

MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

QUALITY CONTROL			
TRIM REFERENCES	12/114		
RESPONSIBLE POSITION	General Manager		
APPROVED BY	Council resolution		
REVIEW DATE	May 2026	REVISION NUMBER	5
EFFECTIVE DATE	ACTION	MINUTE NUMBER	
29/11/2000	Adoption	38961	
26/11/2003	Adoption	40205	
28/11/2012	Adoption	43236	
29/03/2017	Public Exhibition	45503	
31/05/2017	Adoption	45544	
30/03/2022	Public Exhibition	46790	
25/05/2022	Adoption	46857	

1. INTRODUCTION

This Policy provides a framework for Councillors and staff to use to promote coverage of Council affairs that is consistent, fair, accurate and reliable.

2. POLICY OBJECTIVE

The Media Relations Policy has the following objectives:

- To ensure consistency by Councillors and staff in dealing with the media.
- To promote open exchange of information between Council and the media.
- To limit the publication of inaccurate information which could cause conflict or embarrassment for employees and Councillors.
- To limit the possibility of miscommunication and reputation risk.
- To promote positive media relationships.
- To clearly indicate Council's authorised spokespersons.
- To ensure appropriate authorisation and responsibility for information provided.

3. POLICY SCOPE

This Policy applies to Councillors, Council officers, volunteers, consultants, and contractors.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

The following guidelines should be observed at all times when interacting with media:

4.1 Staff and Media

- All media enquiries should be directed to the Communications and Community Engagement Coordinator.
- Council staff must not speak to the media about matters related to Council unless authorised by the General Manager to do so.
- Council employees may not provide any 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.
- Council employees may speak to the media or write Letters to the Editor as private individuals providing they do not comment on Council business or policy, and do not identify themselves as Council employees.
- From time to time it may be necessary for a Letter to the Editor to be written as an official Council communication to inform the community about a particular matter. Such letters must be issued through the Communications and Community Engagement Coordinator, subject to the approval of the Mayor and/or General Manager.
- 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.
- When appropriate, a member of Council staff may be nominated by the General Manager to act as the sole spokesperson on a specific issue, event or initiative within their operational portfolio, to ensure consistency of message.
- Council staff should treat all media outlets equally and avoid giving one outlet preferential treatment. Media releases should be distributed to all media outlets at the same time.
- Council staff should never provide information "off the record" during media interviews. Anything said to a media representative can be used in a news story.
- Contractors, volunteers or service providers employed by Council must refer all media enquiries relating to Council to the Communications and Community Engagement Coordinator.

4.2 Councillors and Media

- Councillors have been elected to represent the community and are free to speak to the media.
- Councillors may speak on behalf of Council only when delegated by the Mayor. In such an instance they must completely support Council's position on the issue at hand.

- Councillors may speak with media on behalf of Committees on which they are Chair or Acting Chair on matters that directly relate to their Committee.
- Councillors are welcome to contact the Communications and Community Engagement Coordinator or General Manager before speaking to media to ensure they can provide the most up to date information from Council on the matter at hand.

4.3 Media Releases

- Staff may prepare draft media releases, but they must be forwarded to the Communications and Community Engagement Coordinator for editing, formatting and distribution to ensure consistency in communication with media.
- Media releases should never be issued without the Communications and Community Engagement Coordinator's knowledge, and the prior approval of the General Manager, the Mayor, or a delegated authority.
- A media release should never be issued quoting a Councillor or member of staff without that person's permission.
- Staff with specialist knowledge may be quoted in media releases with the permission of the relevant delegated authority.
- Media releases must be approved by the General Manager or the delegated authority before posting on the Council website or social media.

4.4 Media Alerts

Any Councillor or staff member who is aware of a Council matter that may be of interest to the media should immediately contact the General Manager's Office.

4.5 Complaints about the Media

Staff complaints about incorrect or unfair media content regarding Council matters should be forwarded to the Communications and Community Engagement Coordinator. Official complaints about media, or requests for a correction can only be made with the authorisation of the General Manager.

4.6 Emergency Communication

Council recognises that ill-considered and uninformed comments can cause dire consequences and have legal implications in the event of an emergency, disaster, crisis or other sensitive issue.

In the event of an emergency in the Council area involving serious injury to and/or death of residents, the Mayor/Councillors or Council employees, or involving significant damage to Council assets or private property, or involving significant law enforcement activity on Council property, the following procedures will apply:

- The General Manager's Office must be notified immediately of details of the incident or activity.
- Details of the incident or activity must not be discussed with any media representatives unless approved in advance by the General Manager.
- Requests by the media to film, photograph or interview Council employees or Council assets involved in the emergency situation must be referred to the General Manager's Office.

4.7 Crisis Management

In communications planning, a crisis is regarded as an emergency due to an actual or imminent occurrence (such as fire, flood, storm, earthquake, explosion, terrorist act, accident, epidemic or war like action) which creates an emergency that requires a significant and coordinated response.

A crisis is defined as a situation that:

(a) endangers, or threatens to endanger, the safety or health of persons or animals in the Local Government Area and;

(b) destroys or damages, or threatens to destroy or damage, any property in the Local Government Area.

If the District Emergency Management Committee enacts the District DISPLAN, requests must be referred to the General Manager's Office. The General Manager will be guided by the advice of the District and Local Emergency Operations Controllers.

4.8 Non-compliance with this Policy

Failure to comply with this policy may be dealt with in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct.

5. IMPLEMENTATION

5.1. Roles and Responsibilities

The following Council officers are responsible for the implementation and the adherence to this policy:

Authorised Officer	Roles and Responsibilities
Mayor	Council's official spokesperson on all strategic and policy matters. Authorised signatory for Letters to the Editor on policy issues.
Deputy Mayor	To act as the Mayor's delegated spokesperson if the Mayor is unavailable.
General Manager	Council's official spokesperson on all policy, operations, strategic, and administrative issues. Authorised signatory for Letters to the Editor on these issues.
Councillors	Provide the media with comment, identifying that it is provided as their own personal opinion, and not the official position of Council.
Department Managers	May make statements on behalf of Council as a designated spokesperson if authorised by the General Manager.
Communications and Community Engagement Coordinator	Responsible for coordinating responses, and providing information and press releases to the media.
General Staff	No media role unless authorised by the General Manager to act as a designated spokesperson.

- The Mayor and the General Manager are Council's official spokespersons on all matters.
- The General Manager may nominate other staff to act as spokespersons for the Council.
- The Mayor may delegate another Councillor to speak on a particular matter.
- The Communications and Community Engagement Coordinator is responsible for co-ordinating media liaison and issuing press releases, and is delegated to respond to media enquiries on behalf of Council.
- No staff member, other than those authorised by the General Manager, are to handle an enquiry from the media without prior approval.
- Information given to the media of a controversial, legal, or ethical nature requires the approval of the General Manager and/or the Mayor.
- All staff, Councillors, volunteers and contractors must abide by Council's Code Of Conduct when speaking with the media.

5.2. Communication

This Policy will be communicated to the community and staff in accordance with Council's Policy, Procedure and Process Framework and Council's Business Paper process. Following adoption by Council the Policy will be made available on Council's website, and also directly supplied to local media outlets.

6. REVIEW

Review of this policy will incorporate relevant legislation, documentation released from relevant state agencies and best practice guidelines.

The standard review period will be within each term of Council following the Local Government Elections, or as required to ensure that it meets legislation requirements and the needs of the community and Council. The responsible Council officer will be notified of the review requirements three (3) months prior to the expiry of this policy.

The Communication and Community Engagement Coordinator is responsible for the review of this policy.

7. LEGISLATIVE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the following:

- Local Government Act 1993
- Local Government (General) Regulation 2005
- 2015 Model Code of Conduct for Councils in NSW

Council employees shall refrain from personal activities that would conflict with proper execution and management of Council's Media Relations Policy. Council's Code of Conduct provides guidance for recognising and disclosing any conflicts of interest.

8. DEFINITIONS

"DISPLAN" – The Broken Hill City Council Local Disaster Plan