



**DATE ADOPTED: 26 MARCH 2019**

**VERSION: 2.0**

## **POLICY OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Establish the purpose of Council's involvement with media.
- Ensure consistency by the general manager, councillors and staff in communicating with media.
- Limit the risk to Council's reputation through the communication of inaccurate information.
- Embed a philosophy of proactive engagement and transparency with media within the organisation.
- Establish a framework for the release of information from Council meeting agendas.

## **POLICY SCOPE**

This policy applies to councillors, the general manager, staff, volunteers and contractors as it pertains to the interaction with media in an unpaid context.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

Maitland City Council is committed to connecting with the community using a wide range of traditional and contemporary mediums. Media is a key influencer of Council's reputation, it is therefore important that Council has an established framework for interaction with the media. Council will proactively pursue media opportunities to connect in a genuine way with both the community and a broader audience.

For the purposes of this policy, media includes both traditional media outlets and social media platforms.

### **1. Council's involvement with media**

Maitland City Council has worked proactively to build relationships with local and regional media outlets for a number of years. The community in particular, has a right to be informed by independent media about initiatives and projects, issues and developments that relate to Council and the city.

Council will embrace the opportunities presented by the media and actively pursue media exposure.

Media organisations and their representatives will be treated equally and without bias.

All media enquiries coming into the organisation will be managed through the Marketing and Communications section of Council.

Maitland City Council will actively engage with media to:

- protect, and where possible enhance, Council's reputation.
- promote the projects and services of Council.
- inform the community about projects, policies and activities.
- promote Maitland as a place to live, work, visit and invest.
- provide essential updates to the community during a crisis or emergency.

## **2. Consistency of communication**

Council will proactively resource and manage its media through the Marketing and Communications section during business hours. A single point of contact within the organisation will aid consistency of communication for both internal stakeholders and media.

Council's Media Guide, Social Media Guide and Language and Writing Style Guide aid consistency of communications including with media.

### **Staff authority and delegation**

Staff representing Council in the media are required to have the appropriate authority and delegation in accordance with Council's delegations register.

Staff as private citizens are entitled to enter into public debate and make comment on civic affairs provided they do not give the impression they are speaking in their official position or on behalf of Council.

### **Councillors**

Councillors engage with the citizens of Maitland through various forums including media. Councillors have the responsibility to ensure that their interaction with media is appropriate. This includes:

- making it clear they are expressing their personal opinion and not purporting to represent the position of Council.
- supporting Council's official release of information rather than releasing information independently before Council has distributed through official channels.
- Not disclosing information classified as confidential in reports and briefings to Council or information that is embargoed until a specific date or time.
- refraining from using the media to make negative personal reflections on each other, or Council staff, that could be interpreted as such and which are reasonably likely to undermine public confidence in the Council.

## **3. Reputation and risk**

Council will openly discuss matters of interest with media unless disclosure of information contravenes Council's obligations of confidentiality or privacy, duty of care, or could infringe on other laws or regulations that govern its operations.

To ensure consistency of communication with media, key messages will be developed and used.

Council acknowledges that not all media coverage will reflect positively on the organisation however it will seek to ensure that any media coverage of matters is balanced. Whilst it is not always appropriate or timely for Council to make comment on specific issues, Council will always provide a response to media enquiries.

Staff delegated to speak to the media and process for escalation of issues will be identified in communications plans. Wherever possible, media enquiries will be addressed by the staff member or manager, with appropriate delegation, responsible for the matter with escalation occurring when the matter becomes controversial, sensitive or crosses groups within the Council. In addition, the General Manager will be the spokesperson for the organisation in crisis situations, projects of a significant nature or where an individual communications plan identified the General Manager as the spokesperson.



Council will collect, retain and dispose of media communication in line with Council's Records Management Policy.

#### **4. Proactive engagement and transparency**

Council will wherever possible proactively release information to media and make staff available for comment or interview in a timely manner.

It is the responsibility of all staff to identify media opportunities. Marketing and Communications staff will foster productive relationships with media, being respectful of media needs including deadlines. Conversely staff will seek to gain media respect for the environment within which Council operates and which may limit Council's ability to fully respond to all matters.

#### **5. Council meeting agendas**

After the Council Meeting Agenda has been made public, Marketing and Communications staff will post on social media highlighting the upcoming meeting. To ensure a central point of information dissemination, only Marketing and Communications staff will provide real time social media updates regarding notable resolutions at Council meetings. Councillors are encouraged to share this information at the conclusion of the Council meeting. It is acknowledged that the minutes of Council meetings remain the official record of resolutions.

### **POLICY DEFINITIONS**

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Business hours:</b>    | Monday to Thursday 8.30am – 5.00pm and Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm excluding public holidays and the period between Christmas Day and New Year's Day inclusive. |
| <b>Media:</b>             | Includes broadcast, print and online outlets including social media and freelance journalists.   |
| <b>Official channels:</b> | Council issued media releases and updates on Council's social media presences.   |
| <b>Staff:</b>             | Includes all Council employees, volunteers and contractors.  |



## POLICY ADMINISTRATION

|   |   |
|---|---|
| BUSINESS GROUP:                           | Vibrant City  |
| RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:                      | Executive Manager, Vibrant City   |
| COUNCIL REFERENCE:                        | Ordinary Council Meeting 26 March 2019 Item 11.3  |
| POLICY REVIEW DATE:                       | Three (3) years from date of adoption   |
| FILE NUMBER:                              | 111/13  |
| RELEVANT LEGISLATION                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSW Defamation Act 2005</li> <li>• Privacy Act 1988</li> <li>• NSW Local Government Act 1993</li> <li>• Government Information Public Access Act 2009</li> <li>• NSW Privacy and Personal Information Act 1998</li> <li>• NSW State Records Act 1998</li> </ul>  |
| RELATED POLICIES / PROCEDURES / PROTOCOLS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Code of Meeting Practice</li> <li>• Complaint Management Policy</li> <li>• Privacy Management Plan</li> <li>• Unreasonable complainant conduct Policy</li> <li>• Provision of information and interaction between councillors and staff Policy</li> <li>• Internet and email use Policy</li> <li>• Right to information Policy</li> <li>• Records Management Policy</li> <li>• Work Health and Safety Policy</li> <li>• Violent, aggressive and threatening behaviour procedure</li> <li>• Media Policy</li> <li>• Social Media Guide</li> <li>• Media Guide</li> <li>• Language and Writing Style Guide</li> </ul> |



# POLICY HISTORY

| VERSION | DATE APPROVED   | DESCRIPTION OF CHANGES |
|---------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1.0     | 28 October 2014 | New policy adopted     |
| 2.0     | 26 March 2019   | Updated policy adopted |