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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Council acknowledges that within its local government area boundaries are the traditional lands of the Wonnarua people, the Awabakal people and the Darkinjung people. We acknowledge these Aboriginal peoples as the traditional custodians of the land on which our offices and operations are located, and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We also acknowledge all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now live within the Cessnock Local Government Area.

COUNCIL VALUES

Integrity, Respect, Teamwork, Accountability, and Excellence.

DISCLAIMER

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1 PRINCIPLES

- 1.1** We, the councillors, staff, and other officials of Cessnock City Council, are committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of media engagement:

Openness

- 1.2** We will ensure that we promote an open exchange of information between our council and the media.

Consistency

- 1.3** We will ensure consistency by all councillors and staff when communicating with the media.

Accuracy

- 1.4** 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.

Timeliness

- 1.5** We will ensure that we respond to media enquiries in a timely manner.

2 OBJECTIVES

- 2.1** The objectives of this policy are to:

- 2.1.1 Clearly indicate Council's Authorised spokespersons and define roles and responsibilities within Council for communicating with the Media;
- 2.1.2 Ensure appropriate, accurate and authorised information is provided to the Media in order to limit risk to Council's reputation;
- 2.1.3 Promote open exchange of information between Council and the Media;
- 2.1.4 Provide the Media with a single point of contact with Council, enhancing the provision of Council information and enabling the building of positive Media relationships; and
- 2.1.5 Ensure Council is communicating with its community through a variety of Media Channels.

3 SCOPE

- 3.1** This policy applies to Council Officials and their liaison, engagement and communication with the Media.

4 STATEMENT

- 4.1** Council encourages open communication with the community through a range of communication methods, with an emphasis on promoting a positive, progressive and professional image of Council and Council Officials.
- 4.2** To ensure information released publicly about Council is accurate, consistent, reliable and in the best interests of the organisation, commentary to the Media must be released in accordance with this policy.
- 4.3** 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.

5 ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MEDIA

Appointment and role of the Communications and Engagement Manager

- 5.1** The General Manager will appoint a suitably qualified Communications and Engagement Manager with responsibility for leading Council's media and communications functions.
- 5.2** The role of the Communications and Engagement Manager includes responsibility to:
 - 5.2.1 be the lead point of contact for all media enquiries, requests for interviews, requests to film or photograph Council Officials, facilities or events for news and current affairs purposes
 - 5.2.2 be responsible for preparing all media statements prior to their release
 - 5.2.3 liaise with relevant staff officials where appropriate
 - 5.2.4 ensure that media statements are approved by the Mayor and/or General Manager prior to their release
 - 5.2.5 provide media training and/or messaging support to Council Officials authorised to engage with the media
 - 5.2.6 maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses
 - 5.2.7 ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly
 - 5.2.8 provide guidance to councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation, and
 - 5.2.9 ensure that all media releases are published on the Council's website.
- 5.3** The General Manager or Communications and Engagement Manager may delegate responsibilities to a suitably qualified member of staff, including members of the Communications and Engagement Unit, as required.

6 WHO CAN ENGAGE WITH THE MEDIA

The General Manager

- 6.1** The General Manager is the official spokesperson for the Council on operational and administrative matters.
- 6.2** 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).

The Mayor

- 6.3** 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* (NSW)).
- 6.4** If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as the Council's spokesperson.
- 6.5** The Mayor may delegate their role as spokesperson to other Councillors where appropriate.

Councillors

- 6.6** 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.
- 6.7** When engaging with the media, Councillors:
 - 6.7.1 must not purport to speak for the Council unless authorised to do so
 - 6.7.2 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)

- 6.7.3 must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
- 6.7.4 must not disclose council information unless authorised to do so, and
- 6.7.5 must seek information and guidance from the Communications and Engagement 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.
- 6.8** 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.
- 6.9** Where Councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Communications and Engagement Manager.

Council Staff

- 6.10** Council staff must not speak to the media about matters relating to the Council unless authorised by the General Manager to do so.
- 6.11** 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 Communications and Engagement Manager.
- 6.12** 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.
- 6.13** If authorised to speak to the media, Council staff:
 - 6.13.1 must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
 - 6.13.2 must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the Communications and Engagement Manager, and
 - 6.13.3 must seek information and guidance from the Communications and Engagement 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.
- 6.14** Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Communications and Engagement Manager.

Councillors' questions about media engagement

- 6.15** Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this policy to the Communications and Engagement Manager.

7 STANDARDS OF CONDUCT WHEN ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA

- 7.1** 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.
- 7.2** Council Officials must not share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms that:
 - 7.2.1 are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other Council Officials or members of the public
 - 7.2.2 contains profane language or is sexual in nature
 - 7.2.3 constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the Code of Conduct, or is unlawfully discriminatory

- 7.2.4 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
- 7.2.5 contains content about the Council, Council Officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive
- 7.2.6 divulges confidential Council information
- 7.2.7 breaches the privacy of other Council Officials or members of the public
- 7.2.8 contains allegations of suspected breaches or information about the consideration of a matter under the Code of Conduct or its procedures.
- 7.2.9 could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment
- 7.2.10 commits the Council to any action
- 7.2.11 violates an order made by a court
- 7.2.12 breaches copyright
- 7.2.13 advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business.

8 DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

- 8.1** All Media Statements provided by Council to the Media will be accurate and provided as soon as practicable, having regard to Media deadlines.
- 8.2** Council will take into account staff availability and time constraints of both Council Officials and the Media when responding to Media requests for information/interview.
- 8.3** All Council related Media enquiries should initially be directed to Council's Media and Communications Unit.
- 8.4** A Media Statement quoting a Council Official must not be issued without that person's knowledge and consent.
- 8.5** Council Officials should be aware that anything said to any Media representative may be published, and should be shared and managed accordingly.
- 8.6** Media Statements of Council must be approved by the General Manager or their delegate before release to the Media.
- 8.7** All Media engagement by Council Officials must be conducted in a professional, timely and respectful manner.

9 USE OF MEDIA DURING EMERGENCIES

- 9.1** During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, Council's Media and Communications Unit will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of the Council.
- 9.2** Council Officials must not provide comment or information to the media that is inconsistent with official advice issued by the Council and any other agency coordinating the emergency response.
- 9.3** Training on Media engagement during emergencies will be provided to Councillors and relevant Council Officials as required.

10 MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN THE LEAD UP TO ELECTIONS

- 10.1** 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.

- 10.2** 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 Council or produced by Council with Council resources.

11 BREACHES AND COMPLAINTS AS PER THIS POLICY

- 11.1** To ensure compliance with the different legislative and regulatory requirements Council is obligated to conform with, the following is not permitted under any circumstance and will constitute a breach of this policy:
- 11.1.1 Offensive, humiliating, bullying, threatening, intimating, profane or abusive language;
 - 11.1.2 Information which is false, misleading or defamatory;
 - 11.1.3 Behaviour, comments or remarks which are discriminatory or could constitute bullying or harassment within the meaning of the Code of Conduct, including in relation to a person or group based on age, colour, creed, disability, family status, gender, nationality, marital status, parental status, political opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, race or social origin, religious beliefs/activity, responsibilities, sex or sexual orientation;
 - 11.1.4 Behaviour, comments or information which is illegal or designed to encourage law breaking;
 - 11.1.5 Behaviour, comments or information which would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks);
 - 11.1.6 Making comments that have the capacity to bring Council into disrepute;
 - 11.1.7 Behaviour that is contrary to their duties under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (NSW) and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by Council to ensure workplace health and safety;
 - 11.1.8 Behaviour that would otherwise be in breach of Council's Code of Conduct and any other legislation.
- 11.2** Any complaints or breaches under this policy should be lodged and managed in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct and/or Council's Complaints Handling Policy.
- 11.3** Complaints regarding the handling of personal information should be lodged as a privacy complaint in accordance with Council's Privacy Management Plan.
- 11.4** Complaints lodged in accordance with clause 11.2 may still be assessed and deemed to be a privacy complaint. Such deemed privacy complaints will be referred to the appropriate Council Official and dealt with in accordance with Council's Privacy Management Plan.

12 RECORDS MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

Records management

- 12.1** Media content created and received by Council Officials 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* (NSW). These records must also be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* (NSW) and the Council's approved records management policies and practices.

Privacy and personal information handling

- 12.2** Any personal information collected and received by Council Officials in their dealings with the Media or when creating Media content will be used for Media engagement by Council Officials. This personal information may also be used for related administrative functions, compliance and complaint handling, internal auditing and in accordance with Council's [Privacy Management Plan](#) and [Privacy Statement](#).

- 12.3** Individuals may access, correct or update their personal information by visiting Council's website, contacting Council's Privacy Contact Officer on 4993 4100 or by sending an email to council@cessnock.nsw.gov.au.
- 12.4** Council Officials are responsible for ensuring personal information they collect or receive is protected as well as the privacy of those individuals.

13 POLICY DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Act	means the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> (NSW).
Authorised spokesperson	means a Council Official who has been given authorisation to communicate with the Media on behalf of Council.
Council	means Cessnock City Council.
Council Affairs	Includes matters before the elected Council and other Council affairs and business, policy, interpretation of policy, management of Council business or staff, or other matters that may commit Council's resources.
Council Official	includes Councillors, members of staff (permanent, casual or temporary), Council advisors, administrators, Council committee members, volunteers and delegates of Council.
Council Staff	Means members of staff of Council and includes committee members.
Councillors	Means the elected representative of Cessnock City Council.
Media	Means organisations that prepare or disseminate mass media information (including but not limited to newspapers, magazine, internet publishers, radio and television broadcasters), including reporters, journalists and researchers working for or on behalf of such organisations, either accredited with or regulated by a recognised media industry peak body, or that acts in accordance with the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance Code of Ethics for journalists and/or the Australian Press Council's Standards of Practice and Advisory Guidelines.
Media Channels	Means print or electronic publications, including, but not limited to television, radio, newspapers, magazines, newsletter, digital media, internet and social media.
Media Statement	Any verbal or written statement provided to the Media or published on Media Channels.
Personal information	means 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
Social media	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.

14 POLICY AUTHORISATIONS

Note: The General Manager may update this section to appoint a new/additional Communications and Engagement Manager at any time, without the need to report to Council for adoption.

No.	Authorised Function	Authorised Business Unit / Role(s)
	Be Council's designated spokesperson on operational and administrative matters and communicate with the Media.	General Manager
	Act as Council's designated spokesperson and communicate with the Media when sub-delegated in accordance with this policy.	Council Officials
	Draft, approve and distribute any outgoing material for the Media; Respond to the Media and Media enquiries; Brief the Mayor, General Manager and other relevant Council Officials on issues that may generate media interest; Identify and embrace the opportunities presented by the Media and actively pursue positive Media exposure in a professional manner.	Communications and Engagement Manager

15 POLICY ADMINISTRATION

Directorate	Corporate and Community Services		
Responsible Officer	Communications and Engagement Manager		
Associated Procedure	N/A		
Policy Review Date	20 August 2025	Is this a local policy pursuant to Part 3, Chapter 7 of the <i>Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)</i> ?	No
Document Reference Number	DOC2014/002728 (Final web version) DOC2024/181301 (Word version)		
This policy supports Council's compliance with the following legislation: – Division 2 of Part 2, Clause 26 of Schedule 1, <i>Defamation Act 2005</i> (NSW) – Part 2 of <i>State Records Act 1998</i> (NSW) – <i>Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009</i> (NSW) – <i>Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998</i> (NSW)			
This policy contributes to the achievement of the following desired outcome or objectives as per Council's Delivery Program: – Objective 5.2: Encouraging more community participation in decision.			
Related Documents (include reference document numbers)	▪ Code of Conduct (DOC2018/086716) ▪ Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct (DOC2018/086682)		

	▪ Code of Meeting Practice (DOC2018/103094) ▪ Complaints Handling Policy (DOC2018/048382) ▪ Complaints Handling Procedure (DOC2019/123194) ▪ Records Management Policy (DOC2019/038769) ▪ Social Media Protocol (DOC2018/008576) ▪ Social Media Policy (DOC2014/002471) ▪ Social Media Community Guidelines (DOC2024/181299) ▪ Privacy Management Plan (DOC2014/005148) ▪ Privacy Statement
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16 POLICY HISTORY

Revision	Date Approved / Authority	Description Of Changes
1	7 July 2004 / (GM29/2004 - 60)	New policy adopted
2	7 November 2007 / (GM55/2007 - 779)	Policy Review
3	18 September 2013 / (PM91/2013 – 581)	Policy Review
4	7 May 2019 / (GMU5/2019)	Policy Review
5	17 September 2025 / (CC59/2025)	Policy Review Incorporation of the Office of Local Government's Model Media Policy New policy template