

MEDIA

Policy | Strategy and Engagement

To provide a framework for Councillors and staff to promote positive coverage of Council affairs that is timely, fair, accurate and reliable.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with Council's Social Media Policy.

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Service Unit:	Communication and Engagement		
Responsible Officer:	Coordinator Communication and Engagement		
Responsible Director:	General Manager		
Authorisation Date:	16 July 2018	Review Date:	16 July 2020
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1 Background

1.1 Title of the Policy and Commencement Date

Media Policy, which will be effective upon adoption by Council.

1.2 Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on and promote understanding of the appropriate interaction with media by Councillors and Council staff.

The Media Policy has the following objectives:

- To clearly indicate authorised Council spokespeople and define roles and responsibilities when working with media;
- To ensure consistency by Councillors and staff when dealing with media;
- To minimise the possibility of miscommunication and reputational risk;
- To promote positive media relationships;
- To ensure appropriate authorisation and responsibility for the information provided to media outlets;
- To assist the media by clarifying information and the level of service to access Council representatives and responses to their enquiries;
- To promote an open exchange of information between Council and the media;
- To provide effective and positive communication of Council business to the public through media channels that is fair, accurate, timely and reliable.

2 Scope

This policy applies to authorised Council officials, in situations where they:

- Communicate with media outlets about Council affairs and any other related matters;
- Attend public speaking engagements;
- Partake in commentary on Council business where it is reasonably foreseeable that such comments will be published in the media.

This policy applies to journalist behaviour when attending Council meetings and other associated Council events.

This policy applies to all Councillors and Council staff when representing Singleton Council in the media.

This policy does not extend to disaster management or emergency events. In the case of the aforementioned incidents, please refer to the Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan.

3 Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

Term	Meaning
Council	Singleton Council
Council affairs / Council business	Includes matters before Council or other Council business, policy, interpretation of policy, management of Council business, management of Council staff or actions of matters that may commit Council resources.
Council worker	As defined in the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 is: an employee; a contractor of subcontractors; an employee of a labour hire company who has been assigned to work in the person's business or undertaking; an outworker; an apprentice or trainee; a student gaining work experience; or a volunteer.
Councillor	A person elected or appointed to civic office, including the mayor.
Authorised spokesperson	Council staff with delegation to use and communicate on behalf of Council on Council-managed social media platforms.
Confidential Information	Includes but is not limited to trade secrets of Council; non-public information about the organisation and affairs of Council such as: pricing information, production scheduling software, special supply information, marketing or strategy plans; exclusive supply agreements or arrangements, commercial and business plans, contractual arrangements with third parties; tender policies and arrangements; financial information and data; training materials; technical data; schematics; proposals and intentions; designs; policies and procedures documents; concepts not reduced to material form; information which is personal information for the purposes of privacy law; and all other information obtained from Council or obtained in the course of working or providing services to Council that is by its nature confidential.
Intellectual property	Means all forms of intellectual property rights throughout the world including copyright, patent, design, trade mark, trade name, and all Confidential Information and including know-how
Media	Includes print media such as newspapers, magazines, newsletters, brochures, and other documents; and broadcast media including radio and television outlets and online publishers.
Public comment	Includes interviews to the media (including but not limited to comments to or interviews with media outlets), public speaking engagements, expressing views in letters to media outlets/ editors, in books, notices, articles, on social media or in any such medium where it is reasonably foreseeable that the publication will be circulated in the public domain.
Publication	The distribution of information via print or electronic media (including but not limited to newspapers, radio, television and the internet including but not limited to: websites, online publications and social media).

4 Principles/Body

4.1 Procedural Statement

It is essential that Councillors and Council staff are aware of and understand their responsibilities under Council's Code of Conduct.

The following sections of the Code of Conduct are particularly relevant to this policy:

- General conduct;
- Fairness and equity;
- Harassment and discrimination;
- Personal dealings with Council;
- Obligations of Councillors and administrators;
- Obligations of staff;
- Inappropriate interactions;
- Use of certain Council information;
- Use and security of confidential information;
- Personal information;
- Use of Council resources; and
- Maintaining the integrity of this Code.

Singleton Council's relationship with media outlets provides the opportunity to keep the community informed about Council activities, services and programs; involve the community in an open dialogue about the provision of services and planning for the future; and foster community inclusiveness in Council activities that support place and lifestyle.

The following principles will underpin Council's interaction with the media.

- Council will be open and transparent when discussing 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.
- Only delegated spokespersons may speak to the media on Council affairs.
- All comments made to the media by delegated spokespersons must enhance the reputation of the Council, utilising Council values as the cornerstone, and adhere to a "whole of Council" approach when answering enquiries or providing information about programs and services.
- Council staff must not make political or controversial statements in or to the media relating to Council affairs, decisions and/or events, or about Council officials which are likely to bring Council or holders of civic office into disrepute.
- Contractors and service providers of Council must refer all media enquiries in relation to Council to the Communications unit.
- The General Manager is to be immediately alerted to any contentious or political media issue/enquiry.

- All incoming and outgoing media of interest to Singleton Council must be recorded according to Council's record-keeping requirements.
- Councillors and Council staff are expected to demonstrate standards of conduct and behaviour in the media that are consistent with relevant legislation, regulations, Council policies, Council's Code of Conduct and Standard Operating Procedure which apply to authorised spokespersons.

The following guidelines apply to ensuring the appropriate Council-delegated spokesperson in particular circumstances:

- The Mayor on political, contentious or other issues as nominated by the General Manager
- The General Manager on strategic and/or operational Council-wide activities and issues
- The Directors on operational issues and activities pertaining to their service areas or other issues and activities as nominated by the General Manager
- The Coordinator Communication and Engagement for the purpose of responding to enquiries, arranging interviews and providing background or contextual information for media
- The General Manager may at any time delegate authority to the Manager or Supervisor level when pertaining to the promotion of upcoming community events or activities

5 Responsibilities

All enquires received by Council officers from any media outlet must be directed in the first instance to Council's Communications team. Adherence to this requirement significantly enhances the provision of consistent and accurate Council information circulated through the news media.

Before any statement is made on behalf of Council to the media, Council officers must ensure:

- The statement being made is in accordance with Council's media delegation authority;
- All quotes and information provided to media outlets must be attributable to a Council officer or elected representative with appropriate media delegation;
- The comment is approved by the Council's Communications team.

The Communications team must be briefed on any information concerning Singleton Council that may generate media interest. The Communications team will monitor local and metropolitan media for items of interest to Singleton Council and, if required, assist the authorised spokespersons with an appropriate response.

5.1 Councillor responsibilities

As members of the community, Councillors are entitled to enter into public debate in their private capacity and make comment on Council affairs. The Councillor must always make it clear to the media the comments:

- Are being made as an individual;
- Are not necessarily the view of Council;
- May relate to matters that have not yet been determined by Council; and
- Do not bring the Council or other holders of civic office into disrepute.

Councillors speak “for the Council” when delegated to do so by the Mayor.

Confidential information provided to Councillors prior, during or after a Council workshop, briefing or meeting must remain confidential and not be provided to the media, or any member of the public.

5.2 Communications team responsibilities

The Communications team is responsible for:

- Coordinating and distributing articles, columns, and newsletters on behalf of the Mayor, General Manager and Council;
- Preparing and distributing news releases once approved by the General Manager (all comments attributed to the Mayor, General Manager, or Directors must be approved prior to release);
- Monitoring local newspapers, radio, television and online media to identify any mention of Singleton Council;
- Identify any issues that may potentially involve Singleton Council;
- Provide information to Council’s Leadership Team;
- Respond to all media enquiries promptly;
- Brief the Mayor and General Manager on issues that may generate media interest; and
- Provide detailed guidance to Council staff on their obligations under this Policy.

Authorised Officer	Roles and Responsibilities
Mayor	Council’s official spokesperson on policy related matters that are supported by a Council resolution, advocacy or representations to other levels of government or external agencies, upcoming events. Authorised signatory for Letters to the Editor on these issues.
Deputy Mayor	Act as the Mayor’s delegated spokesperson if the Mayor is not available.
Councillors	Provide commentary, identifying that this is provided as their own opinion and not representing the official position of Council.

General Manager	<p>Council's official spokesperson on all operational, service delivery and administration issues.</p> <p>Authorised signatory for Letters to the Editor on these issues.</p>
Directors and Leadership Team	<p>Directors are delegated to speak to the media on areas under their organisation jurisdiction. They are required to advise the General Manager and/or the Communications team prior to, or directly after, comments being made. They are required to provide information, or approval of attributed quotations, to the Communications team when requested in a timely manner.</p>
Communications team	<p>Responsible for coordinating responses and providing information to the media on behalf of Council.</p> <p>Responsible for distributing all written comments to media outlets.</p>
Council staff	<p>Selected managers and other staff with delegated authority may be asked to provide information within their area of expertise when requested by the Communications team and may be asked to provide interviews. This may include technical or in-depth knowledge of a particular subject.</p>
Other staff	<p>No role in media liaison. Council staff must not speak to the media about matters related to Council unless authorised to do so. Council employees must not provide any comment or information to the media with the intention of contesting or undermining Council policy or cast Council, Councillors or staff in a negative light.</p> <p>Council employees may speak to the media or write Letters to the Editor as private individuals with the following restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must not comment on Council business or policy; Not identify as a Council employee; Comments are not to be perceived as representing official Council position or policy.

6 Relevant Legislation

- *Copyright Act 1968*
- *Spam Act 2003*
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*
- *Local Government Act 1993*
- *Defamation Act 2005*
- *State Records Act 1998*
- *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA)*
- *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*
- *Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000*
- *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*

7 Document Information

Related documents and reference information in this section provides a single reference point to develop and maintain site compliance information.

7.1 Related Documents

Related documents, listed in **Table 7-1** below, are internal documents directly related to or referenced from this document.

Title
Code of Conduct Policy
Information Management (Records Keeping) Policy
Information Technology Usage Policy
Corporate Image Communications and Public Relations Strategy Policy
Filming Protocol Policy
Social Media Policy

Table 7-1 – Related documents

8 Responsible Officer / Policy Owner

Ownership of this policy rests with the Manager Strategy and Engagement and Coordinator Communication and Engagement.

9 Approval

As per cover sheet.

10 Monitoring

This policy will be monitored by the Coordinator Communication and Engagement to ensure compliance.

11 Review Date

This policy, once adopted, is to remain in force until it is reviewed by Council. This policy is to be reviewed approximately every two (2) years to ensure that it meets legislative requirements.

12 Last Review Date

May 2016.

13 Record Keeping, Confidentiality and Privacy

This policy is to be made available for public viewing as required under the *Government Information (Public Access) 2009, NSW*.

14 Breaches and Sanctions

Any breaches of this Policy will be referred to the General Manager for appropriate action.

Rescinded