

Media Policy

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Approval date:	17 October 2022
Policy owner:	Communications & Engagement Coordinator
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This policy is intended to provide guidance and a consistent framework for the provision of official comment in relation to Council business via traditional and social media.

Purpose

To establish protocols and consistent methods for managing the dissemination of information from Council to the community via traditional and social media; to ensure coordinated, accurate and reliable presentation of public information.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Identify Council's spokespersons and their responsibilities when interacting with the media on behalf of Council.
- Ensure the dissemination of timely and transparent information within the community, to build to levels of trust.
- Maintain and enhance a positive reputation of Council.
- Promote effective working relationships with the media and encourage maximum coverage of Council's decisions, services and events.
- Meet the objectives of Community Strategic Plan, including to keep the community informed and involved in decision making.

Scope

Wagga Wagga City Council encourages open communication with the community through a range of communication methodologies, with an emphasis on promoting a positive, progressive and professional image of Council and staff.

To ensure information released publicly about Council is accurate, reliable and in the best interests of the organisation, Council officers must be designated as an authorised representative before providing comment to the media or making public comment on Council owned social media sites.

Policy Provisions

Media

Authorised Council Media Representatives

- a. Only authorised Council representatives may comment to media – this includes, Mayor, Councillors, General Manager, Directors and Marketing and Communications staff. Other staff may receive authorisation as required.
- b. The Mayor is the lead public spokesperson on matters relating to the representative Council, decisions of Council and the community. If unavailable, the Deputy Mayor will become the lead spokesperson followed by other Councillors as appropriate.
- c. Councillors have a right to express their own views to the media at any time in their role as a member of the governing body and as a representative of the community, noting that such views do not necessarily represent the position of Council.
- d. Councillors have a right to establish their own social media presence as a member of the governing body and as a representative of the community.
- e. The General Manager, in their statutory role, is the lead spokesperson for Wagga Wagga City Council on operational management matters.
- f. Directors are the primary spokespeople for matters that fall within their operational area and may provide comment on matters of fact and other matters not involving interpretation of Council policy or making predictions as to future Council actions.
- g. Directors can nominate specialist members of staff to respond to questions on operational matters.
- h. The Marketing and Communications team shall issue media statements and social media comment only on matters of approved Council policy, or at the Mayor's or the General Manager's discretion, on issues of direct benefit to the Council as a whole.
- i. Major announcements will only be released by the Marketing and Communications team to maximise the media and marketing potential for Council as an organisation and/or Wagga Wagga as a city.

Responding to media enquiries/requests

- a. Responding to media requests for information and interview will take into account staff availability and time constraints of both Council staff and media.
- b. It is an expectation that a sufficient amount of detail and context will be provided at the time of the request to enable an appropriate and informed response by Council officers.
- c. A member of the Marketing and Communications team will respond to all media enquiries and requests with at least an acknowledgement, as soon as possible and preferably on the same day if within business hours, and a formal response or interview is to be provided as soon as possible.

Social Media

Authorisation to comment

- a. Staff may not comment on behalf of Council on social media unless they have the appropriate delegations to do so.

- b. When commenting on behalf of Council, staff must adhere to the social media guidelines, overseen by the Marketing and Communications team, as well as all relevant documents such as the Code of Conduct, this policy and legal requirements.

General guidelines

- a. Staff will adhere to the terms of use and guidelines associated with the relevant social media platform/website.
- b. The Marketing and Communications team reserve the right to approve or reject requests from staff in relation to social media advertising. Social media should be one component of an overall marketing and communication campaign.
- c. Comments that ask a question about Council, or a matter related to Council, should be answered as soon as possible, preferably on the same day if within business hours.
- d. Comments received outside of normal business hours (eg after hours, weekends, public holidays) will be responded to on the following business day.
- e. Council reserves the right to delete comments that are false statements about individuals, companies or the government; misleading, obscene, off-topic, sexist, racist or spam; promotional or commercial in nature; unlawful or incite others to break the law; and/or defamatory.

Defamatory, offensive or inappropriate content

General guidelines

- a. Council is committed to supporting staff welfare, and where defamatory, offensive and/or inappropriate comments are published or broadcast about staff, Council will seek to have comments removed, amended or retracted.
- b. The Marketing and Communications team will notify People and Culture of any defamatory comments published or broadcast, so that they may liaise with the relevant staff member.

Wagga Wagga City Council Marketing and Communications

- a. The Marketing and Communications team coordinates Council's media liaison and communication, distributing a range of information to the media and community. In doing so, Councillors and Council management are informed, and any subsequent enquiries are coordinated.
- b. The Marketing and Communications team coordinates Council's social media presence, maintaining official Council profiles and overseeing guidelines and requirements for all profiles under the broader Wagga Wagga City Council banner.
- c. Additional pages created for other facilities or departments of Council may be granted with approval from the Marketing and Communications Manager (or delegate). If approved, Marketing and Communications reserves the right to remain an administrator of these social media profiles.
- d. Public information surrounding an emergency or crisis is to be coordinated through Marketing and Communications in accordance with the Emergency Response Plan and Business Continuity Plan, as required.

Media releases

- a. Marketing and Communications will draft and distribute media releases in a standard format and will ensure that media releases are promptly made available online upon release.
- b. Prior to distribution, media releases are to be sent by the Marketing and Communications team to the relevant Director and/or the General Manager or the Mayor for fact checking and approval of quotes.
- c. Any media enquires generated from media releases will be handled by the Marketing and Communications team.
- d. When a media release prepared by another organisation involves Council, the Marketing and Communications team will provide an official comment on behalf of Council, following approval from the relevant Director and/or the General Manager or the Mayor.

Council staff and Councillors

- a. Council representatives shall have regard for the Council Code of Conduct when making statements to the media and shall show respect to members of the public and colleagues in their comments and not misrepresent the Council.
- b. When providing public comment, Council representatives shall have regard for whether disclosure of certain information contravenes or could infringe laws or regulations which govern Council's operations.
- c. Council representatives must not discuss staff, confidential legal advice or matters of commercial in confidence with the media.
- d. Council representatives must not provide comment or information to the media with the intention of contesting or undermining Council policy or casting Council, Councillors or Council staff in a negative light.
- e. Any Council representative that becomes aware of an occurrence that may be of interest to the media (positive or negative) should immediately contact the Marketing and Communications team with relevant background details.
- f. When commenting on a decision of Council, Councillors shall reference the resolution as carried by Council to provide context to their comment. Councillors are encouraged to seek the assistance of the General Manager and/or the Marketing and Communications team when issuing or making public statements to ensure the information is appropriate, timely and factually accurate.
- g. The Mayor and Councillors should, out of courtesy, inform the Marketing and Communications Manager of comments provided to the media.
- h. Council staff must comply with Council's Social Media Operating Standard and Social Media Usage Booklet in relation to making personal comments on any social media platform.
- i. Council staff who receive requests direct from media representatives should not provide comment and should advise the media representative to contact Council's Marketing and Communications team.

Breaches

- a. Any deviations by Councillors to this policy may be deemed to constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct and appropriate action will be taken.
- b. Any deviations by staff to the above policy are subject to disciplinary action.

Legislative Context

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 procedure.

The following legislation and/or guideline information is applicable to this policy:

- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- Copyright Act 1968
- Defamation Act, NSW 2005
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998

Related Documents

- Australian Press Council
- Journalists Code of Ethics
- Wagga Wagga City Council Code of Conduct
- Social Media Usage Operating Standard and Social Media Usage Booklet

Definitions

Term	Definition
Media	Broadcast, print and online media outlets, and their various means of published communications
Social media	Includes (but is not limited to) social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), video and photo sharing sites (e.g. Instagram and YouTube) and micro-blogging sites (e.g. Twitter)
Council representatives	Councillors, members of council staff, administrators, council committee members, conduct reviewers and delegates of council
Council officer	Member of council staff

Revision History

Revision number	Council resolution	Council meeting date
1		23 July 2007
2	Res. No: 09/077	27 July 2009
3	E Team	June 2012
4	Res. No: 13/224.1	26 August 2013
5	E Team	November 2015
6	General Manager approval	August 2016

Revision number	Council resolution	Council meeting date
7	Res No: 17/279	28 August 2017
8	Res No: 22/354	17 October 2022