

Policy Owner/Responsible Officer	Manager Communications and Engagement
Department	Office of Chief Executive Officer
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Policy Statement/Objectives

Kiama Municipal Council is committed to engaging effectively and professionally with the media to keep the community informed, explain decisions and to provide confidence in the Council and its decisions.

How a council is portrayed in the media impacts on how the organisation is perceived. Media can be an effective tool to promote council programs, events, and initiatives. In addition, media can be invaluable in times of crisis or emergency when information needs to be communicated to the public.

In line with the pillars of our Community Strategic Plan 2022-2032, Council uses media opportunities to help promote accountable and transparent leadership, create a strong and diverse economy and strengthen ties within and between our communities for improved connection, liveability, sustainability and a sense of belonging.

Despite its obvious benefits, media also presents a variety of challenges and risks. These include:

- maintaining the accuracy, reliability, and integrity of information;
- ensuring confidential information is managed appropriately; and
- the increased exposure and risk to reputation where information is not managed appropriately.

Kiama Municipal Council is committed to developing and maintaining professional working relationships with local and regional media that interact with the business. This Policy clearly explains media process and engagement practices.

The objectives of this Policy are to provide a framework to assist Council employees, executives and Councillors when dealing with the media and to ensure that media engagement by Councillors and employees is consistent, accurate and professional and enhances the Council's reputation.

This Policy also sets out some best practice guidelines for interactions between journalists and media organisations with Council.

This Policy is based on the Office of Local Government's Model Media Policy (2022).

At the heart of the Media Policy are the four principles of media engagement. These are:

- Openness;
- Consistency;
- Accuracy; and
- Timeliness.

These principles, which are expanded upon in Part 1, should underpin every aspect of a Council's media engagement and all Councillors and Council Officials should commit to upholding them.

Scope

This Policy applies to engagement between Council Officials and the media. It does not generally apply to social media use. Council has a separate Social Media Policy.

References

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following:

- Local Government Act 1993
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011
- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- State Records Act 1998
- Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW – clause 3.1(b)

- Office of Local Government Model Media Policy
- Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) Journalist Code of Ethics
- Australian Press Council
- Australian Government Style Guide
- Council's Code of Conducts and Procedures
- Council's Child Safe Policy and Guidelines
- Council's Social Media Policy
- Council's Code of Meeting Practice
- Council's Local Government Elections (Caretaker Period Provisions) Policy

Consultations

- Executive Leadership Team
- Management Leadership Team
- Cross-council Communications Officers
- Governance
- Elected Councillors
- Community consultation via exhibition

Definitions

Term	Definition
Council Official	Councillors, employees and delegates of the Council (including members of committees that are delegates of the Council)
Media Liaison	A person appointed under clause 2.1 of this Policy
Communications Team	Kiama Municipal Council employees employed as Communications, Media, Marketing and Community Engagement Officers, Coordinators and Managers. The Communications Team is led by the Manager Communications and Engagement, who reports to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) .
Media	Print, broadcast and online media used for communicating information to the public including, but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, internet publishers, radio, and television broadcasters.
Personal information	Information or an opinion (including information or an opinion forming part of a database and whether or not recorded in a material form) about an individual whose identity is apparent or can reasonably be ascertained from the information or opinion
Social media	Online platforms and applications, such as but not limited to social networking sites, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites, and message boards, that allow people to easily publish, share and discuss content. Examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Snapchat, LinkedIn, Yammer, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and Wikipedia.

Variation and review

Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this Policy.

Review History

Date reviewed	Date adopted/endorsed	Brief detail of amendments
N/A	19 March 2024	New Policy

POLICY

1. Principles

We, the Councillors, employees and other officials of Kiama Municipal Council, are committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of media engagement:

Openness	We will ensure that we promote an open exchange of information between our Council and the media.
Consistency	We will ensure consistency by all Councillors and employees when communicating with the media.
Accuracy	The information we share with the media will be a source of truth for our Council and community and we will prioritise the need to correct inaccuracies when they occur.
Timeliness	We will ensure that we respond to media enquiries in a timely manner.

2. Administrative framework for engagement with the media

2.1. Chief Executive Officer, Communications Team and Media Liaison

- 2.1.1. Council's CEO will appoint a Manager Communications and Engagement. The CEO and/or Manager Communications and Engagement will appoint a member of the Communications Team as Media Liaison.
- 2.1.2. Council's Official channel for all media enquiries is via the Communications Team. The Manager Communications and Engagement will ensure all media liaison is via suitably qualified employees from Council's Communications Team.
- 2.1.3. The CEO and/or Manager Communications and Engagement may appoint more than one Media Liaison and may in some cases specify which Council department, facility or work areas a Media Liaison will cover.
- 2.1.4. The Media Liaison's role is to:
 - a) be the lead point of contact for all media enquiries, requests for interviews, requests to film or photograph Council employees, facilities or events for news and current affairs purposes;
 - b) be responsible for preparing all media statements prior to their release;
 - c) liaise with relevant employees within the organisation where appropriate;
 - d) ensure that media statements are approved by the Mayor and/or CEO and/or appropriate Director prior to their release;

- e) develop and/or approve media training and/or induction to be provided to relevant employees and/or Councillors;
- f) maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses;
- g) ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias;
- h) build/maintain good relationships with local and regional media organisations and representatives including freelancers, as appropriate;
- i) ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly;
- j) provide guidance to Councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation; and
- k) ensure that all media releases are published on Council's website.

3. Who can engage with the media

3.1. The Chief Executive Officer

- 3.1.1. The CEO is the official spokesperson for the Council on operational and administrative matters.
- 3.1.2. The CEO may delegate to other Council employees to speak on their behalf where appropriate, (for example, where the delegated employee has professional expertise regarding the subject matter, or the CEO is unavailable).

3.2. The Mayor

- 3.2.1. The Mayor is the principal member and spokesperson of the governing body of the Council, including representing the views of the Council as to its local priorities (section 226(c) of the *Local Government Act 1993*).
- 3.2.2. If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as the Council's spokesperson.
- 3.2.3. The Mayor may delegate their role as spokesperson to other Councillors where appropriate, (for example, where another Councillor is best placed to comment, because the issue is of particular interest to them, or it is within their particular area of expertise).

3.3. Councillors

- 3.3.1. As a member of the governing body and as a representative of the community, Councillors are free to express their personal views to the media.
- 3.3.2. When engaging with the media Councillors:
 - a) must not purport to speak for the Council unless authorised to do so (see clause 3.2.3);
 - b) must clarify when speaking to the media that they are expressing their personal views as an individual Councillor and that they are not speaking for the Council (unless authorised to do so);
 - c) must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council;
 - d) must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so;
 - e) must not bring the organisation or its employees into disrepute through any form of media commentary (as per the *Code of Conduct for Councillors* clause 3.1); and
 - f) must seek information and guidance from the CEO and/or Manager Communications and Engagement where appropriate before providing comment to the media to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered reputational or other risks.

3.3.3. In the interests of promoting a positive, safe and harmonious organisational culture, Councillors should endeavour to resolve personal differences privately and must not prosecute them publicly through the media.

3.3.4. Where Councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the CEO and/or Manager Communications and Engagement.

3.4. Councillors' questions about media engagement

3.4.1. Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this Policy to the CEO and/or Manager Communications and Engagement.

3.5. Council employees

3.5.1. If employees receive a media enquiry or they are invited to comment to the media on a matter relating to the Council, they must refer the enquiry to the Communications Team as soon as possible.

Employees are required to promptly respond to Communications Team requests for assistance with any media enquiries to ensure media deadlines are met. This means employees should respond to any media enquiries or requests via the Communications Team within four (4) business hours to ensure the Communications Team/ Media Liaison can prepare an official response to the media, as per clause 2.1.4(i).

3.5.2. If approached outside of work, employees can express their personal views to the media on matters that do not relate to the Council, but in doing so, must not make comments that reflect badly on the Council or that bring it into disrepute.

3.5.3. If authorised by the CEO and/or Manager Communications and Engagement, or Media Liaison to speak to the media, employees:

- a) must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council;
- b) must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the CEO or Media Liaison;
- c) must seek information and guidance from the Media Liaison/ Communications Team where appropriate before providing comment to the media to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered reputational or other risks; and
- d) may request media training/advice/guidance from the Media Liaison/ Communications Team

3.5.4. Where employees become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest – whether positive, negative or neutral – they should provide this information to the Communications Team.

3.5.5. The Media Liaison can supply council statements or quotes as a 'Council spokesperson' in response to media enquiries.

3.6. Tone

3.6.1. All media engagement by Council Officials must be conducted in a professional, timely and respectful manner.

3.6.2. Where possible and appropriate to audience, align tone and commentary back to Council's Community Strategic Plan.

3.6.3. Council's written statements should adhere to Council's style guide (based on the Australian Government Style Guide).

3.6.4. Employees must take care to remain apolitical in commentary.

3.7. Induction and training

- 3.7.1. The Council will provide training to Council Officials who engage or are authorised to engage with the media.
- 3.7.2. Media engagement training will be provided to Councillors as part of their induction or refresher training or as part of their ongoing professional development program.

4. Standards of conduct when engaging with the media

- 4.1. Council officials must comply with Council's Code of Conduct when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a Council official.
- 4.2. Council officials must not share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms that:
 - a) are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other Council officials or members of the public;
 - b) contains profane language or is sexual in nature;
 - c) constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW, or is unlawfully discriminatory;
 - d) is contrary to their duties under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by the Council to ensure workplace health and safety;
 - e) contains content about the Council, Council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive;
 - f) divulges confidential Council information;
 - g) breaches the privacy of other Council officials or members of the public;
 - h) contains allegations of suspected breaches of the *Council's Code of Conduct* or information about the consideration of a matter under the *Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*;
 - i) could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment;
 - j) commits the Council to any action;
 - k) violates an order made by a court;
 - l) breaches copyright; and/or
 - m) advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business.

5. Process for media engaging with Council

- 5.1. All media enquiries including interview requests, photo requests and information/fact checks should be directed to the Communications Team. The Media Liaison officer will respond as soon as possible (generally within eight (8) business hours) and arrange statements or interviews as appropriate.
- 5.2. Council requests fair, balanced and unbiased reporting and a right of reply when media articles or content mention Council or its spokespersons, in line with the principles set out by the Australian Press Council and MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics.
- 5.3. Should published articles provide incorrect information, Council will advise the media outlet and seek a correction, retraction and/or prepare its own media release.

- 5.4. If the media wishes to film or electronically record any aspect of a Council Meeting or event, prior permission should be sought, as per Council's Code of Meeting Practice. Note: all Council Meetings are Livestreamed and the recording is made available via the Council website within twenty-four (24) hours of the meeting.
- 5.5. Council requests members of the media identify themselves when attending Council premises or events.
- 5.6. Council requests media be mindful to ensure photo permissions have been granted, especially for minors. (See Council's Child Safe Policy and Guidelines).

6. Use of media during emergencies

- 6.1. During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the CEO and Media Liaison/s will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of the Council.
- 6.2. Councillors, employees and other Council Officials must not provide comment or information to the media that is inconsistent with official advice issued by the Council and any other agency coordinating the emergency response.
- 6.3. Training on media engagement during emergencies will be provided to Councillors, relevant employees and other Council Officials.

7. Media engagement in the lead up to elections

- 7.1. This Policy does not prevent the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a council or any other election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.
- 7.2. Any media comment provided by the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a Council or another election must not be provided in an advertisement, newspaper column, or a radio or television broadcast paid for by the Council or produced by the Council or with Council resources.
- 7.3. It is the responsibility of the candidate and/or media outlet, not the Council, to ensure any political advertising by candidates or political parties has been correctly authorised.
- 7.4. Note that Caretaker provisions and restrictions as defined in the *Local Government Act 1993* apply in the lead up to an election.
- 7.5. See also Council's *Local Government Elections (Caretaker Period Provisions) Policy*.

8. Records management requirements

- 8.1. Media content created and received by Council Officials (including Councillors) acting in their official capacity is a council record and may be subject to information access applications made under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*. These records must also be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* and the Council's approved records management policies and practices.
- 8.2. Media enquiries and Council's response to media enquiries will be stored in Council's records management system.

9. Disclosure of paid advertising, content, advertorials social media coverage

- 9.1. Council will endeavour to ensure any paid or gratis content is identified as such.
- 9.2. Council content on social media will either be clearly identified as Council content by appearing on Council’s channels or under the Kiama Municipal Council name (or the name of an identified Council-owned facility or department, such as Kiama Leisure Centre), as per Council’s Social Media Policy.

Related Forms/Documents

- Code of Conduct – Council Staff, Contractors and Volunteers
- Code of Conduct for Councillors
- Social Media Policy
- Community Engagement Strategy
- Child Safe Policy
- Local Government Elections (Caretaker Period Provisions) Policy

Attachments

Nil	
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Authorisation

Name: Chief Executive Officer – Council Resolution No: 24/051OC

Date: 19 March 2024