



9. GOVERNANCE

Policy 9.12

MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Version 3

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OBJECTIVES:

- a)** To provide a policy for the release of information relating to Council business through media outlets.
- b)** To endorse Council's use of social media for the dissemination of information and to facilitate discussion as part of a community engagement strategy.
- c)** To ensure the media receives accurate information in a timely manner.
- d)** To ensure the community and other stakeholders are kept abreast and informed about Council decision, developments, policies and major projects.
- e)** To clearly identify authorised spokespersons on behalf of Council and provide guidelines when making statements regarding Council business.
- f)** To clearly identify roles and responsibilities for Council staff in terms of media management and pro-active promotion of Council's service, events and activities.
- g)** To ensure media spokespersons are skilled and feel confident to present to the community with print, online and broadcast media.

DEFINITIONS

Media

The term commonly given to various means of communication that reaches a broad cross-section of the community such as television, radio and newspaper.

Social media

The term commonly given to web-based tools that allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests online. As the name implies, social media involves the building of online communities or networks to encourage participation and engagement.

This includes blogs, message boards, social networking websites (such as Facebook, twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace) content sharing websites (such as Flickr, YouTube) and many other similar online channels.

Worker

As defined in the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and varied to include councillors. A worker is:

- A councillor, or

- An employee, or
- A contractor or subcontractor, or
- An employee of a contractor or subcontractor, or
- An employee of a labour hire company who has been assigned to work in the person's business or undertaking, or
- An outworker, or
- An apprentice or trainee, or
- A student gaining work experience, or
- A volunteer.

PURPOSE

Communicating with the media and on social media is an important part of achieving Council's broader objectives and commitment to transparency and open, honest communication with the public. Media coverage is a key driver of organisational reputation – hence the need for a positive framework for interaction and engagement.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Inform the community of Lithgow City Council's use of media and social media platforms for the distribution of information and community consultation pertaining to the business of Council.
- Outline the responsibilities of Councillors and Council workers with regarding to engaging the media and use of social media.

This policy has been developed to ensure that the interface between Council and the media is managed appropriately to maximise the benefits for Council and to minimise the risk of adverse publicity and misunderstanding due to inaccurate information or inappropriate sharing of information.

BACKGROUND

Lithgow City Council is committed to making the best use of all available media to improve communication with the public. This includes using all reasonable and cost-effective means to improve the way we communicate, reach out and interact with the different communities we serve.

Social media and the media are the Council's most important channels of communication with the community. They are effective mediums which the Council works with to provide factual and positive information on policies, initiatives, performances and achievements.

It is important that any potential risks are managed through a common-sense approach and framework as well as proactively monitoring the development of such applications.

It is important that the Council builds on its relationship with the media and the community and continues to issue timely, informative and interesting media releases and to provide other information as necessary.

It is also important that each media release and the distribution of information through social media is approved through the correct Council channels.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the Mayor, all Councillors and Council staff when representing Council in the media. This policy applies to verbal and written comments in the media, public speaking engagements, media releases and the use of social media.

POLICY

Council Workers (not including Councillors)

1. Any comment made to a journalist or member of a media organisation is to be consistent with Council's Code of Conduct and accurately reflect the decisions and values of Council.
2. The Mayor and General Manager are the official spokespeople on Council affairs, as per the NSW Local Government Act (1993).
3. All media enquiries received by workers without media delegation should be directed in the first instance to the General Manager.
 - a. Approval as an authorised spokesperson will be made on a case by case basis according to the subject matter of the inquiry. Approval may be granted by the General Manager.
 - b. Only the General Manager, Mayor, Directors or authorised spokespersons have permission to speak to the media.
 - c. Council workers with a professional expertise are allowed to speak to the media on a specific subject within their field – on specified occasions – with the permission of the General Manager and in consultation with the relevant Director.
 - d. No contractor employed by council is allowed to speak to the media regarding Council business without the express permission of the General Manager.
4. Council workers have an obligation to support Council decisions and shall not use the media to damage Councils reputation, undermine public confidence in the Council or local government generally.
5. As members of the community, council workers are entitled to offer their personal views on matters which are the subject of community engagement, bearing in mind point 4 above. Workers who are uncertain in this matter should seek the guidance from their Supervisor, Director or the General Manager.

6. Council workers must not make political or controversial statements in or to the media relating to Council affairs, decisions and/or events, or about council officials that are likely to generate negative publicity and damage the reputation of Council.
7. The Personal Assistant to the General Manager and Mayor is responsible for distributing media releases, articles, columns, statements and other media material on behalf of the Mayor and Council.
8. The Media and Social Media Policy also applies in emergency and public alert situations.

Councillors

1. Councillors may openly discuss matters of interest with the media and on social 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.
2. The Mayor and the General Manager are the official spokespeople on Council affairs, as per the NSW Local Government Act (1993).
3. Councillors have an obligation to support Council decisions and shall not use the media to damage Council's reputation, undermine public confidence in the Council or local government generally.
4. As members of the community, Councillors are entitle to offer their personal views on matters which are the subject of community engagement, always bearing in mind how that may be perceived given their substantive role with Council. Councillors who are uncertain in this matter should seek guidance from the General Manager or Directors.

| Position | Role |
|------------------------------|--|
| Mayor | To lead councillors in their understanding of, and compliance with, this policy and related guidelines. |
| General Manager | To lead workers (either directly or through delegated authority) in their understanding of, and compliance with, this policy and related guidelines. |
| Directors and Managers | To communicate, implement and comply with this policy and related guidelines. |
| Supervisors and Team Leaders | To support workers in their understanding of, and compliance with, this policy. |
| All Council workers | To implement this policy. |

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| Council Committees | To be aware of, and adhere to this policy. |
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Council recognises the important role the media plays in informing the public about the work of the organisation and its facilities and businesses. Subject to operational and legal constraints, Council provides the media with as much information as is practical and possible about this work, as long as it is clearly in the public interest for such matters to be known.

Council will not, for operational and legal reasons, comment on any matter that is the subject of an ongoing investigation or consideration, or where it is not in the public interest for the matter (or the details of the matter) to become publicly known, in some cases, the issue may be subjected to the public interest test (GIPA Act) to determine what information should/can be released, or information may be withheld to avoid potential defamation/privacy breaches.

Confidential Information

The integrity and security of confidential documents or information in an authorised media spokesperson's possession, or for which the spokesperson is responsible, must be maintained and managed in line with Council's Code of Conduct.

Confidential information will not be released by Council via any form of media or social media.

Defamation

Council staff and elected officials should be aware of defamation laws when commenting in the media.

As a guide, under *Defamation Act 2005*, published material that identifies a person (not necessarily by name) and meets any of the below criteria may be considered defamatory:

1. Exposes a person to ridicule,
2. Lowers the person's reputation in the eyes of members of the community, or
3. Causes people to shun or avoid the person, or
4. Injures the person's professional reputation.

Legislation

Actions and comments are governed by various legislative and Council requirements.

Councillors and staff members may expose themselves to legal action or sanctions under these requirements unless complying with this policy and relevant Standard Working Procedures.

The following legislation is applicable to this policy:

- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- Freedom of Information Act, 1982 (Federal)

- Copyright Act 1968
- Defamation Act, NSW 1974
- Privacy Act, 1988
- Lithgow City Council policies
- Lithgow City Council Code of Conduct
- Workplace Surveillance Act.
- State Records Act 1998
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1991

Council Policies

The following Council policies should be referred to in conjunction with this policy:

- Policy 4.6 Customer Service Policy
- Policy 4.8 Consultation with Indigenous People
- Policy 4.10 Community Engagement and Communications
- Policy 9.10 Councillor Workshops and Briefing Sessions

Community Strategic Plan

This policy supports the sentiments expressed by the community during the preparation of the *Community Strategic Plan ~ Our Place, Our Future* that "Council focuses on strong civic leadership, organisational development and effective governance with an engaged community actively participating in decision making processes affecting their future".

- GL1 Our Council works with the community
 - GL1.1 our community is involved in the planning and decision making processes of Council.
- GL3 We are all valued citizens
 - GL3.1 we provide prompt, knowledgeable, friendly and helpful advice.

Protocols relating to Council Business

1. Council and Committee Meetings

Council Officers will draft media releases relating to the outcomes of Council and Committee Meetings. These media release are issued as soon as practicable after the meeting.

Approval must be sought from the Supervisor, Manager, Director, General Manager and Mayor prior to release by the PA to the General Manager & Mayor.

2. Reports before Committees/Council

Council Officers are not permitted (unless authorised) to comment publicly on information and recommendations contained in reports that are before committees and Council:

Requests from media for staff to publicly comment on a particular item in the Business Papers must be brought to the attention of the General Manager.

Reports prepared for Council and Committees are public documents and may be reported on in the media.

3. Tenders

As a general rule, it is inappropriate to comment on a tender until it has been awarded by Council. When there is media interest in a tender, the media may be advised of the following:

- The tender closing date and project details;
- The number of tenders received by Council, the names of companies that submitted tenders and when Council will determine the tender;
- The outcome of the tendering process following a Council resolution.

In order to maintain probity to any tender process, no further comment will/should be made.

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