



Communications and Media Relations **Policy**

October 2021

Policy No: CCC067 - Adopted

Policy owner:	Communications, Marketing & Customer Engagement - Corporate Affairs Directorate
Approved by:	Council
Date of approval:	26/10/2021
Policy category:	Operational
Content Manager No:	D14935477
Review date:	26/11/2023

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1. Purpose

The aim of this policy is to:

- outline the approach to communicating with the public and dealing with the media on official Council business and information
- to ensure a co-ordinated response to communicating with the public and dealing with the media is undertaken from one single point of contact, the Communication Team
- to define authorised spokespersons on behalf of Council
- to ensure that a consistent message is communicated and given through the media to the public.

Council is committed to conducting itself with openness and transparency and will communicate through own published content and the media to:

- help the public understand Council's programs, services and initiatives
- enable the effective operation of services to residents
- influence attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of individuals and the community
- fulfil a legislative requirement
- inform in times of emergency or crisis
- enhance the reputation of the Central Coast by promoting initiatives of the Council and its partners.

1.1 Policy summary

This document sets out Council's principles for communicating with the public and protocols for the media relations functions of Council. Advice is also given on handling joint media policies and communication protocols with third party organisations.

1.2 Scope

This Policy covers personnel employed by Council; any person or organisation contracted to or acting on behalf of Council; and any person or organisation employed to work on Council premises or facilities and all activities of the Council.

1.3 Background

Central Coast Council aims to build and maintain a positive reputation and has adopted a proactive approach to communicating with the public and dealing with the media.

Published content provided to the community and the media play an important role in shaping public opinion. Professionally managing all information published by Council is important. Additionally, professionally managing the provision of information to the media is essential to protect Council's reputation.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

All Council Officials - Council officials are not to comment on Council business including confidential matters (e.g. staff, personal information, legal advice and commercial-in-confidence matters).

The roles of various Council officials regarding contact with the media are listed below in more detail.

- **Mayor / Deputy Mayor / Administrator** - Council's official spokesperson on all policy matters and key decisions. May delegate to the Deputy Mayor or another Councillor or CEO.
- **Councillors** - Each Councillor has a right to express a personal opinion on any issue, speak on behalf of the community they represent, whether or not that opinion or proposal reflects Council's official position. Councillors must carefully identify the role in which they speak or write. Councillors have a duty of responsibility to assist in building a positive brand and reputation for Council with the community.
- **Chief Executive Officer** - Official spokesperson on all operational and administrative issues. An authorised signatory for letters to the editor on related issues. May delegate to other senior staff who have had media training.
- **Communication Team** - Technical experts in managing Council's brand and reputation. Manages the day-to-day activities of communications including editing published content, issuing media releases and statements; coordinating media enquiries and interviews; coordinating all communications and campaigns on behalf of Council and providing media training. Gives advice and expertise about issues management and how to respond to negative publicity.
- **Employees, contractors, volunteers** - Individuals employed by Central Coast Council are not authorised spokespeople of the organisation, unless they have received delegation from the CEO or member of the ELT and had media training arranged through the Communication Team. Staff must seek approval from their manager prior to speaking at any external presentations or conferences and should only speak publicly about their area of expertise.

Employees may access media outlets in their personal capacity as residents or ratepayers but should be mindful to their obligations under Council's Code of Conduct. When acting in a personal capacity, staff should be aware of their association with Council and the perception that may be created if they are identified as a Council employee. Council employees may not imply or be perceived to imply that they are speaking on behalf of Central Coast Council.

2.2 Media Spokespeople

- The following staff have approval to be a media spokesperson for Council:
 - Mayor / Deputy Mayor / Administrator
 - Chief Executive Officer
 - A member of the Executive Leadership Team as delegated by the Chief Executive Officer
 - Others specifically authorised by the Chief Executive Officer, or a Director.
- All media spokespersons must be media trained before they can speak to the media or be quoted in a media release. This is to ensure accurate and consistent information is provided. Media spokespersons must liaise with the Communication Team before speaking to the media.
- Council spokespersons should only comment on their areas of expertise.
- Members of the Executive Leadership Team may respond to questions during media interviews on cross-departmental issues if they are well informed on the matter.
- Communication staff must ensure media spokespersons are well prepared when participating in a media interview including providing briefing and speaking notes and to sit in on media interviews as required.
- Communication staff will ensure all media spokespersons are available for interview before issuing media releases, in which a staff member is quoted.
- Council comment on legal or contentious matters may only be made or approved by the Chief Executive Officer or delegate.
- A media comment or a media statement must be attributed to a 'Council spokesperson' unless a specific Council spokesperson is to be named.
- Office of the Mayor or Administrator

The Mayor or Administrator may nominate an officer from his or her office, or Corporate Communication to issue a statement on his or her behalf.

- Office of the Chief Executive Officer

The Manager Corporate Communication or delegate may issue statements on behalf of the Chief Executive Officer, and as an official spokesperson of the Chief Executive Officer at the direction of the Chief Executive Officer.

3. General

3.1 Professional Standards

In all forms of communication, media and published content on behalf of Council, including verbal, printed or digital, Council officials are expected to adhere to corporate brand and writing guidelines, and the highest standards of ethical practice and professional competence.

Senior Managers are required to consider the Communication Team advice on all matters related to any form of communication on behalf of Council. If a dispute arises, the matter will be escalated to the appropriate Executive member.

3.2 Published content

Information published by all Council employees, contractors or volunteers on Council's behalf, as representing Central Coast Council should represent Council's official position and should be consistent, accurate, accessible and easy to understand.

- All published content must comply with Council's Writing Style Guide and Branding Guidelines.
- All published content must be in line with Council's corporate key messages, determined by the Communication Team.
- All published content must be approved by the relevant subject matter Unit Manager, or their delegate.
- All published content on any Council website aims to conform to Level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2 (WCAG 2.0).

The Communication Team may edit any content to be published on Council's behalf to comply with Council's Writing Style Guide, including editing content on any Council website.

3.3 Social Media

Council recognises the right for employees to use social media in a personal capacity. Council's protocol around staff use of social media is outlined in Council's Code of Conduct. The

Communication Team manage Council's corporate social media pages including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn. Posting to these channels may be a recommendation of the Communication Team depending on Council's corporate focus.

- Only employees with the appropriate authority and delegations can be a spokesperson for Council across social media platforms.
- No personal post by a Council employee should trump a corporate Council communication announcement or strategy. Employees are to wait until the official post by Council before sharing, posting or commenting on the topic personally.
- If employees are using social media in their personal capacity, posts and comments must be clear that content is their personal opinion and not the opinion of Council.
- The Mayor or Administrator may nominate an officer from his or her office to oversee the management of the mayoral or administrator's social media accounts and holds all passwords
- Some Council social pages and groups are managed by other parts of the business and posts/comments on these channels must adhere to the Code of Conduct, brand and writing style guidelines.

3.4 Media Releases

The purpose of a media release is to inform the media about a Council matter, with the expectation that the information then be passed on to the community. A media release often defines the core script and corporate messages agreed from which other content is created about a Council matter.

- Media releases are written by the Communication Team and content is consulted with the subject matter expert Council staff.
- No media release is to be sent out without approval from the relevant member of the Executive Leadership Team or their delegate.
- All media releases are issued by the Communication Team to media and published on Council's website.
- All media releases that are issued by the Office of the Mayor or Office of the Administrator will be published on Council's website.
- Embargoed media releases may be issued when the details of a matter are not to be published before a certain time; but Council wishes to provide timely information to media.

3.5 Media enquiries

Council's policy is to deal with all media enquiries centrally and as a priority, to ensure that a consistent message is given through the media to the public that is open, honest, accurate and timely.

- The Communication Team coordinate all media contacts and response on behalf of Council.
- Information provided to the Communication Team is expected to be timely, considered, accurate and relevant.
- All responses to media enquiries must be approved by an Executive Leadership Team member, or their delegate or Mayor/Administrator where appropriate.
- Executive Leadership Team and Senior Managers must work with the Communication Team to finalise a response to a media enquiry within the Service Level Agreement timeframe.
- Staff must not respond to any media enquiries received outside of the Communication Team and must communicate the enquiry to the Communication Team. The exception to this is media enquiries originating in the Office of Mayor where the Office of Mayor may choose to respond to a media query not as a corporate communications response on behalf of Council, but as an Office of the Mayor response.

3.6 Media interviews

Council's policy is to proactively respond to requests for media interviews and ensure that consistent messages are communicated and given through the media to the public.

- The Communication Team arranges all media interviews on behalf of Council, with the exception of the Office of the Mayor who may arrange media interviews directly in certain circumstances.
- Only authorised spokespeople having undertaken Council's media training program and with delegation, may speak in a media interview.
- All media interview requests must be responded to within the Service Level Agreement.
- Staff must not respond to any media interview requests received outside of Communication Team and must communicate the request to the Communication Team.
- The Communications Team provides media briefing notes to the authorised spokesperson and may attend face-to-face media interviews or media photo opportunities.

3.7 Media conferences

Media conferences can be a useful way of managing media and efficiently providing information at the same time. Media conferences can be used to announce something major or manage media enquiries on an issue or emergency through a formal presentation and then a question and answer opportunity with approved spokespeople.

The Communication Team arrange media conferences, coordinate the attendance of the media and spokespeople, provide media briefing notes and attend face-to-face media conferences.

3.8 Joint media opportunities

Council works in partnership with various organisations and other levels of government to help achieve the aims of Council and provide services, programs or initiatives. Protocols for managing communications and media around partnership projects may be contained in funding agreements, or by following protocols set by other levels of government. Guidelines on the development of joint media opportunities are contained in Council's Media Relations procedures.

3.9 Publicity for third parties

Council employees must abide by the following guidelines in relation to suppliers wishing to obtain publicity from the fact that Council is using their products or services:

- All requests by suppliers for publicity or communication related to Council must be provided to the Communication Team.
- Council employees should not offer testimonials for supplier products. This means that no photographs of Council employees (identified either by logo, name or position title) are to appear in any communication channel, and no Council employee or contractor is to be quoted in any supplier story, 'case study' or advertisement relating to a product or service. Unless the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate approves an exception.
- Suppliers may issue media statements about Council using their product or service, but these must be written in the third person only. Any media statement written by a supplier mentioning Council must first be approved by the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate.

3.10 Communication issues management

- The Communication Team gives advice and expertise about issues and how to respond to negative publicity. It is important that advice from the Communication Team is sought to maintain a positive reputation for Council and correct any misinformation.

- The Executive Leadership Team members and Senior Management Team members should alert the Communication Team as soon as practicable if they identify potentially damaging, ambiguous or negative issues.
- The Communication Team is to regularly communicate issues to the Executive Leadership Team and Administrator/Mayor's Office.
- The Communication Team will prepare responses to any potential negative publicity where advance notice of difficult issues is available.

3.11 Communication management during a crisis

In the event of a major incident, emergency or break in business continuity, the Communication Team will follow the protocols and guidelines in Council's Emergency Management or Business Continuity Plans. It is understood by all areas of Council that in a time of crisis, it is a corporate priority of Council's Communication Team to support emergency response communications over other business as usual communications.

3.12 Communication management during Caretaker Period

Published content and media releases during the caretaker period must be of public interest, relate to day-to-day Council business, and must not be able to reasonably be construed as being for political purposes.

Media events may be held during the caretaker period provided they relate to core Council business or an ongoing project and are not used for political purposes.

If, at a media event, the Administrator/Mayor or Councillor are asked a political question, the Administrator/Mayor and / or Councillor may respond in their capacity as a candidate.

4. Review

4.1 Compliance, monitoring and review

This Policy should be reviewed every two years and endorsed by the Chief Executive Officer. The success and effectiveness of the policy will be measured by:

- Information to the community that is timely, frequent, accessible, and accurate, and which encourages discussion about Council decisions and policies.
- Ensuring the community has access to Council decisions and policies, the reasons for those decisions and the resultant outcomes.

- Ensuring information that encourages and promotes advancement towards the accomplishment of Council's corporate goals.

Suspected breaches or misuse of this policy are to be reported to the Chief Executive Officer. Alleged breaches of this policy shall be dealt with by the processes outlined for breaches of the Code of Conduct, as detailed in the Code of Conduct and in the Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct.

4.2 Records management

The Communication Team will maintain a record of media enquiries and responses. All records are stored on Council's Electronic Records Management System (Content Manager).

5. Definitions

In this policy:

- Council** means Central Coast Council (CCC) and in context, elected Councillors, staff of Central Coast Council and engaged representatives
- CCC** means Central Coast Council
- Channel** refers to the medium through which communications are delivered to target audiences
- Council spokesperson** means a person with the authority to speak on behalf of Council
- Media** comprises all print, broadcast and online media as well as management of media enquiries coming into Council as a result of various media posts, public speaking engagements and other forms of communication where it could be reasonably expected that the comments might be recorded or circulated to the wider community
- Media comment** means a verbal statement issued by Council formal channels that states its position on a matter of Council business, Council policy or public interest
- Media statement** means a written statement issued by Council formal channels that states its position on a matter of Council business or policy of public interest
- Media delegation** means a person with Executive Leadership Team member approval to speak on a topic on behalf of Council. Media training does not also grant media delegation
- Media release** means a written, pre-approved statement issued by Council to the media, used to communicate with the community to respond to an issue or improve knowledge around services and activities

- j) **Media training** means media training that has been arranged by the Communications Team. Authority to be a spokesperson must be given by the Executive Leadership Team
- k) **Official position** means a position that is determined by resolution of Council or as determined by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- l) **Published content** comprises of all information, digital and print, published by or on behalf of Council including but not limited to promotional material, letters to residents, frequently asked questions, videos, signage, website content, social media posts and reports
- m) **Service Level Agreement** defines the level of service and the actions that are agreed between the Communication Team and the Council Departments
- n) **Social Media** means any on-line or social media forum where information is published publicly.

6. Related resources

Council ensures that in administering its communications, media program and community information it complies with:

- a) NSW Local Government Act 1993 No.30
- b) Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 No.52
- c) Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW) No.48
- d) Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW) No.133
- e) Work Health Safety Act 2011 (NSW) no.10
- f) Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000 (cth)
- g) Copyright Act 1968 (cth)
- h) Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988 NSW No.35
- i) Media Council of Australia
- j) Journalists Code of Ethics

Associated/Internal documents:

- a) Code of Conduct (found on the intranet)

- b) Delegations of Authority Policy (found on the intranet)
- c) Privacy Management Plan
- d) Community Strategic Plan
- e) Public Interest Disclosure Policy
- f) Central Coast Council Media Relations Procedures

History of revisions

Amendment history	Details
Version 1	<p>Creation of Policy as per resolution</p> <p>26/10/2021 Ordinary Council Meeting 264/21 Resolved</p> <p>That Council adopt the attached Policy for Communications and Media Relations functions of Central Coast Council</p> <hr/> <p>CM document number D14935477</p> <hr/>