

MEDIA PROTOCOLS POLICY

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Description	Date
Policy defines authorised spokespeople and procedures for interacting with the media	
Notes	

POLICY

PURPOSE

The purpose of Council's Media Protocols Policy is to ensure 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 AND RELATED LEGISLATION

Effective communication can enhance service delivery by informing members of the public of Council matters. Dubbo Regional Council recognises the important role the media plays in informing the public about Council's decisions, activities, programs, events, services and initiatives. For many residents of the Local Government Area media channels such as newspapers, radio, television and the internet are primary sources of news and information about Council's policies, programs and services.

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- Provide guidelines relating to the authorisation of Council spokespersons;
- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities for Council staff in terms of media management and the pro-active promotion of Council's services, events and activities;
- Ensure the media receives accurate information in a timely manner;
- Ensure the community and other stakeholders are kept abreast and informed about Council decisions, developments, policies and major projects;
- Ensure media spokespersons are skilled and feel confident to communicate with print, online and broadcast media.

This policy is not intended to prevent information which is in the public interest from entering the public arena.

Related legislation

- Defamation Act 2005
- State Records Act 1998
- Copyright Act 1968
- Local Government Act 1993
- Privacy and Personal Protection Act 1998
- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1991

SCOPE

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

DEFINITIONS

To assist in interpretation, the following definitions apply: (Delete section if not required)

Term	Definition
<i>Blogs</i>	A log of events, experiences or commentary on a web platform to build credibility and create a readership of devotees.
<i>Contentious issue</i>	Refers to any circumstances that have caused, or may potentially cause, a concern in the media or community.
<i>Council / Corporation</i>	Dubbo Regional Council (including Mayor, Councillors and operational staff).
<i>External media</i>	All media operating outside of the Dubbo Regional Council Local Government Area (eg. metropolitan media, regional media, specialty or trade magazines etc).
<i>Communications team</i>	The communications function under the Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Branch – part of the Economic Development and Business Division - which includes the Communications Coordinator, the Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator, Graphic Design and Production Coordinator and Digital Communications Coordinator
<i>Media</i>	Any print, broadcast and online media (including social media) accessible to the public
<i>Personal information/opinion</i>	Information or an opinion about a person whose identity is apparent, or can be determined from the information or opinion
<i>Responsible officer</i>	Council staff member responsible for the project / service / business / facility or program etc
<i>Social media</i>	Refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies that enable people to communicate two-way (includes Facebook, Twitter, blogs etc)

POLICY

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.

The Mayor and General Manager are Council's official spokespersons.

Other staff and representatives may be authorised as a spokesperson to comment in the media on behalf of Dubbo Regional Council on matters relevant to their accountability within Council.

Only authorised Council spokespersons may be interviewed by the media or provide approved responses ensuring the community receives the most accurate information.

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 Mayor, the General Manager or the respective Director.

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.

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, or
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.

Protocols relating to Council business

1. Council and Committee Meetings:

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

Approval must be sought from the Divisional Director, Committee Chair/Mayor and General Manager prior to release.

In addition the Communications team may utilise authorised Council social media channels to communicate decisions made at Council meetings as they occur.

2. Reports before Committees/Council

In the following circumstances, Council staff are not permitted (unless authorised) to comment publicly on information and recommendations contained in reports that are before Committees and Council:

- If the issue is of a contentious/political nature;
- If it is a matter that has not previously been considered by Council and has no policy direction.
- If the report is confidential.

In any case, requests from media for staff to publicly comment on a particular item in the Business Papers – other than to seek a clarification on information contained within the reports - must be brought to the attention of the communications team.

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 communications team may advise the media 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.

Statement of procedures for information being sent to the media

1. Dubbo Regional Council media releases:

- Are to be prepared and co-ordinated by based on information provided by the responsible Council officer. Wherever possible requests for media releases should be made at least five days in advance.
- Should quote authorised Council spokespersons only.
- Must be approved by the General Manager.
- The communications team will coordinate the approval process which includes approval from Manager, Director, Committee Chair (if required) Mayor (if required) and General Manager
- Provide contact of The communications team to manage inquiries
- Must be distributed via e-mail to Councillors, Executive Staff, Customer Services Centre, Branch Manager and key staff, and all local media and, when appropriate, targeted external media
- Must be uploaded to the Dubbo Regional Council website at the time of release
- Filed in line with Council's Records Management Procedures Policy.
- Council spokespersons are to be available for interview to provide additional information, audio, footage and photographs following the distribution of media releases

The following exceptions to the approval process are in place:

- Media releases promoting exhibitions at the Western Plains Cultural Centre are approved by the respective Director
- Media releases promoting performances at the Dubbo Regional Theatre and Convention Centre are approved by the respective Director
- Media alerts which advise of pre-planned official media engagements or announcements are approved by the respective Director

2. Media statements

A media statement is a written response provided to any media specifically prepared to address an inquiry.

- All media statements are to be co-ordinated by The communications team with information to be provided by the responsible Council officer in a timely manner;
- Should quote an authorised Council spokesperson
- Must be distributed via e-mail to the respective media outlet making the inquiry and the relevant branch manager, Director and General Manager notified.
- Filed in line with Council's Records Management Procedures Policy.

3. Media interviews

A media interview is any conversation with a journalist either by phone or in person that may be reported on by that journalist. The following protocols apply to Dubbo Regional Council's authorised media spokespersons:

- Do not provide personal comment on, or speculate about, Council decisions, policy or issues;
- At all times, adhere to the interview topic and the facts; avoid speculation;
- The communications team must be notified of any inaccurate quotations relating to the interview so that an appropriate response can be determined;
- Ensure adequate preparation for the interview;
- Be open, honest and co-operative;
- Avoid saying 'no comment' if you are unsure how to answer a question; instead let the journalist know you will endeavour to get back to them with a response where possible;
- Avoid providing comment (as opposed to factual information) - whether 'on' or 'off' the record – to the media;
- In line with privacy legislation, do not provide client contact details (for example, details relating to volunteers, community members etc) or confidential information about a client to the media without prior permission from the client;
- Where possible, all enquiries must be responded to on the day of the inquiry unless otherwise negotiated through The communications team and the respective journalist;
- Intentionally providing misleading, or inaccurate information to the media, is considered a breach of this Policy;
- Be aware of defamation laws.

Media interviews may be conducted in association with a planned media event, to provide additional information on approved media releases or as a response to a specific inquiry.

4. Media backgrounds

A media background is the provision of further information specifically related to a project, factual information or access to pre-approved content that may assist a journalist with an inquiry. Media backgrounds may be provided by the communications team on advice from a Council spokesperson to help manage the timely distribution of non-contentious project related information.

Statement on the use of online communications

1. Council use of social media

Dubbo Regional Council uses official social media channels to disseminate information. Comments made through official social media accounts are representative of Council and only made by those authorised to do so.

Councillors and staff should take measures to ensure personal comments on social media cannot be mistaken for an official comment of Council.

2. Responding to online media

Online media includes any websites, digital, email, blogs and forums containing information. This includes online newspapers/news sites, blogs and forums.

Enquiries to supply information will be treated as an inquiry from a traditional media outlet and should in the first instance be referred to the communications team to assess the potential benefits of providing information and coordinate a response in accordance with this policy.

Where staff intend to participate in conversations in online media (for example comment on a blog post) Staff should:

- Notify The communications team of your intention to participate with details of the site and the subject
- When responding as an authorised spokesperson, use your real name, title and make it clear that you are officially representing Dubbo Regional Council
- Only comment on topics that fall within your area of responsibility
- Ensure your response/publication of your response is filed in line with Council's Records Management Procedure Policy.

Statement on non-news, commentary and feature/special interest stories

Non-news content applies to a wide range of content prepared for publication. It includes contributions, columns, feature articles, human interest stories/profiles, editorials and advertorials, publications in trade related publications and advertising features.

- If being supplied by Council, non-news stories are to be prepared by the responsible Council officer and reviewed by the communications team based on information provided by the responsible Council officer.
- Approvals should follow the media release approval process prior to release including approval from the General Manager where required.
- Interviews relating to non-news stories must be authorised and co-ordinated via The communications team to ensure the appropriate spokesperson and relevant background information is provided
- Contributions are to be filed in accordance with Council's Records Management Procedures Policy

- Requests to initiate regular columns or segments in the local media must be discussed with the communications team in the first instance. If approved such regular columns are exempt from the approval process.

Filming / recording on Council sites

Safety of staff and visitors to Dubbo Regional Council facilities is paramount. To ensure safety standards are upheld at all times, protocols apply to media visiting Council sites.

Media, in the first instance, must obtain permission from the communications team (who will consult with the appropriate Director) to enter any Council facility to obtain photographs or footage.

As a general rule, media must also check-in with the facility / event manager and be accompanied on-site during their visit, where required.

Council expects that all media taking photographs/filming at Council facilities, managed reserves and events:

- abide by privacy laws, especially those relating to photographing minors, and
- seek permission from anyone they wish to photograph/film, including non-Council employees (stating the exact context in which the images will be used).

Specific regulations are in place in regards to the Dubbo City Regional Airport, the Dubbo Animal Shelter, Council Chambers and all construction sites. Access to such sites is only permitted with the express permission of Council via The communications team and made in accordance with the relevant legislative and Council policies and procedures.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Council's Communications team is the central point of contact for all incoming media enquiries. The communications team also acts as a central point of contact for staff who wish to promote their activities, services, programs or events to the community through the media.

The communications team also has a responsibility to ensure the timely, accurate and relevant distribution of information aligned to the objectives stated in the Community Engagement and Communications Plan.

Only authorised Council spokespersons may be interviewed by the media or provide approved responses ensuring the community receives the most accurate information. 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 Mayor, the General Manager or the respective Director using the table on page 9 as a guide:

MEDIA SPOKESPERSON	ROLE
Mayor	Primary spokesperson for Dubbo Regional Council including the City of Dubbo and Wellington
	Spokesperson on all matters related to the implementation of the merger of the former Dubbo City and Wellington councils
	Primary spokesperson for decisions made at Ordinary and Extraordinary Meetings of Council and Council Committees. May delegate this task to the General Manager or Director where appropriate
	Primary spokesperson on political and major issues such as government announcements, significant Council projects, events and high profile issues
	May direct the General Manager to act as a spokesperson or delegate a spokesperson
Committee Chairpersons	Spokesperson on issues concerning the deliberations and decisions made by that Committee
General Manager	Spokesperson for all high-level administrative, operational, sensitive and management issues
	May authorise a nominated Director or manager to act as spokesperson
Executive staff (Directors)	<p>Spokespersons for matters relating to major projects / operational issues in their Division</p> <p>May authorise a manager to speak on non-contentious, specific activities, events and projects</p>
Branch Managers / project staff	Spokespersons for non-contentious Council activities, events and projects directly related to their role