

8.4 Policy Review - Media Policy

REPORT BY THE MANAGER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
TO 17 APRIL 2024 ORDINARY MEETING
GOV400105, ECO800001

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. **receive the report by the Manager Economic Development on the Media Policy Review;**
 2. **place the revised Media Policy on public exhibition for 28 days; and**
 3. **adopt the revised Media Policy if no submissions are received during the exhibition period.**
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Executive summary

The existing Media Policy has been reviewed, and proposed amendments are recommended to ensure the appropriate staff are delegated within the Policy.

Disclosure of Interest

Nil

Detailed report

The Media Policy ('the policy') is designed to provide a framework for Councillors, staff, delegates and advisers to:

- Ensure all communication with the media is consistent, balanced, well-informed, timely, professional and appropriate;
- Clearly indicate Council's authorised spokespersons; limiting the possibility of miscommunication by ensuring comments to the media relating to Council are made only through those authorised spokespersons; and
- Improve communication with customers and enhance Council's public image.

Changes are tracked in the attached policy and include:

- Communications Coordinator updated to revised position name of Marketing and Communications Coordinator throughout the document;
- In crisis and issues communication (page 4, point 3), amended from specifically stating the Marketing and Communications Coordinator to naming "on-call communications staff" as delegated persons. The communications on-call phone is shared between the Marketing and Communications Coordinator and the Digital Communications Officer. This enables the Digital Communications Officer to be included in the scope of delegated staff for this type of communication after hours; and
- Adding Community Engagement Strategy and Community Engagement Policy to related policies and plans.

All proposed changes to the Media Policy are shown as “track changes” on the copy of the Policy attached.

Community Plan implications

Theme	Good Government
Goal	Good communications and engagement
Strategy	Improve communications between Council and the community and create awareness of Council’s roles and responsibilities

Strategic implications

Council Strategies

Community Engagement Strategy

Council Policies

Social Media Policy

Community Engagement Policy

Electronic Communications – Acceptable Use Policy

Mid-Western Regional Council Code of Conduct

Legislation

Local Government Act 1993

Privacy Act 1988 (Privacy Act)

Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015

Criminal Code Amendment (Sharing of Abhorrent Violent Material) Act 2019

Defamation Act 2005 (NSW)

Financial implications

No budget variations are recommended as a part of this report.

Associated Risks

If the recommendations are not endorsed there is a risk that the policy would not be able to function efficiently in emergency situations.

MICHELE MINI
MANAGER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ALINA AZAR
DIRECTOR DEVELOPMENT

2 April 2024

Attachments: 1. Media Policy.

APPROVED FOR SUBMISSION:

BRAD CAM
GENERAL MANAGER



Media Policy

*A prosperous
and progressive
community*

ADOPTED		VERSION NO	3.1
COUNCIL MEETING MIN	28/20	REVIEW DATE	MARCH 2024
DATE:	20 MARCH 2020	FILE NUMBER	GOV400047

Objective

To provide a framework for Councillors, staff, delegates and advisers to:

- Ensure all communication with the media is consistent, balanced, well-informed, timely, professional and appropriate
- Clearly indicate Council's authorised spokespersons; limiting the possibility of miscommunication by ensuring comments to the media relating to Council are made only through those authorised spokespersons
- Improve communication with customers and enhance Council's public image

Introduction

Mid-Western Regional Council recognises that a well-run, competent, ethical and reputable organisation is the best way to promote a favourable image and that any public relations program is only as good as the organisation behind it.

Council will take advantage of interest from the media to further its reputation and inform the public about Council's activities. Council will also proactively distribute information to the media to communicate information about Council's activities and decisions. In dealing with the media, Councillors and Council officers must be careful to communicate accurate information.

Council welcomes enquiries from the media. All media representatives are to be treated in the same manner as any other customer of Council. That is, Council will attend to media requests promptly and with courtesy, honesty and respect. Council believes that a good relationship based on trust, familiarity and confidence is important between Council and the media.

Related policies and plans

- Mid-Western Regional Council Social Media Policy
- Mid-Western Regional Council Code of Conduct
- [Mid-Western Regional Council Electronic Telecommunications – Acceptable Use](#)
- [Mid-Western Regional Council Community Engagement Strategy](#)
- [Mid-Western Regional Council Community Engagement Policy](#)

Policy

Dealing with media enquiries

POLICY: [MEDIA POLICY](#) | VERSION 3.1, [REFERENCE SOURCE NOT FOUND](#)

1. The Mayor, General Manager, Director Operations, Director Development, Director Community, Manager Economic Development and the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) are Council's official spokespersons on all matters. Only the General Manager or his nominee may nominate other staff to act as spokespeople for the Council.
2. Council's [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) is responsible for coordinating media liaison and has been delegated authority to respond to media enquiries on behalf of Council.
3. No staff member, other than Council's authorised spokespeople listed in paragraph 1 above are to handle an enquiry from the media without prior approval from the General Manager.
4. Information given to the media requires the approval of the General Manager.
5. The [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) is responsible for issuing media releases about Council's activities, decisions and plans subject to the General Manager's approval.
6. All staff are required to pass on important information to the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) which could be used as the basis for a media release or internal communication. The [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) in consultation with other staff members will decide if the information warrants a media release and/or photo or other treatment.
7. Information that Council officers wish to communicate to the media is to be distributed by the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) only.
8. All staff are required to advise the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) of any issues that may create interest for media in a timely manner, including but not limited to media attending events, information [in regards to regarding](#) topical issues and other potential areas of interest for the community. If the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) is unavailable the issue should be escalated to the Manager Economic Development, and in their absence to the Director Development.

Councillors and the media

1. In their role as elected representatives, Councillors may talk to the media and utilise social media at any time on any issue of interest in accordance with the Code of Conduct.
2. Every Councillor has a right to express a private opinion on any issue, whether or not that opinion reflects Council's official position but Councillors must carefully identify the role in which they speak.
3. Whenever Councillors publicly express their own opinions they must make it clear they are speaking for themselves, and not for Council, unless they are supporting a Council position.
4. When Councillors speak on behalf of Council they must express and support Council's entire policy on the issue at hand.
5. Any Councillor who feels unable to speak enthusiastically in support of a Council policy while formally representing Council faces a dilemma and must treat it in a similar fashion to a conflict of interest issue.
6. The [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) will make him or herself available for consultation with the [M](#)Mayor and [C](#)councillors if and when required.

Speaking to the media

1. Councillors and Council staff are encouraged to co-operate at all times with media outlets subject to the guidelines provided in this policy and to be proactive, as opposed to reactive, in their use of the media.
2. All media enquiries to staff should be directed to the Council's [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer-Coordinator](#) who will then contact the relevant Director or the General Manager.
3. Council staff must not speak to the media or use social media to communicate about matters related to Council unless authorised to do so by the General Manager, a Director, the Manager Economic Development or the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer-Coordinator](#).
4. Council employees and Councillors may not provide any comment or information to the media or use social media with the intention of contesting or undermining Council policy or casting Council, Councillors or Council staff in a negative light.
5. Council employees may speak to the media, use social media or write Letters to the Editor as private individuals with the following restrictions:
 - They do not comment on Council business or policy;
 - They are not identified as Council employees;
 - Their comments are not perceived as representing official Council position or policy.
6. In the event of an industrial dispute (or an incident likely to lead to an industrial dispute), statements on behalf of Council employees should be issued via the relevant union.
7. Councillors and Council staff should not provide information off the record. Everything said to any media representative and anything communicated by social media may appear in a news story.
8. Contractors, volunteers or service providers employed by Council must refer all media enquiries relating to Council to the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer-Coordinator](#).

Media releases

1. Under no circumstances should a media release be issued quoting a Councillor or member of staff without that person's approval.
2. All Media releases and Alerts are to be issued to the Customer Service Team for their information.
3. Written media releases must be distributed to Councillors and Executive Team at least 2 hours prior to being released to the media.
4. Councillors must not forward media releases to media outlets or publish on social media until after the original media release is [publically-publicly](#) issued by the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer-Coordinator](#).

Responding to criticism

Criticism about media content or the use of social media should be forwarded to the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer-Coordinator](#). Formal complaints about media content on

POLICY: [MEDIA POLICY](#) | VERSION 3.1, [ERROR! REFERENCE SOURCE NOT FOUND](#)

behalf of Council staff should only be made by the General Manager in consultation with the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#).

Crisis and issues communication

In the event of an emergency or infrastructure failure in the Council area, the following procedures will apply:

1. [Corporate The Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) and Manager Economic Development must be notified immediately of details of the incident by telephone [and/or](#) SMS message.
2. Details of the incident must not be discussed with any media representatives by any staff unless approved in advance by the General Manager.
3. [Corporate The Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) or Manager Economic Development will issue a media alert (in business hours) directly to media outlining key impacts and directions for residents. Councillors and Executive Team will be sent a copy of this alert simultaneously. Out of business hours, media are notified of critical incidents through social media posts published by the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) or [call communications staff](#) – or Manager Economic Development to Council’s Facebook page. Local Media notified by SMS or email.
4. Requests by media to film, photograph or interview Council staff or Council assets involved in the emergency situation must be referred to the General Manager or the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer Coordinator](#) for approval.

Community newsletter

While editorial coverage in independent media plays an important role, such reporting will always be limited due to limits on space, distribution quality and competition of news. Final decisions about stories published or broadcast by independent media are made by those media outlets, not Council. As such, Council needs a regularly published and widely distributed newsletter to communicate effectively to residents.

This communication is primarily undertaken via Council’s newsletter and official news publication, the *Mid-Western Regional Council Community News*, a free printed newsletter and digital content publication distributed as directed by Council.

The core objectives of the production of a community newsletter are for Council to:

- Engage effectively with local residents, keep them informed and obtain their views with ongoing consultation.
- Provide a framework for Council advertising to assure widest possible distribution.
- Promote a range of services and activities for the benefit of the Council and the Mid-Western Region community.

Community News will inform the public about policies, services, activities, events and other matters in an attractive, balanced, objective and accessible format. Specific editorial goals are:

1. To raise the profile of and seek feedback on key issues of Council, promote the Council’s services and encourage greater involvement by residents in local democracy.

POLICY: [MEDIA POLICY](#) | VERSION 3.1, [_ERROR! REFERENCE SOURCE NOT FOUND.](#)

2. To inform the public about the work of Council, its policies, services, activities and events in an attractive, balanced and accessible format.
3. To explain how rate payers' money is spent by reporting on achievements and measuring them against the goals of the Delivery Program and Operational Plan.
4. To improve consultation and encourage participation in the democratic process by seeking the views of local residents on Council services, plans, proposals and priorities.
5. To provide a civic vehicle through which other non-profit community service agencies and government bodies can distribute information to the Mid-Western community.

Editorial direction for Community News will be determined by the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer/Coordinator](#) in consultation with the General Manager. Elected Councillors will exercise oversight of the content of the newsletter as part of the General Manager's performance review meeting or at more regular meetings if Council becomes concerned that the direction of Community News is not neutral and not meeting the goals of this policy.

Community News and other newsletters will not be used to promote the achievements or plans of a Councillor or group of Councillors or as a political platform by any Councillor or member of staff.

Community News will be produced in-house by Council staff. The [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer/Coordinator](#) and General Manager have the final decision on content.

Delegations

In the absence of the [Corporate Marketing & Communications Officer/Coordinator](#), all responsibilities will be performed by the Manager Economic Development and/or Director Development.