



Policy

52 MEDIA POLICY

Version 04

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Responsible Officer: Director Corporate Services

1. POLICY STATEMENT

The Council has an important relationship with the media. This relationship provides an opportunity to:

- Keep the community informed about Council activities, services and programs,
- Involve the community in dialogue about the provision of services and planning for the future, and,
- Involve the community in activities which support the aims and objectives of the Council and the wider community as detailed in the Community Strategic Plan – *Berrigan Shire 2023*.

Berrigan Shire Council has a responsibility to the community to ensure that when it provides public information – in particular to the media – that then information is accurate and accurately reflects the Council's position in relation to activities and issues.

It is unreasonable to expect that the community can readily differentiate either inaccurate information or personal views or opinions.

Where inaccurate information or personal views or opinions are provided it portrays the Council as unprofessional at best and incompetent or secretive at worse.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to:

- Provide for effective communication of Council affairs to the public through the media
- Promote positive coverage of Council affairs that is fair, accurate and reliable



Policy

- Establish a process that clarifies which person or persons provides public information in relation to Council activities or issues.
- Clarify if information provided is the official Council position or a personal expression of opinion.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to Council officials as defined in Council's Code of Conduct (see Definition section below).

This policy applies to situations where Council officials:

- Communicate with the media about Council affairs and related matters,
- Attend public speaking engagements, or,
- Make comments on Council affairs where it is reasonably foreseeable that their comments will be published in the media.

This policy acknowledges the rights and responsibilities of Councillors as elected representatives as outlined in the *Local Government Act 1993*

4. OBJECTIVE

This policy is developed to assist the Council with the following Delivery Plan Objectives:

2.2.2 Council operations support ethical, transparent and accountable corporate governance.

5. DEFINITIONS

Council affairs: includes matters before the Council or other Council affairs and business, Council policy, interpretation of policy, management of Council business, management of Council staff or actions or matters that may commit the Council's resources to any purpose.

Council officials: as defined in Council's Code of Conduct, Council officials includes councillors, members of staff of Council and delegates of Council including volunteers.

Council staff: means Council officials who are not Councillors. This includes consultants, contractors and other delegates of Council, including volunteers.

Media: includes print media such as national or local newspapers, magazines, newsletters, brochures and other documents and the broadcast media including radio and television broadcasters and internet publishers.



Policy

Public comment: includes interviews with the media (including comments to or interviews with the press, radio or television), public speaking engagements, expressing views in letters to the press, in books, notices, articles, social media or in any medium where it is reasonably foreseeable that the publication or circulation will enter the public domain.

Publication: the distribution of information via print or electronic media including but not being limited to newspapers, radio and television broadcasting and the internet.

6. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

6.1. General spokespersons

The Mayor and General Manager are the official spokespersons regarding Council affairs and it is expected that in most cases this will remain the most appropriate situation.

The Director Technical Services and Director Corporate Services are delegated authority to speak to the Media on areas under their jurisdiction. The General Manager must be informed either before, or directly after, the comments made.

The Strategic and Social Planning Coordinator is delegated authority to speak to the Media to provide information on Council affairs as per the Council's Community Engagement Framework.

6.2. Specific spokespersons

In some cases it would be more appropriate to designate specific Councillors or staff to act the Council spokesperson on specific issues.

The Council will from time to time designate a Councillor or staff member to be its official spokesperson in relation to specific issues or activities. Such designation will be by Council resolution.

If this designation is to occur it should be at the inception of an issue or activity as this will create certainty and consistency.

Where no such designation exists, the Mayor and General Manager will continue to be the Council's official spokespersons. The Mayor and General Manager may also express the Council's position in relation to activities or issues even if there is a designation.

The General Manager may nominate specialist members of staff to respond to technical questions on operational matters only. The Mayor and/or the General Manager must approve of other information before it is issued or distributed to the media.



Policy



Policy

6.3. Unauthorised comment

Where Council officials are asked to respond to media or public enquires regarding activities of the Council, they should:

- clarify that they are not the best person to speak to, and
- refer the enquiry to the Mayor, General Manager or other authorized delegate.

Council officials should support Council decisions and should 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 or local government generally.

Council staff must not make political or controversial statements in or to the media relating to Council affairs, decisions and/or events, or about Council officials which are likely to generate negative publicity for Council.

Breaches of this policy will be dealt with in accordance with the Code of Conduct i.e. staff will be disciplined while allegations against Councillors, the Mayor or General Manager will be referred to the Conduct Committee.

6.4. Councillors and public debate

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 committee of Council.

6.5. Media releases

All media releases must be approved by the General Manager or Mayor prior to release.

6.6. Incorrect information

In the event of incorrect information or information that has a personal or corporate reputational risk being published, the Director Corporate Services will investigate and report to the General Manager on how the information came to be published.

If necessary, the General Manager will issue or will authorise a media release to be issued clarifying the incorrect information.



Policy

7. RELATED POLICIES OR STRATEGIES

7.1. Legislation

- *Local Government Act 1993*
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*
- *Defamation Act 2005*

7.2. Council policies and guidelines

- Berrigan Shire 2023 (Community Strategic Plan)
- Code of Conduct
- Community Engagement Framework
- Privacy Management Plan
- Internal Reporting Policy
- Access to Information Policy
- Policy for volunteering in Berrigan Shire
- Social Media Policy