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RELEVANT CODES/POLICIES:	Code of Conduct Communications Strategy Business Continuity Plan
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OBJECTIVE

- To build and maintain good working relationships with media representatives.
- To ensure all media releases and statements issued are timely, factually correct and professionally presented.

- To proactively promote the positive achievements of Council to the public and to minimise reactive crisis management .
- To effectively monitor media coverage of Council.
- To establish protocols and procedures for Council employees regarding communication with the media.

DEFINITIONS

Media includes all print, radio, television and electronic media. Please note that in the Cessnock Local Government Area, there are several community specific newsletters and newspapers which are printed on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. There is also an active community FM radio station.

Media Release is any written material prepared under Council guidelines and distributed to the media by the Community and Media Information Officer after written approval by the Mayor or General Manager.

Media Statement is any verbal or written statement provided to the media by either the Mayor or General Manager, usually in direct response to a particular enquiry.

Council spokesperson is the Mayor, General Manager, a Director or a Manager who is identified as the most qualified person to speak with the media regarding a particular issue. Other employees, from time to time, may also be identified as Council spokesperson on a particular subject: their Director's approval must be obtained prior to contact with media.

Public is a generic term for all the people who are interested in or affected by the actions, policies and decisions of Council. Public includes all Council stakeholders: residents, ratepayers, media, community and not-for-profit organisations, environmental and heritage organisations, visitors to the Local Government Area, small and larger business organisations, commercial and property developers, industry, educational institutions, other local government councils, State and Federal Government departments and politicians.

The Cessnock City Council Media Policy applies to all Council employees and their liaison and communication with the media, including Council endorsed and private interviews, published articles, letters to the editor and paid advertisements. This policy also applies to telephone conversations and correspondence sent via facsimile, email and sms between Council employees and media representatives.

POLICY

1. Media Enquiries

- 1.1 **All media enquiries should be directed to the Community and Media Information Officer.** The Community and Media Information Officer is responsible for all media liaison on behalf of Council.

- 1.2 Media enquiries will be dealt with as soon as practicable and with high priority, having regard to media deadlines.
- 1.3 The Community and Media Information Officer, together with the General Manager and/or Director(s), will determine the most appropriate employee to respond to media queries.
The Mayor, General Manager, Directors and Managers will be official spokespersons for Council. If deemed appropriate by the General Manager or Directors, other employees may, from time to time, be nominated as Council spokesperson, providing that staff member is comfortable with being nominated.
- 1.5 All comments made to the media are to be considered 'on the record', even if a commitment is made by a media representative that the comments will be regarded as 'off the record'.
- 1.6 It is not acceptable for employees to be discourteous to any media representative at any time.
- 1.7 Council employees have the right to refuse to act as Council spokesperson, to be filmed or photographed by media representatives or the Community and Media Information Officer for distribution to the media.
- 1.8 At no time will confidential information regarding Councillors, employees or community members be issued to the media. The Freedom of Information Act 1989 and the Privacy Act 1988 will be adhered to when requests for information are received.
- 1.9 At no time will a Council employee be defamatory about an individual, company or organisation or Council, a Councillor or another Council employee.
- 1.10 At no time will a Council employee present the work of another individual or organisation as his or her own.
- 1.11 At no time will a Council employee's direct work telephone contact number be given to a media representative.

2. Media Releases and Statements

- 2.1 All Media Releases and Statements will be issued by the Community and Media Information Officer, once written approval has been provided by the Mayor or General Manager.
- 2.2 All Media Releases will be presented in the Council Media Release format.
- 2.3 The Mayor, the General Manager, Directors and/or Managers will be quoted in Media Releases. Officers responsible for specific projects or areas of operation may also be quoted in Media Releases, with the approval of the General Manager. The Community and Media Information Officer will seek approval from the relevant Council officers for any quotes included in Media Release prior to distributing the release.

- 2.4 In regard to Media Statements, only the Mayor or General Manager will be quoted.
- 2.5 All statistical figures and 'factual' information included in Media Releases and Statements must be verifiable.
- 2.6 Organisations, companies, other councils and/or government departments which are involved in a partnership with Council or which have sponsored/funded a particular activity for which a Media Release is to be issued will have their name and the nature of their contribution included in the release. Where appropriate, approval will be sought from the other party prior to distribution of the release.
- 2.7 Council will, at all times, seek to be proactive in communicating positive and professional information to the public.
- 2.8 Where possible, advance notice of Council activities or events which are newsworthy should be provided to the Community and Media Information Officer to allow adequate time for a Media Release to be prepared and distributed to the media.
- 2.9 In the Cessnock Local Government Area there are several newspapers and newsletters which are published weekly, fortnightly and monthly. Employees should be mindful of these timelines and deadlines when requesting the Community and Media Information Officer to seek media coverage for a Council matter.

3. Media Visits to Council Buildings, Facilities and Work Sites

- 3.1 Media requests for visiting Council buildings, facilities and work sites should be directed to the Community and Media Information Officer, who will coordinate the visit with the relevant Director and/or Manager.
- 3.2 Notice in advance of a scheduled media visit will be supplied to relevant employees.
- 3.3 In the event that media representatives visit a Council building, facility or work site without prior arrangement, the Community and Media Information Officer is to be notified immediately by the Supervisor or Manager.
- 3.4 All visiting media are to be professionally greeted and escorted by the Mayor, General Manager, Community and Media Information Officer, relevant Director and/or Manager.
- 3.5 Media visits will be conducted in accordance with the Workplace Safety and Occupational Health and Safety Acts. Where appropriate, a risk assessment must be completed and media representatives supplied with safety wear.

4. Crisis Management

- 4.1 Council will seek, at all times, to minimise the necessity for crisis management.

- 4.2 Council will seek to proactively and honestly address issues which may have the potential to escalate into a crisis.
- 4.3 In the event that crisis management is required the Mayor, General Manager, relevant Director and Community and Media Information Officer will be responsible for managing the issue in relation to the media.

5. Media and Councillors

- 5.1 The Mayor and Councillors are responsible for their own liaison and communication with the media.
- 5.2 No Council employee can direct the Mayor or Councillors in regard to media relations.
- 5.3 It is expected that all elected representatives will act in a responsible manner and not bring the Council, its employees or its activities into disrepute through his or her communications with the media.
- 5.4 Only the Mayor or, in his/her absence, the Deputy Mayor will be quoted in Media Releases or Statements issued by the Community and Media Information Officer. The Community and Media Information Officer will only issue these upon receiving the written approval of the Mayor or Deputy Mayor.
- 5.5 Upon receiving a media enquiry specific to the Mayor or other Councillors, the Community and Media Information Officer will direct the media representative to the appropriate Councillor.

6. Media Training

- 6.1 From time to time, Council will organise media training for employees who are expected to communicate with the media on a regular basis.
- 6.2 Employees who are nominated Council spokespersons and who have not experienced media training may contact the Community and Media Information Officer for advice.

7. Private Individuals

- 7.1 Employees are not permitted to provide opinion or comment to the media on a private basis regarding Council matters, unless prior approval is granted by the General Manager.
- 7.2 Employees who communicate with the media in a private capacity on any subject matter must immediately (or as soon as practicable) advise their Manager, who will advise the Community and Media Information Officer. In these instances, employees should not attribute their views or opinions to those of Council, they should not use Council's name or use their position title.
- 7.3 In some instances, profiles of employees may be sought by the media which do not directly relate to the Council or the employee position but will, as a matter of

interest, include the person's position title and Council's name. This will generally be organised by the Community and Media Information Officer but in the circumstances where it is not (ie a direct approach to an employee by the media), the Community and Media Information Officer must be notified prior to the distribution or broadcast of the profile.

7.4 In the event of a natural disaster, an accident or event involving members of the public or any other similar happening where media may be present, employees who are involved in any capacity should concentrate on their own actions and/or duties and, if approached by the media for comment, use their discretion as to the appropriateness of providing comment. If comment is provided, the employee(s) should advise his/her/their Manager as soon as practicable after the event and provide details of the comment(s).

7.5 Employees are entitled to refuse to provide comment to the media.

8. Media monitoring

8.1 Media monitoring will be undertaken by the Community and Media Information Officer until such time as Council determines commercial media monitoring is required.

9. Breaches of this Policy

9.1 Any Council employee found to be in breach of the Cessnock City Council Media Policy will be investigated through the misconduct provisions of Council's Code of Conduct.

10. Procedures

10.1 The Cessnock City Council Media Release and Communication Protocol and Procedures document should be read in conjunction with this Policy.