

# MODEL MEDIA POLICY 2022



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# Introduction

## Media – opportunities and challenges

The Model Media Policy has been developed to provide a framework to assist councils when dealing with the media and to ensure that media engagement by councillors and staff is consistent, accurate and professional and enhances the council's reputation.

Effective media engagement can assist councils to keep their community informed, explain decisions and to promote community confidence in the council and its decisions.

The term "media" used in this policy means 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.

The advancement of technology and the development of non-traditional media means that the media now has unprecedented reach and accessibility. Anyone with a computer or hand-held device can access media platforms and actively engage in content which has the potential to be viewed and shared by hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

How a council is portrayed in the media impacts greatly on how the organisation is perceived. Media can be an effective tool to promote council programs, events, and initiatives. In addition, media can be invaluable in times of crisis or emergency when information needs to be communicated to the public.

Despite its obvious benefits, media also presents a variety of challenges and risks. These include:

- maintaining the accuracy, reliability, and integrity of information
- ensuring confidential information is managed appropriately, and
- the increased exposure and risk to reputation where information is not managed appropriately

## The development and intent of this policy

The Model Media Policy has been developed by the Office of Local Government (OLG) in consultation with councils. It is applicable to councils, county councils and joint organisations.

The Model Media Policy sets out an exemplar approach by incorporating examples of best practice from the media policies of a diverse range of NSW councils, as well as from Commonwealth and State Government agencies.

The Model Media Policy provides councils, county councils and joint organisations with a robust framework for the administration and management of their 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.

The Model Media Policy recognises that councils interact with media differently depending on factors such as a council's size and resources and the demographics of a local government area. For these reasons, the Model Media Policy ensures a degree of flexibility by including optional and adjustable provisions which enables each council to tailor the policy to suit its own unique circumstances.

## Content of the Model Media Policy

At the heart of the Model Media Policy are the four 'principles' of media engagement. These are:

- Openness
- Consistency
- Accuracy
- Timeliness.

These principles, which are expanded upon in Part 1, should underpin every aspect of a council's media engagement and all councils and council officials should commit to upholding them.

This policy applies to engagement between council officials and the media. It does not apply to social media use.

The [Model Social Media Policy](#) is available for viewing on Council's website [www.council.lithgow.com](http://www.council.lithgow.com)

The Model Media Policy is structured as follows:

- Part 1** Sets out the principles of media engagement for councils
- Part 2** The Administrative Framework in relation to the management of media enquiries and dealing with the media
- Part 3** Details the council's authorised spokespersons when engaging with the media
- Part 4** Prescribes the standards of conduct expected of council officials when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a council official
- Part 5** Prescribes who will be the spokesperson to the media during emergencies
- Part 6** Prescribes how councillors should engage with the media in the lead up to an election
- Part 7** Contains information about records management requirements relating to media
- Part 8** Definitions

## Acknowledgements

This policy has been developed by the Office of Local Government in consultation with NSW Councils.

## Enforcement

Clause 3.1(b) of the *Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW* provides that council officials must not conduct themselves in a manner that is contrary to councils' policies. If adopted by a council, a breach of the policy will be a breach of the council's code of conduct.

Concerns or complaints about the administration of a council's engagement with the media should be made to the General Manager.

# Model Media Policy

## Part 1 – Principles

1.1 We, the councillors, staff, and other officials of Lithgow City Council, are committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of media engagement:

**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.

## Part 2 – Administrative framework for engagement with the media

### The role of the General Manager

1.2 The role of the General Manager 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) delegate to staff members to respond to media enquiries where appropriate
- d) maintain a register of delegated staff
- e) maintain effective oversight of delegated staff
- f) revoke a staff member's status as a delegated staff member when required
- g) ensure that media statements are approved by the Mayor prior to their release where appropriate
- h) Approve media training and/or induction to be provided to delegated staff and/or councillors
- i) ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias
- j) ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly

- k) provide guidance to councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation, and

- g) ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly
- h) ensure that all media releases are published on the Council's website and social media.

## **Appointment and role of the Media Coordinator**

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

1.4 The General Manager may appoint more than one Media Coordinator.

- a) Media enquiries at Lithgow City Council should be directed to
  - General Manager's Executive Assistant
  - Corporate Strategy & Communications Officer

1.5 The Media Coordinator's role is to:

- a) be a point of contact for media enquiries, requests for interviews, requests to film or photograph council staff, facilities or events for news and current affairs purposes
- b) liaise with relevant staff members within the organisation where appropriate.
- c) ensure that media statements are approved by the Mayor and/or General Manager prior to their release
- d) develop and/or approve media training and/or induction to be provided to relevant staff and/or councillors
- e) maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses
- f) ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias

## Part 3 – Who can engage with the media

### The General Manager

- 1.6 The General Manager is the official spokesperson for the Council on operational and administrative matters.
- 1.7 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).

### The Mayor

- 1.8 The Mayor is the principal member and spokesperson of the governing body of the Council, including representing the views of the Council as to its local priorities (section 226(c) of the *Local Government Act 1993*).
- 1.9 If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as the Council's spokesperson.
- 1.10 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).

### Councillors

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 When engaging with the media councillors:
  - must not purport to speak for the 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 the Council (unless authorised to do so)
- must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
- must not disclose council information unless authorised to do so, and
- must seek information and guidance from the General Manager 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.

3.3 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.

3.4 Where councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the General Manager.

### Council Staff

- 3.5 Council staff must not speak to the media about matters relating to the Council unless authorised by the General Manager to do so.
- 3.6 If Council staff receive a media enquiry or they are invited to comment to the media on a matter relating to the Council, they must refer the enquiry to the General Manager.
- 3.7 Council staff are free to express their personal views to the media on matters

that do not relate to the Council, but in doing so, must not make comments that reflect badly on the Council or that bring it into disrepute.

- 3.8 If authorised to speak to the media, Council staff:
- must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
  - must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the **General Manager**, and
  - must seek information and guidance from the General Manager 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
- 3.9 Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the General Manager or Media Coordinator.

## Tone

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

## Induction and training

- 3.11 The Council must provide training to Council officials who engage or are authorised to engage with the media.
- 3.12 Media engagement training will be provided to councillors as part of their induction or refresher training or as part of their ongoing professional development program.

## Councillors' questions about media engagement

- 3.13 Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this policy to the General Manager.



## Part 4 – Standards of conduct when engaging with the media

4.1 Council officials must comply with the Council's code of conduct when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a council official.

4.2 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 the Council to ensure workplace health and safety
- e) contains content about the 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 the 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 the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment
- j) commits the Council to any action
- k) violates an order made by a court
- l) breaches copyright
- m) advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business.

## **Part 5 – Use of media during emergencies**

- 5.1 During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, Director Infrastructure Services will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of the Council.
- 5.2 Councillors, Council staff and other Council officials must not provide comment or information to the media that is inconsistent with official advice issued by the Council and any other agency coordinating the emergency response.
- 5.3 Training on media engagement during emergencies will be provided to councillors and relevant staff and other Council officials.

## **Part 6 – Media engagement in the lead up to elections**

- 6.1 This policy does not prevent the mayor or councillors who are candidates at a council or any other election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.
- 6.2 Any media comment provided by the mayor or councillors who are candidates at a council or another election must not be provided in an advertisement, newspaper column, or a radio or television broadcast paid for by the council or produced by the council or with council resources.

## **Part 7 – Records management requirements**

7.1 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 the Council's approved records management policies and practices.

## Part 8 - Definitions

In this Model Media Policy, the following terms have the following meanings:

**council official** means councillors, members of staff and delegates of the council (including members of committees that are delegates of the council);

**Media Coordinator** means a person appointed under clause 1.3 of this policy

**media** means 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** means 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** means 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

