



Media policy

Summary

This policy informs Council staff and contractors of processes, guidelines and issues relating to media relations to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach is taken to media liaison throughout the organisation.

Policy background

Inner West Council strives to maintain a positive image in the community. Our public image is influenced by the way we communicate and all media relations should support Council in achieving our strategic objectives.

Inner West Council welcomes enquiries from the media, and works proactively with media outlets to inform the public about Council's activities and advocacy.

A mutually beneficial and trusting relationship between Council and the media is essential in maintaining and protecting Council's reputation. All media representatives are to be treated in the same manner as any other customer of Council, with promptness, transparency and respect.

Any media comment made by Council staff and contractors must abide by Council's Code of Conduct.

Policy purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Ensure all communication with the media is consistent, timely, accurate and appropriate;
- Protect and enhance the reputation of Council;
- Maintain and maximise positive relations with media;
- Establish consistent protocols, guidelines and an approvals process for managing communication to the media;
- Clearly indicate Council's authorised spokespeople; and
- Minimise miscommunication and potential adverse consequences.

Who this policy applies to

This policy applies to Inner West Council staff and contractors in relation to communications with the media.

Related legislation, policies and procedures

Related policies:

- Social Media Policy;
- Inner West Council Crisis Communications Guidelines;

- Public Access to Information Policy;
- Community Engagement Framework;
- Code of Meeting Practice;
- Public Interest Disclosures Policy;
- Complaint Handling Policy;
- Local Government Guidelines on Investigations; and
- Council's Code of Conduct.

Related legislation:

- *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA Act)*;
- *Local Government Act 1993*;
- *Independent Commission Against Corruption Act*;
- *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 NSW*;
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 2009 NSW*;
- *State Records Act 1998*;
- *Workplace Health and Safety Act 2011*;
- *Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW 2015*;
- *Copyright Act 1968 Cth*; and
- *Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000 Cth*.

Policy

1 Definition of media

For the purpose of this policy, media comprises all print, broadcast and online media.

2 Responding to media enquiries

All operational or other media enquiries are to be referred to the Media and Communications Coordinator in the Communications team. The Media and Communications Coordinator is responsible for the coordination of responses to all operational enquiries, and will inform and liaise with the General Manager, the Mayor's unit and relevant Council staff as required.

All mayoral media enquiries are to be referred to the mayoral media unit (Mayoral Media and Communications Coordinator or Mayoral Policy and Media Relations Manager) in the first instance, or the Media and Communications Coordinator if the mayoral media unit is unavailable. The Mayoral Media and Communications Coordinator is responsible for the coordination of responses to all mayoral enquiries, and will inform and liaise with the General Manager, the Communications team and relevant Council staff as required.

In dealing with the media, Council staff and contractors must be careful to communicate accurate information.

3 Guidelines for Council staff and contractors

Do ...

- Refer any request from media to provide comment on any issue relating to Council to the Media and Communications Coordinator;

- Notify your manager of any media enquiries received, including the date and time of the enquiry, who made the enquiry and the nature of the enquiry;
- Tell the media respectfully but firmly that their enquiry will be handled by the Communications team; and
- Let the Communications team know of any potential media issues.

Don't ...

- Communicate with media unless expressly authorised to do so; or
- Comment on any confidential matters (such as staff, personal information, legal advice and commercial-in-confidence).

Council staff and contractors may access media outlets in their personal capacity as residents or ratepayers but they should be mindful of their obligations under Council's Code of Conduct.

When acting in a personal capacity, Council staff and contractors should be aware of their association with Inner West Council and ensure that their actions are consistent with our values of flexibility, integrity, respect and spirit of team. They must not imply that they are speaking on behalf of Inner West Council or discuss their work or any matter relating to Council.

Council staff and contractors who have a genuine concern about something at Inner West Council are encouraged to raise this with their manager or Human Resources in the first instance.

4 Contractors and other service providers

Contractors or service providers employed by Council are not authorised to speak on behalf of Council, and must refer all media inquiries relating to Council to the Media and Communications Coordinator.

5 Council's authorised spokespeople

Comments to the media should only be made through authorised spokespeople. In the first instance, the Mayor and General Manager are Council's official spokespeople on all matters.

At their discretion, the Mayor and General Manager can nominate other Council staff to act as a Council spokesperson, such as the Media and Communications Coordinator or senior staff. No Council staff or contractors are permitted to speak to media without the express written authorisation of the General Manager.

6 Process and approvals

Media comment

Only the General Manager, Mayoral media unit and Communications team are permitted to directly contact the media. Any media enquiry in relation to the Internal Ombudsman Shared Service should be referred in the first instance to the Internal Ombudsman who,

as appropriate, will liaise with the General Manager, Media and Communications Coordinator or mayoral media unit.

The Media and Communications Coordinator can provide simple factual information in response to operational questions from by media, attributable to a Council spokesperson. All such comment and responses must be approved by the Group Manager Communications, Engagement and Events and relevant staff before being issued.

Written comment which quotes the Mayor, the General Manager or Council staff must be approved by that person or their nominated representative before being issued. In the case of Council staff, quotes must also be approved by their relevant manager and the Group Manager Communications, Engagement and Events.

In the interest of openness and accountability, where possible, all reasonable media enquiries will be responded to, except those dealing with confidential matters (such as staff, legal advice, personal information and commercial-in-confidence), or the Internal Ombudsman Shared Service. All media inquiries regarding the Internal Ombudsman Shared Service are to be directed to and addressed by the Internal Ombudsman.

Council staff are required to promptly assist the Media and Communications Coordinator with any media enquiries to ensure media deadlines are met.

Where a Council employee is authorised to speak with representatives of media outlets, appropriate training and/or advice will be provided by the Media and Communications Coordinator.

The Media and Communication Coordinator will ensure that other relevant areas of Council are kept informed of any approved Council message, especially frontline staff.

Media releases

The Media and Communications Coordinator is responsible for preparing and issuing media releases about Council's activities, decisions and plans. All staff are required to proactively pass on information to the Media and Communications Coordinator which could be used as the basis for a media release, such as public Council events and positive initiatives. Wherever possible and practicable, Council will provide a spokesperson for comment or interview in support of a media release at the request of a media outlet.

Communications material pertaining directly to the Mayor, using his quotes or image – including media releases, 'Mayoral Messages' for the Council page in the *Inner West Courier*, Council newsletters and forewords for reports – will be provided to the mayoral media unit for the Mayor's approval prior to publication.

7 Media access to Council information and property

Allocated seating will be provided for media outlets at all Committee and Council meetings. Media representatives must adhere to Council's Code of Meeting Practice for Council meetings.

Requests from media outlets to film or photograph Council staff, facilities, meetings and events must be referred to the Media and Communications Coordinator for determination by the General Manager in consultation with relevant Council staff.

8 Record keeping

Council's Media and Communication Coordinator is to maintain a record of media inquiries and responses.

All media releases will also be posted to Council's website.

9 Media liaison in crisis or emergency situations

Only the Mayor and General Manager or their delegate/s are authorised to speak to the media during a crisis or emergency situation.

Publishing information will be the responsibility of the Communications team with approval from the General Manager or their delegate.

All crisis communications must abide by the Inner West Council Crisis Communications Guidelines.

10 Social media and other external communications

Social media use by staff and contractors must abide by the Inner West Council Social Media Policy and Code of Conduct. Any requests to publish information on Council's social media channels should be directed to the Communications team.

Staff must seek prior approval from their manager to speak at any external conference or presentation, and should only speak publicly about their area of expertise.

Where possible, external communications that may attract media attention – such as newsletters, presentations, media releases, advertisements and other publications – should be brought to the attention of the Communications team prior to release.

Documents designed with Inner West Council branding should also be provided to the Communications team for approval to check accuracy, quality and corporate style prior to dissemination.

Staff are reminded that when engaging with external stakeholders as a representative of Inner West Council they should reflect Council's values of flexibility, integrity, respect and spirit of team.

11 Breaches of this policy

Breaches of this policy by Council staff and contractors may result in an investigation of the alleged breach in line with Council's complaint handling policy and the Local Government Guidelines on Investigations, which may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Any alleged criminal offence or allegation of corrupt conduct will be referred to the relevant external agency.

12 Policy review

This policy will be reviewed regularly as required and may change at any time.