

Communication with the Media

Purpose

To ensure coordinated, accurate and reliable presentation of Yass Valley Council information.

To establish protocols for managing communication between Yass Valley Council and all forms of media to ensure coordinated, accurate and reliable presentation of information.

Scope

This policy applies to Councillors, Council staff and contractors and members of Council Committees.

Definitions

Term	Meaning
Media	Media is defined as all forms of broadcast, print and online media and includes newspapers, television, radio, magazines, professional journals, news websites and social media.

Policy Principles

Council will openly discuss matters of interest with the media, unless disclosure of certain information contravenes Council's obligations of confidentiality or privacy, duty of care or could infringe other laws or regulations that govern its operations. Council reserves the right not to comment on specific issues.

- Media organisations and their representatives will be treated equally and without bias.
- All comments made to the media will be considered as "on the record", regardless of any commitment of "off the record" given by a member of the media.
- Defamation law applies to Councillors and Council Officers as it does to other members of the public. It could be considered defamatory to harm another person's reputation verbally or through the written word.

1. Social Media

- 1.1 To maintain the professional integrity of Council's corporate social media sites, only the Media & Communications staff or such other person authorised by the General Manager, are authorised to post comments on social media sites on Council's behalf.
- 1.2 When using social media in an official capacity on behalf of Council, Council Officers must:
 - 1.2.1 maintain the high standard of professionalism expected of all employees;
 - 1.2.2 never engage in behaviour that is harassing, bullying, illegal or in breach of Council's Code of Conduct whether using an official or private social media account;
 - 1.2.3 represent Council professionally when publishing content in an official capacity;
 - 1.2.4 adhere to the protocols outlined in paragraph 1 relating to who is authorised to post comments on Council's behalf; and
 - 1.2.5 under no circumstances disclose information or make commitments on behalf of Council unless authorised to do so.

2. Broadcast and Print Media

- 2.1 All media enquiries should be directed to the Media & Communications staff, and if not available the relevant Director, General Manager or Mayor.
- 2.2 No comment can be made to the media, or information distributed, without the specific approval of the relevant Director or the General Manager. Directors may nominate Managers to respond on specific issues or specialist members of staff to respond to technical questions on operational matters only.
- 2.3 The Media & Communications staff are responsible for coordinating and distributing articles, columns and newsletters on behalf of the Mayor or the Council and is responsible for ensuring the information contained in the document is accurate, checked and distributed in an approved format.
- 2.4 The Media & Communications staff are responsible for preparing and distributing media releases. All media releases must be approved by the relevant Director or the General Manager prior to release, (or the Mayor in the case of a Mayoral media release) and must be in an approved format.
- 2.5 Photos of individuals will not be provided to the media for their use unless consent for use of the image has been obtained.

3. Councillors and the Media

- 3.1 Councillors may not speak to the media on behalf of Council unless authorised by the Mayor.
- 3.2 Councillors should support Council decisions and refrain from using the media to make negative personal reflections on each other or comments that could be interpreted as such and which are reasonably likely to undermine public confidence in the Council, Council Officers or local government generally.
- 3.3 As members of the community, Councillors are entitled to enter into public debate in their private capacity and make comment on Council affairs, provided they clearly state that such public comment reflects their personal opinion and not that of the Council or a Council Committee.

4. Council Officers and the Media

- 4.1 Council Officers should support Council decisions and refrain from using the media to make negative personal reflections on each other or comments that could be interpreted as such and which are reasonably likely to undermine public confidence in the Council, Councillors or local government generally.
- 4.2 Council Officers must not make political or controversial statements in or to the media relating to Council affairs, decisions and/or events, or about Councillors or other Council Officers which are likely to generate negative publicity for Council.
- 4.3 As members of the community, Council Officers are entitled to enter into public debate and make comment on civic affairs provided they do not give the impression they are speaking in their official position for or on behalf of Council.
- 4.5 Committee Members and the Media
 - 4.5.1 Members of Council Committees must not comment to the media on matters relating to the Committee without the approval of the Mayor and/or General Manager and should not make comments that are contrary to decisions of Council.

Responsibilities & Review

The Media and Communications Coordinator will:

- Provide all necessary administrative support for the operation of this policy
- Develop and document any procedures for the effective implementation of this policy
- Review this policy. The review of this policy will incorporate relevant legislation, documentation released from relevant state agencies and best practice guidelines. This policy will be reviewed every two years from the adoption date. The next review date is 02/01/2022.

References

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

Legislation	Privacy Act 1988
	Defamation Act 1988
Policies and procedures	Code of Conduct

Approval History

Stage	Date	Comment	MagiQ Reference
Original	28 August 2013	Approved at Council	Min No. 274
Reviewed	27 November 2019	Approved at Council	Min No. 273 MagiQ 351403

Ownership and Approval

Responsibility	Role
Author	Media & Communications Coordinator
Owner	General Manager
Endorser	EMT
Approver	Council