

Media Policy

MINUTE NUMBER	282/2019
DATE APPROVED	15 August 2019
EFFECTIVE	15 August 2019
AUTHORITY	Director Corporate Services
CONTACT OFFICER	Manager Community and Tourism

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 Council is committed to ensuring the community is well informed and actively involved in dialogue about Council activities. The key objective of this Policy is to establish a clear and consistent framework for managing the dissemination of accurate and reliable information in relation to Council business through both traditional and social media. This Policy also provides guidance for all media used by Council Officials and defines the channels of communication mediums available.

2 SCOPE

- 2.1 This Policy applies to all Council Officials as defined in Section 4. To ensure the information released regarding Council is accurate, reliable and in the best interests of the organisation, this Policy further defines responsibilities and directions for specific Council Official roles.

3 RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Council – Elected members of Council

- 3.1.1 Elected members of Council are responsible for the adoption of this Policy and the consideration of resources towards its implementation. Councillors are able to make comments to the media, provided these comments are identified as their own personal opinion, and are not representing the official position of Council. Councillors are responsible for notifying the General Manager of any potentially contentious or sensitive issues relating to Council as soon as the potential issue arises.

3.2 Mayor

- 3.2.1 The Mayor is Council's official spokesperson on policy, strategic and political matters and is the authorised signatory for correspondence of this nature to the media, unless otherwise delegated to another Council Official.
- 3.2.2 The Mayor will be supported by the Senior Communications Officer, as defined in cl. 3.5.1, to ensure adherence and consistency with this Policy.

3.3 General Manager

- 3.3.1 The General Manager is Council's official spokesperson on strategic, operational and administrative matters and is the authorised signatory for correspondence of this nature to the media.
- 3.3.2 The General Manager will be supported by the Senior Communications Officer, as defined in cl. 3.5.1, to ensure adherence and consistency with this Policy.

3.4 Directors

- 3.4.1 Directors are able to make statements to the media providing there has been approval granted by the General Manager and in consultation with the Senior Communications Officer. Directors are also responsible for the implementation, appropriate resourcing, compliance and monitoring of this Policy and any associated procedures in their work area.

3.5 Senior Communications Officer

3.5.1 The Senior Communications Officer:

- i. is the central point of contact for the majority of media enquiries;
- ii. acts as a support to staff who wish to promote their activities, services, programmes or events to the community through the media;
- iii. coordinates media responses and key messages;
- iv. reviews, edits and distributes media releases, official statements, editorials and background information to the media;
- v. implements Council's proactive media program;
- vi. oversees Council's official social media platforms;
- vii. is the custodian of Council's corporate brand; and
- viii. is responsible for the preparation of briefing material for the Mayor and General Manager, or their delegates, to support media statements and provide a consistent message.

3.6 Staff

3.6.1 Council staff are responsible for notifying the communications team of any potentially contentious or sensitive issues relating to Council as soon as the potential issue arises. Staff are responsible for working collaboratively with the Senior Communications Officer to develop and deliver timely, relevant and engaging communication pieces for the community.

4 DEFINITIONS

4.1 For the purposes of this Policy, the following definitions apply:

Term	Definition
Act	<i>Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)</i>
Media	Refers to both traditional and social media methods further defined below.
Traditional Media	Refers to traditional media methods including, but not limited to, television, radio and newspaper.
Social Media	Refers to a collection of web based tools facilitating conversation and content sharing, including but not limited to; website; social networking sites (i.e. Facebook); video and sharing (YouTube and Instagram); blogs (Twitter); forums, discussion boards and groups; podcasts; and instant messaging and chat services.
Official Social Media	Refers to any Council managed social media account, profile, platform or presence.
Council Officials	As defined by in Council's Code of Conduct: <i>"includes Councillors, members of staff of Council, administrators, Council Committee members, delegates of Council and, for the purposes of cl. 4. 16 (of the Code), Council advisers"</i> as well as volunteers and contractors.

5 POLICY STATEMENT

5.1 Council commits itself to conducting media interactions in a manner which is consistent with the following governing principles:

- i. Integrity and Transparency: Council Officials should be open, honest and reliable when engaging with the media, conducting activities professionally and ethically.
- ii. Respect: Council Officials should respect the people they communicate with through media, valuing different opinions and endeavouring to build effective relationships.
- iii. Innovation and Continuous Improvement: Council Officials should aim to improve their media performance, by listening to their audience and engaging with them.
- iv. Accountability: Council Officials should have the courage to use media as a way of engaging with our community, where appropriate.
- v. Courage: Council Officials should have the courage to use media as a way of engaging with our community, where appropriate.

6 COUNCIL OFFICIALS AND THE MEDIA

6.1 Authorised Media Representatives

6.1.1 The Mayor and General Manager are the official spokespersons on Council matters and activities. In the Mayor's absence the Deputy Mayor is the official spokesperson if delegated authority in accordance with cl. 3.2.

6.1.2 The General Manager may authorise additional Council Officials to undertake media interactions regarding specific Council activities.

6.2 The Mayor and the Media

6.2.1 The Mayor is the official spokesperson for Council and the decision of Council unless otherwise delegated.

6.2.2 The role of the Mayor as spokesperson for is to:

- i. Clearly articulate and explain the deliberations and decisions of Council;
- ii. Promote participation in and understanding of democratic processes and decisions;
- iii. Promote awareness and take-up of various Council services, programmes, activities and events; and
- iv. Protect the Council's reputation.

6.2.3 It is not the role of the Mayor to discuss operational issues, only the General Manager and any delegated Council Officials can provide official comment to the media on operational matters for Council.

6.3 Councillors and the Media

- 6.3.1 All Councillors have a right to express a private opinion on any issue, regardless of whether that opinion supports or reflects Council's official position, however if their opinion does not support Council's decision they should then indicate the formal Council decision on the matter in addition to their opinion on the matter.
- 6.3.2 Councillors must be clear that they are speaking as individuals and not on behalf of Council.
- 6.3.3 Councillors may issue media releases under their own name, however any announcements, launches or timelines for Council projects are to be made in an official Council media release.
- 6.3.4 Councillors are required to seek a briefing by the General Manager or other responsible Council officials on topics for which they are the authorised spokesperson.

6.4 Staff and the Media (including Social Media)

- 6.4.1 Staff must direct all media enquiries to the Senior Communications Officer.
- 6.4.2 Council staff should not speak to or approach the media about matters relating to Council unless authorised by the General Manager to do so. The General Manager's approval may be via delegation or on a case-by-case basis.
- 6.4.3 Council employees may speak to the media or submit correspondence to the media as private individuals, ensuring that:
 - i. They do not comment on Council business or policy in a manner that brings Council or Council Officials into disrepute;
 - ii. They are not identified as Council employees;
 - iii. Their comments are not perceived as representing official Council position or policy;
 - iv. They are not using information obtained in their capacity as a Council employee which is not publicly known or readily available to the public to do so.
- 6.4.4 When deemed appropriate and authorised by the General Manager, a Council staff member may become the sole spokesperson on a specific issue, event or initiative within their operational portfolio to ensure consistency of message.
- 6.4.5 Council staff must not provide information 'off the record' during media interviews.

6.5 Committee Members, Volunteers, Contractors and the Media

- 6.5.1 All Committee Members, Volunteers and Contractors have a right to express a private opinion on any issue, regardless of whether that opinion supports or reflects Council's official position, however if their opinion does not support Council's decision they should then indicate the formal Council decision on the matter in addition to their opinion on the matter.
- 6.5.2 Committee Members, Volunteers and Contractors must be clear that they are speaking as individuals and not on behalf of Council.

- 6.5.3 Committee Members, Volunteers and Contractors may issue media releases under their own name, however any announcements, launches or timelines for Council projects are to be made in an official Council media release.

7 SOCIAL MEDIA

Council encourages the appropriate and professional use of social media to aid the efficient and effective conduct of Council business and to promote its various services, activities, programmes and events. Social media is recognised as an important channel used in conjunction with traditional methods to communicate, listen to, engage and collaborate with the community and enhance the delivery of services. At all times, use of social media by Council Officials should be done in a professional manner in accordance with the relevant policies and legislation, and consistent with Council's values.

7.1 Authorisation to comment

- 7.1.1 Comments made through official social media accounts are representative of Council and can only be made by those staff members authorised to do so by the General Manager.
- 7.1.2 The Senior Communications Officer has oversight of all social media accounts and is responsible for content management.

7.2 Personal use of social media by Council Officials

- 7.2.1 Personal or private use of social media by a Council Officials is considered to be a private matter. Refer to cl 6.4(3).
- 7.2.2 Council Officials participating in commentary about Council on a private social media account must make it clear that any comment relating to Council are not official, and that they are speaking on behalf of themselves.
- 7.2.3 Council Officials must ensure that any personal comments do not compromise their capacity to perform their role in an unbiased manner. Comments relating to Council and its programmes and activities should not be derogatory, and all care must be taken that confidential information relating to Council is not revealed on a private social media platform.

8 DEFAMATION

- 8.1 When making comment in any form of media (including online), Council Officials should familiarise themselves with the provisions contained in the *Defamation Act 2005*.
- 8.2 As a guide, published materials that identifies a person (not necessarily by name) and meets any of the following criteria may be considered defamatory:
- i. Exposes a person to ridicule;
 - ii. Lowers the person's reputation in the eyes of the community;
 - iii. Causes people to shun or avoid the person; and/or
 - iv. Damages the person's professional reputation.
- 8.3 The act of commenting on or liking social media posts may be sufficient to attract liability for defamation. Social media users and organisations with social media accounts should be wary not to engage with posts that they know to be, or suspect to be, defamatory, and ensure they act

responsibly when commenting or liking posts, particularly if the account being used has large number of followers or subscribers.

- 8.4 Council reserves the right to remove any content from its social media platforms if it considers it to be defamatory or which might expose Council to liability as host of that platform.

9 RECORD MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 Comments and interactions that take place on Council's social media accounts are deemed to be official records in accordance with the *State Records Act 1998*.
- 9.2 Council Officials are to ensure that content related to their respective area is to be appropriately managed in line with Council's Records Management Policy.

10 BREACHES

- 10.1 Any deviations by Council Officials to this Policy may be deemed to constitute a breach of Council's Code of Conduct and appropriate action may be taken. Additionally, any deviations by staff to this Policy may subject them to disciplinary action.
- 10.2 Committee Members and Volunteers who deviate from this Policy may be subject to removal from their role with Council indefinitely.
- 10.3 Contractors who deviate from this Policy may have their contract with Council terminated indefinitely.
- 10.4 Council Officials who are found to be abusing media or social media in the treatment, comments, tagging or other activity which may constitute bullying or harassment will be disciplined immediately in line with Council's Code of Conduct.
- 10.5 Council reserves the right to investigate any breach of this Policy and Council Officials must partake in an investigation when requested formally by Council.

11 VARIATION

- 11.1 Council reserves the right to vary the terms and conditions of this Policy subject to a report Council.

Revision History

Version	Adoption Date	Authorised by	Approved by	Revision Date
V1	20/09/2007	Director Corporate Services	General Manager	20/09/2009
V2	20/11/2008	Director Corporate Services	General Manager	20/11/2010
V3	16/02/2012	General Manager	Council	16/02/2012
V4	15/08/2019	General Manager	Council	15/08/2021

Change History

Version	Change Details
V1	Initial Policy
V2	Amended Policy
V3	Amended Policy
V4	Policy revisions and incorporation of Social Media provisions (revoking separate social media policy).

Related Documents

Title

Code of Conduct

Councillors Access to Information & Interaction with Staff

Records Management Policy

Local Government Act 1993

Defamation Act 2005

State Records Act 1998