

FILE NO: PSC2015-03550

TITLE: MEDIA LIAISON POLICY

POLICY OWNER: COMMUNICATIONS SECTION MANAGER

PURPOSE:

Port Stephens Council is committed to keeping its local and wider community well informed about its activities, as well as strengthening Council's brand and reputation.

In doing so, it is important that Council is open, honest and transparent in its dealings with media representatives and uses appropriate language and spokespeople.

To achieve this outcome Council recognises that a good working relationship with media organisations is essential. Social, electronic, digital and print media are principal means by which Council can inform and consult effectively with its community.

This policy also seeks to clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of staff and Councillors and clearly delineate between personal opinions and Council communications.

CONTEXT/BACKGROUND:

This policy continues Council's commitment to these relationships and follows a review of the previous policy (9 December 2014, Minute No. 336).

The current media landscape is a rapidly changing one. Technology is increasing the speed of communication and is influencing audiences' behaviours and expectations regarding how they receive and consume information.

News no longer runs on a weekly or even a 24-hour cycle; as soon as it breaks, there is a waiting audience, with social media beating traditional media, such as newspapers, television and radio, to the punch every time.

Despite the overwhelming changes to the media landscape and the rapidity of this change, there are still portions of the audience, particularly at the local community level, who continue to consume their information via more traditional means. This may be due to factors such as limited access to technology, failure to adopt new technology as a result of age, choice or socio-economic status, a matter of trust, or simply preferring the ritual of turning on the television, tuning into the radio or holding a paper in our hands.

While most traditional media outlets have adopted a digital-first approach to stay in touch with a broader audience, the burgeoning social media landscape has seen an exponential rise in the number of digital channels.

The changes have allowed brands and organisations, such as Port Stephens Council, to adapt our communications in response. Where we once relied almost exclusively on traditional media to reach our community and help tell our stories, we now create our own content and can communicate with a portion of our community in real-time in a targeted fashion.

Working with the traditional media with a shared understanding of the importance of a digital-first approach has and will continue to foster solid relationships and allow us to convey our messages to our community in more ways than ever before. With this in mind it is important for Council to establish and maintain strong working relationships with all forms of media.

SCOPE:

To encourage community understanding and informed judgement about Council's actions and decisions by:

- 1) Establishing and maintaining a good working relationship between Council and the media; and
- 2) Establishing consistent methods for managing communications between Council and the media to ensure accurate, timely, balanced and reliable information reaches the community.

DEFINITIONS:

An outline of the key definitions of terms included in the policy.

Media liaison Media liaison involves the working relationship Council staff has with representatives from the print, broadcast and digital media.

POLICY STATEMENT:

- 1) Port Stephens Council is committed to open communication with its community through the media. Council will be open and honest in its dealing with the media, notwithstanding that Council will comply with its duty of care to protect confidential or personal information and does not infringe any laws in providing information.
- 2) Council representatives will not knowingly provide information to the media which is untruthful or inaccurate.

- 3) Council will make all reasonable attempts to deal with media inquiries promptly and accurately. Council will also try at all times to have relevant Council or staff representatives available to respond to the media in a timely manner.
- 4) As elected community representatives, Councillors may express their personal view on any matter to the media.
- 5) As the elected leader of the Council, the Mayor is Council's spokesperson on matters of policy and interpretation of Council's position or decisions. In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor will be Council's spokesperson on these matters.
- 6) When authorised to do so by the Mayor, Councillors may also represent Council to the media in respect of:
 - a) Matters of interest to their Ward that they have been personally involved in;
 - b) Matters related to the activities of committees, which they chair or are involved in.
- 7) In addition to operational issues, the General Manager may also represent Council to the media on matters of policy.
- 8) Staff may represent Council to the media on matters of factual information only if approved to do so by the General Manager, their Group Manager or the Communications Section Manager. Staff must not express personal views regarding Council matters and in general should only provide information in respect of their area of responsibility.
- 9) From time to time, the General Manager may also authorise individuals other than staff or Councillors to represent Council to the media, for example Chairperson of Audit Committee.
- 10) Written statements to the media on behalf of Council must be issued through the Public Relations and Marketing Unit and approved by the Communications Section Manager. Where appropriate, they will seek approval from the Mayor, General Manager or relevant Group Manager. Where other staff have been quoted in written statements, approval will be sought from the individual(s) prior to distribution to the media.
- 11) All Council staff contact with the media is to be co-ordinated through Council's Public Relations and Marketing Unit. Council will use agreed protocols and procedures to guide staff and Councillors to ensure that this policy is followed.

POLICY RESPONSIBILITIES:

- 1) This policy is to be implemented by all areas of Council.
- 2) The Communications Section Manager is responsible for the implementation, monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the policy.

RELATED DOCUMENTS:

- 1) Code of Conduct
- 2) Communications Plan

CONTROLLED DOCUMENT INFORMATION:

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RM8 container No	PSC2015-03550	RM8 record No	
Audience	Staff, Councillors and the Community		
Process owner	Communications Section Manager		
Author	Public Relations and Marketing Coordinator		
Review timeframe	Two years	Next review date	February 2020
Adoption date	28 May 2002		

VERSION HISTORY:

Version	Date	Author	Details	Minute No.
1.0	28 May 2002	Communications Section Manager		Minute No.208
1.1	9 December 2014	Communications Section Manager		Minute No.336

1.2	27 February 2018	Public Relations and Marketing Coordinator	<p>Changes to the exiting policy to include a broader definition and context with regard to the changing media landscape.</p> <p>Change in reference from 'Communications Unit' to Public Relations and Marketing Unit.</p>	Minute No.033
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