

COUNCIL POLICY

**Policy name**

Media

Abstract

This policy provides the framework for Gunnedah Shire Council's internal and external communications, including detail on how Councillors and Council Staff will engage with media.

Dates	Policy or amendment approved Policy or amendment takes effect Policy is due for review (up to 4 years)	16 Dec 2020 01 Jan 2021 16 Dec 2024
Endorsed by	Executive Leadership Team	
Approved by	Council Gunnedah Shire Council at its Ordinary Meeting held on 16 Dec 2020. Resolution number: 8.12/20	
Policy Custodian	Manager Communications and Cultural Services	
Applies to	Council Officials Councillors Contractors Volunteers Members of Working Groups and Advisory Committees Council Staff	
Superseded Policies	Communications Policy (06 Jan 1999) Communications and Media Engagement Policy (18 Dec 2013) Communications and Media Engagement Policy (19 Nov 2014) Communications and Media Engagement Policy (15 Jul 2015)	
Related documents	Code of Conduct Community Engagement Policy	
Related legislation	Local Government Act 1993 Local Government (General) Regulations 2005	

Contents

1. Purpose
2. Scope
3. Definitions
4. Policy principles
5. Policy statement
6. Accountability, roles and responsibilities
7. Acknowledgements
8. Version control and change history

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide a framework that guides how Council Officials will communicate using media.
- 1.2 This policy also identifies structured lines of authority for providing comment to media on behalf of GSC.

2. Scope

- Activities involved in the production and dissemination of collateral and information to residents, ratepayers and visitors with reference but not limited to Council policies, decisions, programs and services;
- Interaction and engagement with the public using established communication channels, such as social media;
- All external communication with specific reference to representations of GSC in the media;
- Management of the communication of issues of strategic and /or operational importance and value;
- Informing members of the public of their obligations, rights and entitlements; and
- Facilitation of communications in times of emergency.

3. Definitions

Council officials: For the purpose of this policy, 'Council Officials' has the same meaning as defined in the Code of Conduct.

Media: All print, electronic and broadcast media, including specialist and industry publications, Council's own publications and social media.

Social media: All forms of internet-based communication tools including, but not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and YouTube.

Social media administrators: Social media administrators are those authorised to be active on social media on Gunnedah Shire's behalf.

4. Policy principles

GSC will:

- Establish and maintain a good working relationship with media outlets;
- Be proactive in providing information to relevant media outlets about issues of interest to the community;
- Be timely in handling all incoming media enquiries;
- Inform the community of key Council decisions, services, programs and initiatives;
- Promote transparency and accountability in relation to Council's decision making processes;
- Encourage public engagement through the provision of information and consultation in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Policy;
- Provide up-to-date and accurate information through communication channels and via formats that meet the needs of all community members;
- Ensure Council is visible and identifiable to the public;
- Ensure that a communication strategy is an integral component of decision making;
- Foster a cooperative and collaborative approach to communication across divisions;
- Deliver value for money in relation to outsourced communication services;
- Ensure that announcements are consistent with the policies and decisions of Council; and
- Ensure content is appropriate, legal and ethical.

GSC also notes the importance of the following basic principles:

- Accountability
- Transparency
- Accessibility
- Responsive
- Professionalism
- Consultation
- Evaluation

In all forms of communication, Councillors and staff are expected to adhere to the highest standards of ethical practice, professional competence and seek advice when uncertain.

5. Policy statement

5.1 Communications

Gunnedah Shire Council will utilise a wide range of media and social media methods to communicate and engage with the public.

5.2 Media Engagement

The Mayor, or Deputy Mayor in the Mayor's absence, and the General Manager are the official spokespersons for GSC and can make comment on behalf of Council where:

- 1) statements are factual,
- 2) statements confirm Council's agreed position on a matter or its policy, and;

- 3) statements are prepared in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including other Councillors or relevant senior staff.

Other staff members with expert knowledge on content may engage with media at the discretion of the General Manager.

All media enquiries are to be directed to Council's Media and Communications Team.

Following approval from the General Manager or with the General Manager's authority the relevant Director or Council employees may make media statements in their area of expertise, however must do so in consultation with the Council's Media and Communications Team.

Councillors and Council employees are not permitted to discuss legally sensitive or confidential matters with the media, in particular, current court cases or confidential legal advice.

If contacted by the media, all enquiries relating to council operations should be referred to the Media and Communications Team.

Councillors are the Shire's elected members, and as such can speak publicly but must uphold Council decisions publicly and/or indicate clearly they are presenting their own views.

Councillors are not required to seek the permission of the Mayor or General Manager when speaking to the media. However, they are required to make it clear that they are either:

1. Representing Council in accordance with an adopted position, policy or procedure; and/or
2. Presenting their individual point of view.

In doing so Councillors are to ensure:

- As a member of Council there should be acknowledgment and respect for the decision making processes of the Council;
- Information of a confidential nature must not be communicated until it is no longer treated as a confidential matter;
- Information relating to the decisions of Council on development approvals should only be communicated in an official capacity by a designated officer;
- Information concerning adopted policies, procedures or decision of Council is conveyed accurately. Matters of a technical nature should involve the assistance of an appropriately qualified staff member;
- Any statement is factually correct and consistent with the appropriately established position of Council, or other appropriately formed statements which possibly may be provided at the time on behalf of Council;
- Statements must abide by Council's Code of Conduct;
- Councillors must also abide by this position when engaging on social media platforms.

5.3 Media Releases, Statements and Social Media

The Manager, Communications and Cultural Services is responsible for ensuring that all quotes and all public materials are authorised prior to publication.

Routine and non sensitive communications and media releases may be approved by staff with the appropriate delegation to do so from the General Manager.

Any communications of a sensitive nature must be referred to the Director of the relevant area and approved by the General Manager.

In instances where the content is of a non-operational nature, approval must be obtained from the Mayor, and the General Manager must be consulted prior to the release or statement being issued.

The Media and Communications Team must send all releases to Councillors via the General Manager's Executive Assistant at the same time as sending to the media. Media releases will be uploaded onto Council's website and intranet for all staff.

6. Accountability, roles and responsibilities

6.1 Policy Custodian

Manager Communications and Cultural Services

6.2 Responsible Officer

Manager Communications and Cultural Services

6.3 Roles

General Manager

The General Manager must play an active role in steering and maintaining a visible communication function for GSC. The General Manager leads, and is responsible for, the overall management of communications and its integration with other key functions. The General Manager champions the Council's internal communications.

Mayor

The Mayor is the publicly elected spokesperson for GSC on political and high-level matters as appropriate. The Mayor is the representative of the Councillors and must represent the values and united decision of the Council. The Mayor champions the Council's high-level external communications. If unavailable, the Mayor can delegate the role of spokesperson to the Deputy Mayor.

Councillors

Councillors are the Shire's elected members, and as such can speak publicly but must uphold Council decisions publicly and/or indicate clearly they are presenting their own views.

Manager Communications and Cultural Services

The Manager Communications and Cultural Services has responsibility for approving media releases, media statements and public materials, providing strategic advice and support on communications issues to GSC, managing day-to-day media relations, including media enquiries and releases, and co-ordinating and overseeing the effective communication of GSC policies, programs and services.

Media and Communications Officers

The Media and Communications Officers report to the Manager Communications and Cultural Services. They assist the Manager in the preparation of media and communication materials, providing strategic advice and support on communications issues to GSC, and working on day-to-day issues including media enquiries and releases. In the event of the Manager's unavailability, the officers take on a communications material approval role.

Designated Social Media Administrators

Designated Social Media Administrators are those authorised by the General Manager to be active on social media on Gunnedah Shire Council's behalf. It is the responsibility of Social Media Administrators to monitor and manage GSC's social media platforms and to ensure all posts and response comply with Council's Media Policy.

Designated Approved Officers within Council Departments

Designated Approved Officers within Council Departments are GSC staff members approved by the General Manager to proceed with agreed arrangements to provide public materials. This could include items such as job vacancy advertisements or a small regular column in a newspaper by a content expert such as the librarian.

7. Acknowledgements

The following acknowledgements are made recognising institutions or documents that have provided a basis, instructive comment or templates that have been used to develop Council's Communication and Media Engagement Policy.

- Local Government Association 'Model Council Communications Plan and Guide.'

8. Version control and change history

Date	Version	Approved by & resolution no.	Amendment
2 Oct 2012	1	MANEX endorsed on 17 Oct 2012 subject to amendments	Minor
23 Oct 2012	2	Circulated post MANEX	No amendments suggested
21 Nov 2012	3	Prepared for Council	
12 Dec 2012	4	Prepared for Council	Following requested changes by Mayor Owen Hasler, amendments have been made to media engagement section and communications policy and media engagement policy have been merged.
09 Dec 2013	5	Prepared for Council	Amendments made to incorporate new title of Customer Relations and to clarify media

			release approval process.
31 Oct 2014	6	Prepared for Council	Policy updated to include media process flowchart and firmer guidelines for media processes.
23 Jun 2015	7	Prepared for Council	Amendments made to add further clarification around acceptable practices.
15 Jul 2015	8	Resolution 9.07/15	
16 Dec 2020	9	Council Meeting 16/12/20 Resolution 8.12/20	Supersede Communications and Media Engagement Policy