



Media policy for Councillors

Summary

This policy informs Councillors of processes, guidelines and issues relating to media relations to ensure they are aware of their obligations regarding media liaison.

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 media relations should support Council in achieving our strategic objectives.

A mutually beneficial and trusting relationship between Council and the media is essential in maintaining and protecting Council's reputation. Inner West Council welcomes enquiries from the media, and works proactively with media outlets to inform the public about Council's activities and advocacy.

This policy recognises that Councillors are elected representatives and as such are required to represent and communicate with their constituents as part of a robust local democracy, including through public debate and engaging with the media.

Councillors should ensure they are aware of and comply with their obligations under the Code of Conduct and Code of Meeting Practice.

Policy purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Establish consistent protocols and guidelines for Councillor communication to the media;
- Clearly indicate Council's authorised spokespeople;
- Protect the reputation of Council;
- Maintain and maximise positive relations with media; and
- Minimise miscommunication and potential adverse consequences.

Who this policy applies to

This policy applies to Inner West Council Councillors in relation to communications with the media.

Related legislation, policies and procedures

Related policies:

- Social Media Policy for Staff;
- Social Media Policy for Councillors;
- Media Policy for Staff;
- Inner West Council Crisis Communications Guidelines;
- Public Access to Information Policy;
- Community Engagement Framework;
- Code of Meeting Practice;

- Public Interest Disclosures Policy;
- Local Government Guidelines on Investigations;
- Code of Conduct; and
- Procedures for the Administration of 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*;
- *Australian Constitution*;
- *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 Council's authorised spokespeople

Comments to the media on behalf of Council 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 officials to act as a Council spokesperson.

3 Media comment and responding to media enquiries on behalf of Council

All operational media enquiries relating to Council 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.

All media inquiries regarding the Internal Ombudsman Shared Service are to be directed to and addressed by the Internal Ombudsman.

4 Media comment by Councillors

Individual Councillors may speak to the media and express their opinions, but may not speak on behalf of Council or comment on any confidential matters.

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 Councillors must abide by the Code of Conduct and Code of Meeting Practice.

Councillors who have a genuine concern about something at Inner West Council are encouraged to raise this with the General Manager or relevant Group Manager in the first instance in accordance with policy.

5 Guidelines for Councillors

The following are examples of, but are not limited to, what Councillors should and should not do regarding media liaison.

Do ...

- Be mindful of your obligations under the Code of Conduct, Part 3, General Conduct, including the requirement not to damage Council's reputation, treat others with respect at all times and not discriminate, disadvantage or treat anyone adversely.
- Be careful to communicate accurate information when dealing with the media.

Don't ...

- Imply that you are speaking on behalf of Inner West Council.
- Comment on any confidential matters (such as staff, personal information, legal advice, commercial-in-confidence and Code of Conduct complaints).

6 Process and approvals for Council media releases

The Media and Communications Coordinator is responsible for preparing and issuing media releases about Council's activities, decisions and plans.

Communications material pertaining directly to the Mayor, using his/her quotes or image – including but not limited to 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. The Mayor may also issue media releases on mayoral letterhead.

If other Councillors wish to have a Council media release issued as part of a Council decision this instruction must be included as part of a Council resolution.

Councillors may be quoted in Council media releases relating to motions for which they are responsible.

All Councillors will be provided with copies of general Council media releases for their information.

7 Media access to Council information and property

Media and the public are welcome to attend Council meetings to ensure transparency and access to information.

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, including Councillors, 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 Media liaison in crisis or emergency situations

Only the Mayor and General Manager or their delegate/s are authorised to speak to the media on behalf of Council 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.

9 Breaches of this policy

Breaches of this policy by Councillors may result in an investigation of the alleged breach in line with Council's complaint handling policy, the Local Government Guidelines on Investigations and the Code of Conduct.

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

10 Policy review

This policy will be reviewed regularly as required and may change at any time, subject to a Council resolution.