW) and the Council's approved records management policies and practices

## 10. Review

- 10.1. This policy will be reviewed within 12 months of an Ordinary Council Election or from time-to-time on an as-needs basis.

## References

- *Local Government Act 1993* (NSW).
- *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021* (NSW).

## History

Minute Number	Meeting Date	Description of Change
181/2021	October 26, 2021	Adopted
336/2022	October 18, 2022	Adopted