

# COUNCIL POLICY



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| <b>Policy name</b> | Communications and Media Engagement Policy |
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| <b>Abstract</b>   |
| This policy provides the framework for Gunnedah Shire Council's internal and external communications, including detail on how Councillors and Council Staff will engage with the media. |

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| <b>Dates</b>               | Policy or amendment approved 15 Jul 2015<br>Policy or amendment takes effect 15 Jul 2015<br>Policy is due for review (up to 4 years) 15 Jul 2019   |
| <b>Endorsed by</b>         | Executive Management Team  |
| <b>Approved by</b>         | Gunnedah Shire Council, at its Ordinary Meeting of Council held 15 Jul 2015<br>Resolution number: 9.07/15  |
| <b>Policy Custodian</b>    | Manager Customer and Community Relations   |
| <b>Relevant to</b>         | Residents of Gunnedah Shire Local Government Area<br>Councillors<br>Staff  |
| <b>Superseded Policies</b> | Communications Policy (6 January 1999)<br>Communications and Media Engagement Policy (18 December 2013)<br>Communications and Media Engagement Policy (19 November 2014)   |
| <b>Related documents</b>   | Code of Conduct – Policy<br>Community Engagement Framework – Policy, Matrix and Toolkit<br>The Art of Communication - Communications Strategy<br>Internal Reporting Policy – Public Interest Disclosure<br>Council's Instrument of delegation to the General Manager<br>Operational Plan |
| <b>Related legislation</b> | Local Government Act 1993<br>Local Government (General) Regulations 2005   |
| <b>File number</b>         | 878137   |

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### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 To provide a framework that guides how Gunnedah Shire Council (GSC) and staff communicate with the community and communicate internally within the organisation.
- 1.2 This policy also identifies structured lines of authority for providing comment to the media on behalf of GSC.

### **2. Scope**

This policy encompasses the following:

- Activities involved in the production and dissemination of all key messages, collateral and information to residents, ratepayers and visitors with reference but not limited to Council policies, decisions, programs and services;
- Management of Councils Corporate Identity;
- Interaction and engagement with the public including the use of multifaceted communication channels;
- Identifies the media process for the information of Councillors and Council employees;
- All external communication with specific reference to representations of GSC in the media;
- Management of the communication of issues of strategic and /or operational importance and value;
- Research and analysis of public information needs;
- Monitoring and evaluation of communication initiatives and functions; and
- Informing members of the public of their obligations, rights and entitlements.

### **3. Definitions**

For the purpose of this policy, GSC means elected officials and all staff employed by GSC.

### **4. Policy principles**

GSC will:

- Establish and maintain a good working relationship with media outlets;
- Be proactive in providing information to relevant media outlets about issues of interest to the community;
- Be timely in handling all incoming media enquiries and where possible will provide a response to media enquiries within the stipulated timeframe;
- Inform the community of key Council decisions, services, programs and initiatives;
- Promote transparency and accountability in relation to Council's decision making processes;
- Represent the views of the community and act as an advocate to the State and Federal Governments;
- Encourage public engagement through the provision of information and consultation in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Framework and Communications Strategy;
- Provide up-to-date and accurate information through communication channels and via formats that meet the needs of all community members;
- Ensure the Council is visible and identifiable to the public;
- Ensure that a communication strategy is an integral component of decision making;
- Foster a cooperative and collaborative approach to communication across divisions;
- Deliver value for money and meet all legislated procurement requirements in relation to outsourced communication services;
- Ensure that announcements are consistent with the policies and decisions of Council; and
- Ensure that any matters that are of a controversial or sensitive nature, or that require expert knowledge are appropriately researched and prepared in consultation with relevant stakeholders including other Councillors or senior staff.

GSC also notes the importance of the following basic principles:

- Visibility
- Simplicity
- Value
- Variety
- Responsiveness
- Consultation
- Consistency
- Evaluation

In all forms of communication, including verbal, printed or electronic, Councillors and staff are expected to adhere to the highest standards of ethical practice, professional competence and seek advice from relevant stakeholders.

## 5. Policy statement

### 5.1 Communications

GSC will utilise the following methods to communicate with the public.

- Face-to-face contact
- Written correspondence
- Telephone contact
- Email
- Websites
- Media releases
- Corporate Identity
- Radio and television interviews
- Local, regional and national newspapers
- Integrated Planning and Reporting Publications
- Printed collateral
- Council newsletters
- Signage
- Presence at events such as, but not limited to Ag-Quip
- Speeches
- Social media
- Public meetings
- Direct mail
- Rate notices
- On-hold phone messages
- Displays
- Merchandise
- Key messages

### 5.2 Media Engagement

The Mayor, or Deputy Mayor in the Mayor's absence, and the General Manager are the official spokespersons for GSC and can make comment on behalf of Council where: 1) statements are factual, 2) statements confirm Council's agreed position on a matter or its policy; and 3) statements are prepared in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including other Councillors or relevant senior staff.

All Media enquiries are to be directed to Councils Customer and Community Relations department for processing.

Following approval from the General Manager or with the General Manager's authority the relevant Director, Council employees may make media statements in their area of expertise, however must do so in consultation with the Manager Customer and Community Relations or his / her delegate.

Councillors and Council employees are not permitted to discuss legally sensitive or confidential matters with the media, in particular, current court cases or confidential legal advice.

If Council employees are approached by journalists, photographers or camera operators they should refer all enquiries relating to council operations to the Manager Customer and Community Relations.

Councillors are not required to seek the permission of the Mayor or General Manager when speaking to the media. However, they are requested to make it clear that they are either:

1. Representing Council in accordance with an adopted position, policy or procedure; and / or
2. Presenting their individual point of view.

In doing so Councillors are to ensure:

- As a member of Council there should be acknowledgement and respect for the decision making processes of the Council;
- Information of a confidential nature must not be communicated until it is no longer treated as a confidential matter;
- Information relating to the decisions of Council on approvals should only be communicated in an official capacity by a designated officer;
- Information concerning adopted policies, procedures and decisions of Council is conveyed accurately. Matters of a technical nature should involve the assistance of an appropriately qualified staff member);
- Councillors are required to advise the Manager Customer and Community Relations of any media statements as deemed practically possible; and
- Any statement is factually correct and consistent with the appropriately established position of Council, or other appropriately formed statements which possibly may be provided at the time on behalf of Council.

### 5.3 Media Releases and Media Statements

Media releases and statements are the preferred method of communication with media outlets and are to be drafted by the responsible policy area within Council and then provided to the Customer and Community Relations Department approval.

The Customer and Community Relations Department is responsible for ensuring that all quotes are authorised prior to publication.

The Manager Customer and Community Relations must review all releases and statements to determine if the content is sensitive.

In instances where the content is of a sensitive nature, approval must be obtained from the General Manager prior to the release or statement being sent to Customer and Community Relations for approval.

In instances where the content is of a non-operational nature, approval must be obtained from the Mayor, and the General Manager must be informed prior to the release or statement being sent to Customer and Community Relations for approval.

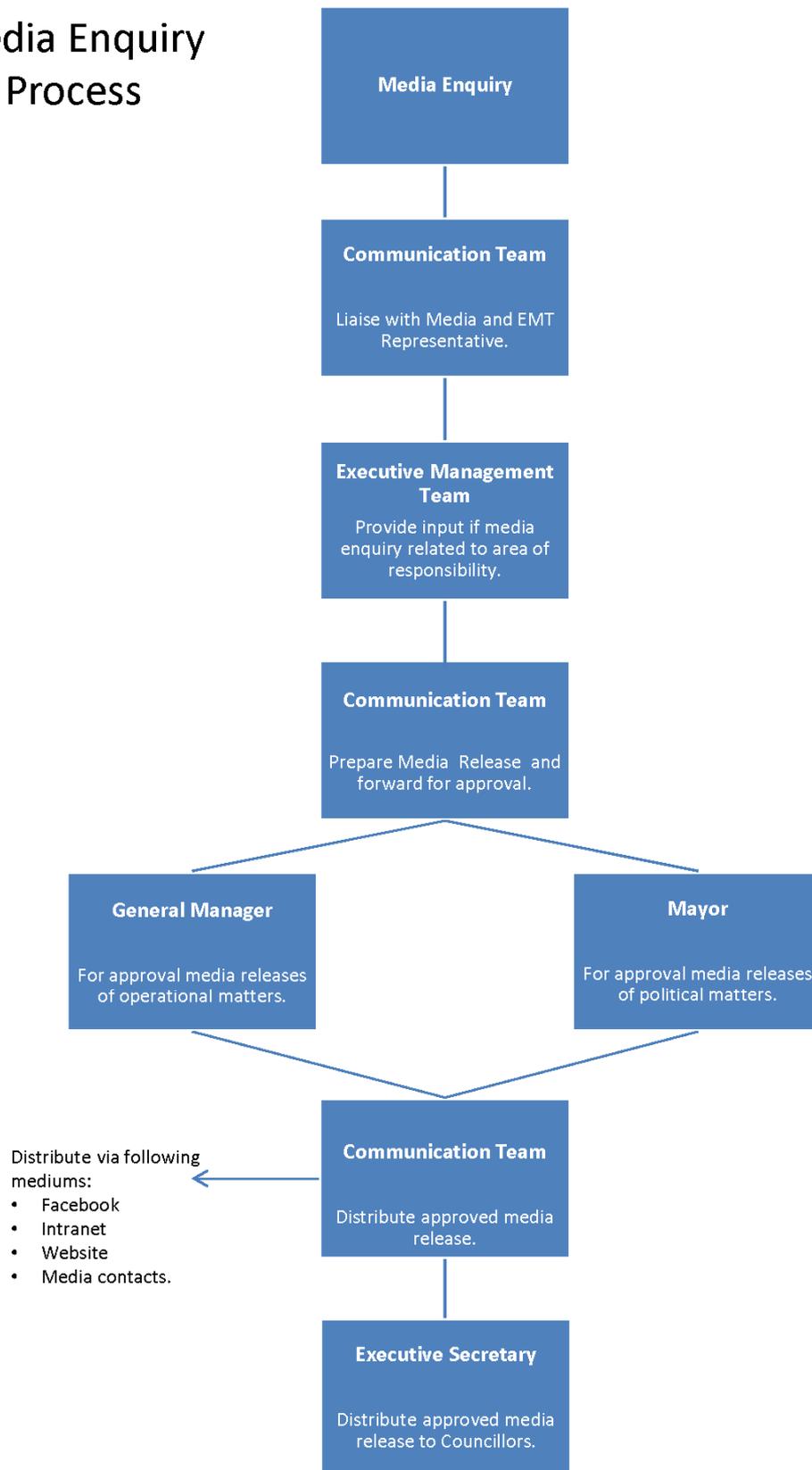
As appropriate, in instances where there is potential for community concern, it is of integral importance that all Senior Managers are informed of the release or statement and are briefed on its implications for the organisation prior to release.

In all other cases where the content is deemed standard, the Manager Customer and Community Relations is responsible for authorising media releases and statements prior to distribution to media.

The Manager Customer and Community Relations must send all releases to Councillors via the General Managers Executive Assistant at the same time as sending to the media. Media releases will be uploaded onto Councils website and intranet for all staff.

5.4 Media Enquiry Model

## Media Enquiry Process



## 5.5 Preparation of Advertisements

All adverts and public notices for inclusion in printed publications, radio, television and web based publications must be approved by Council's Manager Customer and Community Relations or his/her delegate prior to release.

In instances where the content is of a sensitive nature, approval must be obtained from the General Manager prior to the advert / notice being sent to Customer and Community Relations for approval.

In instances where the content is of a non-operational nature, approval must be obtained from the Mayor and the General Manager informed prior to the advert being sent to Customer and Community Relations for approval.

As appropriate, in instances where there is potential for community concern, it is of integral importance that all relevant managers and staff which are reasonably expected to field enquiries, or be expected to be aware and familiar with its content, are informed of the notice / advert and are briefed on its implications for the organisation prior to publication.

Adverts and public notices are to be sent to [mediarelease@infogunnedah.com.au](mailto:mediarelease@infogunnedah.com.au) for approval, allowing two days for approval to be granted.

To enhance customer service delivery, please ensure that Council's main phone number (02 6740 2100) is the only contact number listed in adverts and public notices.

Exemptions may apply to selected services such as the Gunnedah Shire Library, Gunnedah Memorial Pool, Gunnedah Waste Management Facility, Community Care, The Civic and Gunnedah Visitor Information Centre.

Exemptions are at the discretion of the Manager Customer and Community Relations and will be made in consultation with Department Managers.

## 5.6 Web content

Each department is responsible for ensuring their digital content on corporate websites is current, accurate and of community interest.

## 5.7 Presentations

All employees invited to present or speak at an official function on behalf of Council, must seek their manager's approval before accepting the invitation to speak.

Presenters are encouraged to liaise with Customer and Community Relations to formulate key messages and ensure the presentation is well structured.

## **6. Accountability, roles and responsibilities**

### **6.1 Policy Custodian**

Manager Customer and Community Relations

### **6.2 Responsible Officer**

Manager Customer and Community Relations

### **6.3 Roles**

The General Manager must play an active and visible role in steering and maintaining a visible communication function for GSC.

The General Manager leads, and is responsible for, the overall management of communications and its integration with other key functions, particularly policy and program management. The General Manager champions the Council's internal communications.

The Manager Customer and Community Relations has responsibility for approving all media releases, media statements, providing strategic advice and support on communications issues to GSC, managing day-to-day media relations, including media enquiries and releases, and coordinating and overseeing the effective communication of GSC policies, programs and services.

## **7. Acknowledgements**

The following acknowledgements are made recognising institutions or documents that have provided a basis, instructive comment or templates that have been used to develop Council's Communication and Media Engagement Policy.

- Tasmanian Government 'Communications Policy.'
- Liverpool Plains Shire Council 'Communications Policy.'
- Local Government Association 'Model Council Communications Plan and Guide.'

## 8. Version control and change history

| Date        | Version | Approved by & resolution no.                       | Amendment   |
|-------------|---------|--|---|
| 2 Oct. 12   | 1       | MANEX endorsed on 17 October subject to amendments | Minor   |
| 23 Oct. 12  | 2       | Circulated post MANEX                              | No amendments suggested   |
| 21. Nov. 12 | 3       | Prepared for Council                               |   |
| 12 Dec. 12  | 4       | Prepared for Council                               | Following requested changes by Mayor Owen Hasler, amendments have been made to media engagement section and communications policy and media engagement policy have been merged. |
| 09 Dec. 13  | 5       | Prepared for Council                               | Amendments made to incorporate new title of Customer Relations and to clarify media release approval process.   |
| 31 Oct. 14  | 6       | Prepared for Council                               | Policy updated to include media process flowchart and firmer guidelines for media processes.  |
| 23 Jun. 15  | 7       | Prepared for Council                               | Amendments made to add further clarification around acceptable practices.   |
| 15 Jul 2015 | 8       | Resolution 9.07/15                                 |   |