

# **Media and Communications Policy**



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# Introduction

## Purpose

This policy outlines how Council will manage its media and communications activities and will explain how:

- Council liaises with the media (traditional)
- Councillors are required to manage their own media platforms
- help us achieve our overall organisational objectives
- engage effectively with stakeholders
- ensure people understand what Council do
- demonstrate the success of our work, and
- change behaviour and perceptions where necessary

## Applicability

This policy applies to:

- Council officials defined in Council's Code of Conduct and includes Councillors, Council staff, members of Council committees and delegates of Council
- Council operational procedures should be referred to for direction on the use of media for critical incident and business continuity purposes and for employee use of social media in their personal and professional capacities.

## Definitions

<b>authorised spokesperson</b>	members of Council staff who are authorised by the General Manager or Media Coordinator to speak to the media on behalf of Council
<b>Council official</b>	Councillors, members of staff and delegates of Council (including members of committees that are delegates of Council)
<b>relevant staff</b>	As determined by the General Manager
<b>media</b>	includes print, broadcast and online media used for communicating information to the public, including but not limited to, newspaper, magazines, internet publishers, radio and television broadcasters.
<b>Media Coordinator</b>	is Council's Media Coordinator appointed under clause 1.2 of this policy.
<b>minor</b>	for the purposes of this policy, is a person under the age of 18 years.
<b>personal information</b>	information or an opinion (including information or an opinion forming part of a database and whether or not recorded in a material form) about an individual whose identity is apparent or can reasonably be ascertained from the information or opinion.
<b>social media</b>	means online platforms and applications, such as but not limited to social networking sites, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites, and message boards, that allow people to easily publish, share and discuss content. Examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Snapchat, LinkedIn, Microsoft Viva Engage (formerly known as Yammer), YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and Wikipedia.

<b>business community</b>	Registered businesses who communicate with us, and with which we may undertake transactional activities
<b>community interest groups</b>	Resident or community groups who deal with us directly on behalf, and in the interest of others
<b>partners and other stakeholders</b>	Non government and other government agencies and groups with which we deliver services, activities and programs
<b>residents</b>	Individual members of our community

***Communications is defined as:***

- **Literature:** All narratives, reports, letters and emails produced to communicate Council's activities
- **Media announcements:** All print, electronic and broadcast announcements (including local, metropolitan, specialist, community and industry print, radio, broadcast and web media)
- **Publications:** All print and digitally produced magazines, brochures, pamphlets, flyers and posters produced to communicate Council's activities.
- **Social network (social media):** Council registered and managed Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Microsoft Viva Engage (formerly known as Yammer) and online consultation/collaboration sites. A social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants:
  - Have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data
  - Can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others
  - Can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site
  - **Websites:** All online websites with domains registered and managed by Glen Innes Severn Council.

Communications are central to the delivery of all our services. Council will ensure our priorities, objectives, values and ambitions are communicated and understood by our workforce, residents, partners, local businesses and stakeholders.

Communications are integrated into all our corporate planning and are open, honest, clear, concise, simple and accessible.

## Communications Channels

Council's communication channels include digital, print format, broadcast media and presentation to provide people with access to a clear understanding of our operations, priorities and challenges. Council will continue to keep abreast of the most up-to-date communication methods, assess these and utilise them when and where required.

## Brand

All public communications materials and channels must adhere to and reflect Council's identity, incorporating Council's corporate style guide and utilising corporate templates.

## Part 1 – Principles

1.1 We, the Councillors, staff, and other officials of Glen Innes Severn Council are committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of media engagement:

<b>Openness</b>	We will ensure that we promote an open exchange of information between our Council and the media.
<b>Consistency</b>	We will ensure consistency by all Councillors and staff when communicating with the media.
<b>Accuracy</b>	The information we share with the media will be a source of truth for our Council and community and we will prioritise the need to correct inaccuracies when they occur.
<b>Timeliness</b>	We will ensure that we respond to media enquiries in a timely manner.

1.2 This Policy replaces the Communications Policy, which was adopted in 2020.

1.3 This Policy is based on the NSW Office of Local Government (OLG) Model Media Policy December 2022. While not mandatory, the Model Media Policy reflects best practice and all Councils, county Councils and joint organisations are encouraged to adopt them. Council is free to adapt the policy to suit its local circumstances and operating environments and to supplement it with its own provisions.

1.4 All Glen Innes Severn Council communication channels are an extension of Council's information networks and is further governed by other policies and strategies including:

- Code of Conduct Policies
- Social Media Policy
- Computer Usage Policy
- Community Engagement Strategy
- Communications Strategy

## Part 2 – Administrative framework for engagement with the media

2.1 The General Manager will appoint a member of Council staff to be the Council's Media Coordinator. For the purposes of this Policy, the Media Coordinator is the Media and Communications Officer.

2.2 The General Manager may appoint more than one Media Coordinator.

## Part 3 – Who can engage with the media

### Media Coordinator

3.1 The Media Coordinator's role is to:

- be the lead point of contact for all media enquiries, requests for interviews, requests to film or photograph Council staff, facilities or events for news and current affairs

purposes. In the first instance, all media enquiries should be directed to the Media Coordinator at: [media@gisc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:media@gisc.nsw.gov.au)

- be responsible for preparing all media statements prior to their release
- liaise with relevant staff members within the organisation where appropriate
- ensure that media statements are approved by the General Manager and Mayor prior to their release
- develop media training and inductions provided to relevant staff and Councillors
- maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses
- ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias
- ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly
- provide guidance to Councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation, and
- ensure all media releases are distributed across appropriate communication channels, including publication on the Council's website and Facebook, and emailed to the organisation's media contact list.

## General Manager

**3.2** The General Manager is the official spokesperson for the Council on operational and administrative matters.

**3.3** The General Manager may delegate to other Council staff to speak on their behalf where appropriate, (for example, where the delegated staff member has professional expertise regarding the subject matter, or the general manager is unavailable).

## Mayor

**3.4** The Mayor is the principal member and spokesperson of the governing body of the Council, including representing the views of the Council as to its local priorities (section 226(c) of the *Local Government Act 1993*).

**3.5** If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as the Council's spokesperson.

**3.6** The Mayor may delegate their role as spokesperson to other Councillors where appropriate, (for example, where another Councillor is best placed to comment, because the issue is of particular interest to them, or it is within their particular area of expertise).

## Councillors

**3.7** A Councillor is a person elected or appointed to civic office, and includes a Mayor as outlined in the *Local Government Act 1993*.

**3.8** As a member of the governing body and as a representative of the community, Councillors are free to express their personal views to the media.

**3.9** When engaging with the media Councillors:

- must not purport to speak for the Council unless they are authorised to do so.
- must clarify when speaking to the media that they are expressing their personal views as an individual Councillor and that they are not speaking for the Council (unless authorised to do so)

- must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
- must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so, and
- must seek information and guidance from the General Manager where appropriate before providing comment to the media to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered reputational or other risks.

**3.10** In the interests of promoting a positive, safe and harmonious organisational culture, Councillors should endeavour to resolve personal differences privately and must not prosecute them publicly through the media.

**3.11** Where Councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the General Manager in the first instance.

### **Council Staff/Contractors/Volunteers**

**3.12** Council staff, Contractors and Volunteers must not speak to the media about matters relating to the Council unless authorised by the General Manager to do so.

**3.13** If Council staff receive a media enquiry or they are invited to comment to the media on a matter relating to the Council, they must refer the enquiry to the General Manager and Media Coordinator.

**3.14** Council staff are free to express their personal views to the media on matters that do not relate to the Council, but in doing so, must not make comments that reflect badly on the Council or that bring it into disrepute.

**3.15** If authorised to speak to the media, Council staff:

- must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
- must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the General Manager, and
- must seek information and guidance from the General Manager where appropriate before providing comment to the media to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered reputational or other risks.

**3.16** Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Media Coordinator.

### **Tone**

**3.17** All media engagement by Council officials must be conducted in a professional, timely and respectful manner.

### **Induction and training**

**3.18** Training on media engagement may be provided to Councillors, relevant staff and other Council officials who engage or are authorised to engage with the media.

**3.19** Media engagement advice will be provided to Councillors as part of their induction or refresher training or as part of their ongoing professional development program.

**3.20** Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this policy to the General Manager

## Part 4 – Standards of conduct when engaging with the media

**4.1** Council will openly discuss matters of interest with the media unless disclosure of information contravenes the Council's duty of care, contractual obligations, or could infringe laws or regulations that govern its operations (or the privacy of any individual).

**4.2** Council encourages open communication with the media and the community, with an emphasis on promoting a positive, progressive, and professional image of Council and staff.

**4.3** Media organisations and their representatives will be treated equally and without bias.

**4.4** Media enquiries are to be dealt with promptly, truthfully and within the media's deadline wherever possible, provided adequate notice has been given.

**4.5** Council officials must comply with the Council's Code of Conduct when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a Council official.

**4.6** Council officials must not share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms that:

- are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other Council officials or members of the public
- contains profane language or is sexual in nature
- constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW, or is unlawfully discriminatory
- is contrary to their duties under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by the Council to ensure workplace health and safety
- contains content about the Council, Council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive
- divulges confidential Council information
- breaches the privacy of other Council officials or members of the public
- contains allegations of suspected breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct or information about the consideration of a matter under the Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW
- could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment
- commits the Council to any action
- violates an order made by a court
- breaches copyright
- advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business.

## Part 5 – Use of media during emergencies

**5.1** In NSW, local governments are not the authorised organisation to coordinate emergency or disaster responses. Council has two roles in relation to communicating and providing information to the media in an emergency or natural disaster:



- to support the relevant State or combat agency to distribute their message and information as wide and far as possible to residents of the Glen Innes Severn
- to provide information on the operations and status of Council services, assets and facilities with a focus on essential services of roads, water supply, wastewater services and waste management.

5.2 During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the Media Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of Council, approved by either the General Manager or specific Crisis Incident Controller. This may include regular status and situation updates.

5.3 Councillors, Council staff and other Council officials must not provide comment or information to the media that is inconsistent with official advice issued by Council and any other agency coordinating the emergency response.

## Part 6 – Media engagement in the lead up to elections

6.1 This policy does not prevent the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a Council or any other election from providing comment to the media in their capacity as candidates at the election.

6.2 During a period of 40 days prior to an election, Council must not publish any media containing the name, images or statements of the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates.

6.3 In addition to Clause 5.2, and in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Councils in NSW, Councillors must not use Council resources (including Council staff), property or facilities for the purpose of assisting their election campaign or the election campaigns of others unless the resources, property or facilities are otherwise available for use or hire by the public and any publicly advertised fee is paid for use of the resources, property or facility.

6.4 Any media comment provided by the Mayor or Councillors who are candidates at a Council or another election must not be provided in an advertisement, newspaper column, or a radio or television broadcast paid for by the Council or produced by the Council or with Council resources.

6.5 Councillors must not use the Council letterhead, Council crests, Council email or social media or other information that could give the appearance it is official Council material: a) for the purpose of assisting their election campaign or the election campaign of others, or b) for other non-official purposes.

6.6 During Caretaker Mode, Council will be mindful of its obligations before issuing public statements.

## Part 7 – Publications and promotional material

7.1 All publications and promotional material (print and online) about Council decisions, policies, programs, services and events must adhere to Council's branding guidelines.

7.2 All publications and promotional material should be accurate, informative and written in plain language in line with Council's Brand Style Guides. They should be produced and distributed so that they are accessible to the relevant audience. This includes the use of accessible templates.

**7.3** All official Council endorsed strategy documents and policies may (as appropriate) include an introductory message from the Mayor as at the date of publication. This message must be approved by the General Manager and Mayor.

**7.4** Council will regularly communicate Council decisions, policies, programs, services and events through a wide range of communication channels. These channels will not be used to promote individual agendas, political or otherwise, or criticise Councillors, Council decisions, community members, members of the government or opposition, or Council Officers.

**7.5** All communications sent directly (i.e. personally addressed) to an individual must comply with Council's Privacy Policy, particularly:

- The contact details of community members remain confidential and not provided to a third party to be used for other purposes
- The communication and database are not used to promote anything outside the original purpose to which recipients agreed, unless they consent
- Recipients are provided with a mechanism to opt out at any time

## Part 8 – Records management requirements

**8.1** Media content created and received by Council officials (including Councillors) acting in their official capacity is a Council record and may be subject to information access applications made under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*.

**8.2** These records must also be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* and the Council's approved records management policies and practices.

## Variation And Review

The Media and Communications Policy will be reviewed every Council term (four years), or earlier if deemed necessary, to ensure that it meets the requirements of legislation and the needs of Council. The term of the Policy does not expire on the review date, but will continue in force until superseded, rescinded or varied either by legislation or a new resolution of Council.

## Appendix A

### Document Control/Authorisation

<b>Responsible Officer</b>		Media and Communications Officer (MCO)			
<b>Reviewed By</b>		Council			
<b>Review Due Date</b>		February 2029			
<b>Version Number</b>		4			
<b>Document Number</b>		NA			
<b>Versions</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Resolution Number</b>	<b>Description of Amendments</b>	<b>Author / Editor</b>	<b>Approved / Adopted By</b>
4	20/02/2025	07.02/25	Major revision to adopt the OLG Media Model Policy 2022 and rescind the current Communications Policy	MCO	Council
3	27/05/2021	07.06/21	Inclusion of Communications Strategy 2020-2025 and minor amendments	MCO	MANEX
2	26/04/2018	10.04/18	Practice and procedure amendments – fully reworked draft	MCO	Council
1	23/02/2017	04.02/17	Embryonic first draft for management of responsibilities and record keeping	MCO	Council