

COUNCIL POLICY

**Policy Name**

Media

Abstract

This policy provides a framework to assist Gunnedah Shire Council when dealing with the media, and to ensure that media engagement by Councillors and staff is consistent, accurate and professional and enhances Council's reputation.

Dates	Policy or amendment approved Policy or amendment takes effect Policy is due for review (up to 4 years)	20 March 2024 19 April 2024 20 March 2028
Endorsed by	Executive Leadership Team, at its meeting held 30 January 2024.	
Approved by	Gunnedah Shire Council, at its Ordinary Meeting of Council held 20 March 2024. Resolution number: 4.3/24	
Policy Custodian	Manager Customer and Information Services	
Relevant to	Councillors, staff, contractors, volunteers, external members of Working Groups and Advisory Committees	
Superseded Policies	Media Policy (16 December 2020) Communications and Media Engagement Policy (15 Jul 2015)	
Related Documents	Code of Conduct Community Engagement Policy Records Management Policy Social Media Policy	
Related Legislation	Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 Local Government Act 1993 Local Government (General) Regulation 2021 State Records Act 1998	

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1. Purpose

The Media Policy provides Gunnedah Shire Council (Council) with a robust framework for the administration and management of interactions with the media. It also sets standards of conduct for all Council officials who are required to interact with media in their official capacity.

2. Scope

This Policy applies to all Council employees, contractors and elected representatives in their dealings with media agencies. It does not apply to social media use, which is covered by a separate policy.

3. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Council official	Councillors, staff and delegates of Council (including members of committees that are delegates of Council).
Media Coordinator	A person appointed under clause 5.1.1 of this Policy.
Media	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.
Personal information	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.
Social media	Online platforms and applications, such as but not limited to social networking sites, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites, and message boards, that allow people to easily publish, share and discuss content. Examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Yammer, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and Wikipedia.

4. Policy principles

At the heart of this Policy are four 'principles' of media engagement. Councillors, staff and other officials of Council are committed to upholding and promoting these principles. They are:

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.

Accuracy: 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.

5. Policy statement

5.1 Administrative framework for engagement with the media

5.1.1 Appointment and role of the Media Coordinator

The General Manager will appoint a member of Council staff to be Council's Media Coordinator. The Media Coordinator should be a suitably qualified member of staff.

The General Manager may appoint more than one Media Coordinator.

The appointment of Media Coordinator/s will occur by way of an instrument of delegation.

The Media Coordinator's role is to:

- a) 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
- b) be responsible for preparing all media statements prior to their release
- c) liaise with relevant staff members within the organisation where appropriate
- d) ensure that media statements are approved by the Mayor, General Manager or relevant Director prior to their release
- e) develop and/or approve media training and induction to be provided to relevant staff and Councillors
- f) maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses
- g) ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias
- h) ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly
- i) provide guidance to Councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation, and
- j) ensure that all media releases are published on Council's website.

5.2 Who can engage with the media

5.2.1 The General Manager

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

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).

5.2.2 The Mayor

In accordance with section 226(c) of the *Local Government Act 1993*, the Mayor is the principal member and spokesperson of the governing body of Council, including representing the views of Council as to its local priorities.

If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as Council's spokesperson.

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).

5.2.3 Councillors

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.

When engaging with the media, Councillors:

- must not purport to speak for 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 Council (unless authorised to do so)
- must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of Council
- must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so, and
- must seek information and guidance from the Media Coordinator where appropriate 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.

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.

Where Councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Media Coordinator.

5.2.4 Council staff

Council staff must not speak to the media about matters relating to Council unless authorised by the General Manager or relevant Director to do so.

If Council staff receive a media enquiry or they are invited to comment to the media on a matter relating to Council, they must refer the enquiry to the Media Coordinator.

Council staff are free to express their personal views to the media on matters that do not relate to Council, but in doing so, must not make comments that reflect badly on Council or that bring it into disrepute.

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 General Manager or relevant Director, and
- must seek information and guidance from the Media Coordinator where appropriate 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.

Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Media Coordinator.

5.2.5 Tone

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

5.2.6 Induction and Training

Council will provide training to Council officials who engage or are authorised to engage with the media.

5.2.7 Councillors' questions about media engagement

Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this Policy to the General Manager.

5.3 Standards of conduct when engaging with the media

Council officials must comply with Council's Code of Conduct when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a Council official.

Council officials must not share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms that:

- a) are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other Council officials or members of the public

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

5.4 Use of media during emergencies

During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the Media Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of Council.

Councillors, Council staff and other Council officials must not provide comment or information to the media that is inconsistent with official advice issued by Council or any other agency coordinating the emergency response.

Training on media engagement during emergencies will be provided to Council officials as required.

5.5 Media engagement in the lead up to elections

This Policy does not prevent the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a local government or any other election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.

Any media comment provided by the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a local government or another election must not be provided in an advertisement, newspaper column, or a radio or television broadcast paid for by Council or produced by Council or with Council resources.

5.6 Records management requirements

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 Council's Records Management Policy.

5.7 Concerns or complaints

Concerns or complaints about the administration of Council's engagement with media should be made to the Media Coordinator in the first instance.

6. Accountability, roles and responsibilities

6.1 General Manager

The General Manager is responsible for ensuring policy implementation, compliance, monitoring, evaluation and review occurs throughout the organisation.

The General Manager is responsible for the appointment of the Media Coordinator/s.

6.2 Media Coordinator

The Media Coordinator is responsible to carry out the tasks outlined in Clause 5.1.

7. Acknowledgements

This Policy is based on the Model Media Policy developed by the Office of Local Government in consultation with NSW councils.

8. Version control and change history

Date	Version	Approved by & resolution no.	Amendment
20 March 2024	1.0	Ordinary Council Resolution 4.3/24	