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# Cessnock City Council Media Policy

Date Adopted: **7/05/2019** Revision: **4**

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## **1. POLICY OBJECTIVES**

1.1. The objectives of this policy are:

- 1.1.1. To clearly indicate Council's authorised spokespersons and define roles and responsibilities within Council for communicating with the Media.
- 1.1.2. Ensure appropriate, accurate and authorised information is provided to the Media in order to limit risk to Council's reputation.
- 1.1.3. Promote open exchange of information between Council and the Media.
- 1.1.4. To provide the Media with a single point of contact with Council, enhancing the provision of Council information and enabling the building of positive media relationships.
- 1.1.5. To ensure Council is communicating with its community through a variety of Media Channels.

## **2. POLICY SCOPE**

2.1. This policy applies to Council Officials and their liaison, engagement and communication with the Media.

## **3. POLICY STATEMENT**

- 3.1. Council encourages open communication with the community through a range of communication methods, with an emphasis on promoting a positive, progressive and professional image of Council and Council Officials.
- 3.2. To ensure information released publicly about Council is accurate, reliable and in the best interests of the organisation, commentary to the Media must be released in accordance with this policy.
- 3.3. Council will openly discuss matters of interest with the Media unless disclosure of certain information contravenes Council's obligations of confidentiality or privacy, duty of care, or could infringe other laws or regulations that govern its operations.

## 4. DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

- 4.1. All Media Statements provided by Council to the Media will be accurate and provided as soon as practicable, having regard to media deadlines.
- 4.2. Council will take into account staff availability and time constraints of both Council Staff and media when responding to media requests for information/interview.
- 4.3. All Council related media enquiries should initially be directed to Council's Media and Communication Unit.
- 4.4. A Media Statement quoting a Councillor or Council Staff must not be issued without that person's knowledge and consent.
- 4.5. Information is not to be provided to the Media on an "*off the record*" basis. It should always be assumed that everything said to any media representative may be published.
- 4.6. Councillors may communicate with the Media with the following restrictions:
  - a) Their comments are not perceived as representing official Council Affairs.
  - b) Their comments do not bring Council into disrepute.
  - c) Their comments do not contain confidential information relating to Council.
- 4.7. Media Statements of Council must be approved by the General Manager or the delegated authority before released to the Media and publically.

## 5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### 5.1. Mayor

- 5.1.1. The Mayor is the elected spokespersons for Council. All Council communication with the media will be authorised by the Mayor and by Council Staff when delegated by the General Manager.
- 5.1.2. The Mayor may delegate Councillors to act as spokespersons for Council.

### 5.2. Councillors

- 5.2.1. Councillors are entitled to enter into public debate and make comment on civic affairs, provided they do not give the impression they are speaking on behalf of Council. This communication must not contain confidential information or bring Council into disrepute.
- 5.2.2. When using social media Councillors must do so in accordance with Council's Social Media Policy.

### 5.3. The Media and Communication Unit

- 5.3.1. The Media and Communication Unit is responsible for:

- i. Drafting, approving and distributing any outgoing material for the Media;
- ii. Responding to the Media and enquiries;
- iii. Briefing the Mayor, General Manager and all other Council Staff on issues that may generate media interest;
- iv. Identifying and embracing the opportunities presented by the Media and actively pursuing positive Media exposure in a professional manner.

#### **5.4. Council Staff**

- 5.4.1. Council Staff are allowed to make Media Statements if authorised by the General Manager or delegated authority.
- 5.4.2. Council Staff must refer any media enquiries to Council's Media and Communication Unit.

## **6. COMPLIANCE, MONITORING AND REVIEW**

- 6.1. The General Manager is responsible for the implementation of this policy and is responsible for ensuring this policy:
  - aligns with relevant legislation, government policy and/or Council's requirements/strategies/values;
  - is implemented and regularly monitored; and
  - is reviewed to evaluate its continuing effectiveness.

## **7. RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

- 7.1. Council Officials must maintain all records relevant to administering this policy in accordance with Council's [Records Management Policy](#).

## **8. BREACHES AND COMPLAINTS AS PER THIS POLICY**

- 8.1. To ensure compliance with the different legislative and regulatory requirements Council is obligated to conform with, the following is not permitted under any circumstance and will constitute a breach of this policy:
  - 8.1.1. Offensive, humiliating, bullying, threatening, intimidating profane or abusive language;
  - 8.1.2. Information which is false or misleading, is a personal attack on someone, or is defamatory;
  - 8.1.3. Behaviour, comments or remarks which are discriminatory in relation to a person or group based on age, colour, creed, disability, family status, gender, nationality, marital status, parental status, political opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, race or social origin, religious beliefs/activity, responsibilities, sex or sexual orientation;

- 8.1.4. Behaviour, comments or information which is illegal or designed to encourage law breaking;
- 8.1.5. Behaviour, comments or information which would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks);
- 8.1.6. Making comments that have the capacity to bring Council into disrepute;
- 8.1.7. Behaviour that would otherwise be in breach of Council's Code of Conduct and any other legislation.

8.2. Any complaints or breaches under this policy will be lodged and managed in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct and/or Council's Complaint's Handling Policy.

## 9. POLICY DEFINITIONS

<b>Authorised spokesperson</b>	A Council Official who has been given authorisation by the Mayor to communicate with the Media on behalf of Council.
<b>Council</b>	Means Cessnock City Council.
<b>Council Affairs</b>	Includes matters before the elected Council and other Council affairs and business, policy, interpretation of policy, management of Council business or staff, or other matters that may commit Council's resources.
<b>Council Staff</b>	Means members of staff of Council.
<b>Council Officials</b>	Means members of staff of Council, including Councillors and other approved delegates, including volunteers, and members of Council committees.
<b>Councillors</b>	Means the elected representative of Cessnock City Council.
<b>Media</b>	Means organisations that prepare or disseminate mass media information, including reporters, journalists and researchers working for or on behalf of such organisations, either accredited with or regulated by a recognised media industry peak body, or that acts in accordance with the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance Code of Ethics for journalists and/or the Australian Press Council's Standards of Practice and Advisory Guidelines.
<b>Media Channels</b>	Means print or electronic publications, including, but not limited to television, radio, newspapers, magazines, newsletter, digital media, internet and social media.

**Media Statement** Any verbal or written statement provided to the Media or published on Media Channels.

## 10. POLICY ADMINISTRATION

<b>Business Group:</b>	Media and Communication
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Senior Media and Communication Officer
<b>Policy Review Date:</b>	Three years from date of adoption unless legislated otherwise
<b>File Number / Document Number:</b>	DOC2014/002728
<b>Relevant strategic objectives</b>	Objective 5.2: Encouraging more community participation in decision
<b>Relevant Legislation (reference specific sections):</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Division 2 of Part 2, Clause 26 of Schedule 1, <i>Defamation Act 2005</i> (NSW).</li> <li>• Part 2 of <i>State Records Act 2005</i> (NSW).</li> </ul>
<b>Related Policies / Protocols / Procedures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Code of Meeting Practice</li> <li>• Social Media Protocol</li> <li>• Social Media Community Guidelines</li> <li>• Records Management Policy</li> <li>• Complaints Handling Policy</li> <li>• Unreasonable Customer Policy</li> <li>• Unreasonable Customer Guideline</li> </ul>

## 11. POLICY AUTHORISATIONS

No.	Authorised Function	Authorised Business Unit / Role(s)
1	Be Council's designated spokesperson and communicate with the Media. <i>(This policy authorisation was drafted to complement Council resolution MM21/2012 that the Mayor is the designated spokesperson for Council).</i>	Mayor
2	Act as Council's designated spokesperson and communicate with the Media when sub-delegated by the Mayor.	Council Officials
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Draft, approve and distribute any outgoing material for the Media;</li> <li>▪ Respond to the Media and Media enquiries;</li> <li>▪ Brief the Mayor, General Manager and all other Council Officials on issues that may generate media interest;</li> <li>▪ Identify and embrace the opportunities presented by the Media and actively pursue positive Media exposure in a professional manner.</li> <li>▪ Sub-delegate this authorisation as necessary</li> </ul>	Senior Media and Communication Officer
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Manage all matters relating to the Media: approve, distribute and respond to the Media.</li> <li>▪ Sub-delegate this authorisation as necessary</li> </ul>	General Manager
4	Manage all breaches under this policy: review and determine any potential breaches or complaints under this policy and refer them to Council's Code of Conduct Coordinator if needed	General Manager

## 12. POLICY HISTORY

Revision	Date Approved / Authority	Description Of Changes
4	7 May 2019	Policy Review
3	18 September 2013 / (PM91/2013 – 581)	Policy Review
2	7 November 2007 / (GM 55/2007 – 779)	Policy Review
1	7 July 2004 / (A/GM 29/2004 – 60)	Policy Review