

Media Policy

Date Adopted: 23 July 2024

Version: 3.1

Policy Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Establish the purpose of Council's involvement with media.
- Ensure consistency by the General Manager, councillors and staff in communicating with media.
- Limit the risk to Council's reputation by ensuring all information communicated is accurate.
- Embed a philosophy of proactive engagement and transparency with media within the organisation.
- Ensure that media engagement by councillors and staff is consistent, accurate and professional and enhances Council's reputation.
- Ensure media organisations and their representatives will be treated equally and without bias.

Policy Scope

This policy applies to councillors, the General Manager, staff, volunteers and contractors.

Policy Statement

Maitland City Council is committed to connecting with the community using a wide range of traditional and contemporary mediums. The community, in particular, has a right to be informed by independent media about initiatives and projects, issues and developments that relate to Council and the city.

As media is a key influencer of Council's reputation, it is important that Council has an established framework for interaction with the media. Through the Communications Team, Council will embrace the opportunities presented by the media and proactively pursue media opportunities to effectively promote Council programs, events, initiatives and strategic objectives. This will enable consistency of communication for both internal stakeholders and the media. In addition, media can be used in times of crisis or emergency when information needs to be communicated to the public.

For the purposes of this policy, media includes any medium or channel where content is published and is not directly owned or managed by Council. This policy does not include social media, please refer to Council's Social Media Policy.

1. Principles

1.1 The councillors, staff and other officials of Maitland City Council are committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of media engagement:

OPENNESS	We will ensure that we promote an open exchange of information between our Council and the media.
CONSISTENCY	We will ensure consistency by all councillors and staff when communicating with the media.
HONESTY	The information we share with the media will be a source of truth for our council and community and we will prioritise the need to correct inaccuracies when they occur.
TIMELINESS	We will ensure that we respond to media enquiries in a timely manner.

2. Administrative framework for engagement with the media – the Media Coordinator led model

2.1 The Manager, Communication, Engagement and Marketing will ensure one or more members of the Council’s Communications team is available to act as Media Coordinator.

2.2 The Media Coordinator’s role is to:

- 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
- be responsible for preparing all media statements prior to their release
- liaise with relevant staff members within the organisation where appropriate
- ensure that media statements are approved by the Mayor and/or General Manager and/or appropriate Council Executive prior to their release
- develop and/or approve media training and/or induction to be provided to relevant staff and/or councillors
- maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses
- ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias
- ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly
- provide guidance to councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation, and
- ensure that all media releases are published on the Council’s website
- ensure that the Council Spokesperson has the appropriate authority and delegation.

3. Who can engage with the media

THE GENERAL MANAGER

- 3.1 The General Manager is the official spokesperson for the Council on operational and administrative matters.
- 3.2 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

- 3.3 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).
- 3.4 If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as the Council's spokesperson.
- 3.5 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 particular area of expertise).

COUNCILLORS

- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 Councillors have the responsibility to ensure that their interaction with media is appropriate. This includes:
 - must not purport to speak for the Council unless authorised to do so
 - 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)
 - must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
 - must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so, and
 - seeking guidance from the Office of the General Manager (OGM) where appropriate before providing comment to the media to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered other reputational risks.
- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 Where councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the OGM.

COUNCIL STAFF

- 3.10 Council staff must not speak to the media about matters relating to Council unless they have the appropriate authority and delegation within Council's delegations register.

- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 If authorised to speak to the media, Council staff:
- must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of Council
 - must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the Media Coordinator
 - must seek information and guidance from the Media Coordinator 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.
- 3.14 Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Media Coordinator.

TONE

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

INDUCTION AND TRAINING

- 3.16 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

- 3.17 Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this policy through the online councillor portal in accordance with the Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy.

4. STANDARDS OF CONDUCT WHEN ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 Council officials must not share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms that:
- are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other Council officials or members of the public
 - contains profane language or is sexual in nature

- constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW, or is unlawfully discriminatory
- is contrary to their duties under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by the Council to ensure workplace health and safety
- contains content about the Council, Council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive
- divulges confidential Council information
- breaches the privacy of other Council officials or members of the public
- 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 Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW
- could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment
- commits the Council to any action
- violates an order made by a court
- breaches copyright
- advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business.

5. USE OF MEDIA DURING EMERGENCIES

- 5.1 During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the Manager Communication, Engagement and Marketing will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of the Council.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 Training on media engagement during an emergency will be provided as part of the induction or refresher training to councillors and relevant staff and other Council officials.

6. MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN THE LEAD UP TO ELECTIONS

- 6.1 This policy does not prevent the Mayor or councillors who are candidates at a Council or any other election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.
- 6.2 Any media comment provided by the Mayor or councillors who are candidates at a Council or another 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.

7. Records management requirements

7.1 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. These records must also be managed in accordance with the requirements of the State Records Act 1998 and the Council's Records Management Policy.

Policy Definitions

COUNCIL OFFICIAL	A collective term for councillors, the General Manager, members of staff and delegates of the Council (including members of committees that are delegates of the council, volunteers and contractors).
MEDIA COORDINATOR	Means a person appointed under clause 2.1 of this policy.
MEDIA	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.
OFFICIAL CHANNELS	Council issued media releases, website news and updates on Council's social media presences.
PERSONAL INFORMATION	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.
STAFF	Includes all Council employees, volunteers and contractors.

Policy Administration

BUSINESS GROUP:	People & Performance
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Executive Manager, People & Performance
COUNCIL REFERENCE:	
POLICY REVIEW DATE:	Three (3) years from date of adoption

FILE NUMBER:	111/13
RELEVANT LEGISLATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Defamation Act 2005 • Privacy Act 1988 • NSW Local Government Act 1993 • Government Information Public Access Act 2009 • NSW Privacy and Personal Information Act 1998 • NSW State Records Act 1998
RELATED POLICIES / PROCEDURES / PROTOCOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code of Conduct • Code of Meeting Practice • Complaint Management Policy • Privacy Management Plan • Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy • Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy • Internet and email use Policy • Right to information Policy • Records Management Policy • Work Health and Safety Policy • Violent, aggressive and threatening behaviour procedure • Social Media Policy • Language and Writing Style Guide

Policy History

VERSION	DATE APPROVED	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGES
1.0	28 October 2014	New policy adopted

2.0	26 March 2019	Updated policy adopted
3.0	23 July 2024	Updated policy adopted
3.1	18 February 2025	Updated to new branding and alignment to organisation structure. No change to content.