

Document Name	Document Version Number	Review Date
Media Policy	1.0.3	September 2021
Date Adopted	Minute Number	Status
20 December 2017	4877	Major Revision

## Purpose

The Media Policy has the following objectives:

- To inform the community of the Greater Hume Council services, activities and achievements
- To effectively promote Greater Hume's liveability, tourism and economic opportunities
- To effectively communicate information during an emergency or crisis
- To ensure consistency and co-ordination by Councillors and staff in dealing with the media
- To promote open exchange of information between Council and the media
- To limit the publication of inaccurate information which promotes conflict, embarrassment or legal issues for employees and Councillors
- To limit the possibility of miscommunication and reputation risk
- To promote positive media relationships
- To clearly indicate Council's authorised spokespersons
- To ensure appropriate authorisation and responsibility for information provided
- To ensure that Council's communication principles are maintained - honest and accurate content, purposeful, written in plain English, jargon free, inclusive and where appropriate, confidential.

## Scope

This Media Policy is one of a suite of communication vehicles Greater Hume Council uses to inform the public of Council activities, policies and events.

This policy provides a framework for Councillors and staff to use to promote positive coverage of Council affairs that is fair, accurate and reliable.

This policy applies to Councillors, employees, volunteers and Section 355 Committee members.

## Definitions

Media – official, registered publications and official, registered online news sites.

Public Relations material – official speeches, promotional literature and website content.

Policy - a set of ideas or a plan of what to do in particular situations that has been agreed to officially by Council.

Topical Issues - are current and of a local interest (not necessarily related to Council business).

High profile – contemporary issues which have generated a high media profile and therefore strong community interest (may not be related to Council business).

Operational matters - relating to the day to day running of Council that are not deemed to be political or likely to come before the council.

Technical expertise - refers to the underlying knowledge and skills that are necessary to carry out duties or complete a task.

Online material - All of Council's online material including the websites and social media presence.

### **Policy Content**

Greater Hume Council is committed to open communication to its community through the media. Proactive media relations and well managed public relations are essential if Council is to achieve resident satisfaction with Council.

Council will be open and honest in its dealings with the media while at the same time complying with its duty of care to protect confidential or personal information and not infringe any laws in providing information.

Council and its representatives will not knowingly provide information which is misleading or inaccurate.

Council will make all reasonable attempts to deal with media enquiries promptly and accurately.

Council will treat media organisations and their representatives equally and without bias.

The Mayor is Council's official spokesperson on matters of policy and interpretation of Council's position or decisions. In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor will be Council's spokesperson on these matters. At the discretion of the Mayor, the General Manager may be authorised to speak on such matters.

The General Manager will be Council's spokesperson on operational matters. The General Manager may, however, direct staff members to speak to the media on matters relating to their particular area of responsibility or technical expertise. In all instances staff must only give technical or factual information and not provide personal opinions.

With regard to topical issues and high profile contemporary issues, the Mayor and the General Manager will confer on how to respond.

### Councillors and The Media

As elected community representatives, councillors may express their personal view on any matter to the media, providing it is clearly understood that the views expressed are not necessarily the views of Council. Councillors may represent Council to the media only with the approval of the Mayor.

Specifically:

1. Every Councillor has a right to express a private opinion on any issue, whether or not that opinion reflects Council's official position, but Councillors must carefully identify the role in which they speak or write.
2. Whenever Councillors publicly express their own opinions they must make it clear they are speaking for themselves, unless delegated by the mayor, and not for Council, unless they are supporting a Council position.
3. When Councillors speak "for the Council" when delegated by the Mayor, they must express and support Council's entire policy on the issue at hand.
4. Councillors are to be cognisant of the Council's Model Code of Conduct when speaking to the media.
5. Councillors are encouraged to seek the assistance of the General Manger prior to making public statements to ensure the information is factually accurate.

### Approval

Statements to the media on behalf of Council, such as media releases and responses to specific questions from the media, must be approved by the General Manager in all circumstances. In instances where the Mayor is quoted or the subject matter relates to Council policy or contentious issues, the Mayor will also approve.

Council employees who receive requests direct from media representatives shall decline to comment and report the request to an Executive Assistant who will inform the General Manager.

### Council employees

Council employees may communicate with the media as private individuals, with the following restrictions -

- they comply with Council's Model Code of Conduct
- they do not comment on Council business or policy
- they are not identified as Council employees.

### Media Releases

Staff may prepare draft media releases which are to be forwarded to an Executive Assistant for editing and to check formatting.

Greater Hume Council media releases must never be issued without the prior approval of the General Manager, the Mayor where appropriate, or delegated authority.

A media release must never be issued quoting a Councillor or member of staff without that person's prior knowledge and approval.

Staff with specialist knowledge may be quoted in media releases with the permission of the relevant delegated authority.

Once a media release is approved by the Mayor and General Manager the Executive Assistant will be responsible for distribution.

All media releases are to be presented on the Media Release template.

Executive Assistants maintain a core Media List of media and community contact emails.

All media releases will be posted to Council's website, emailed to all staff and councillors.

The General Manager and Executive Assistant will determine if a post to Council's social media platforms is required and determine relevant hashtags.

All new employees will be given Council's Media Policy as a part of the induction process.

### **Links to Policy**

- Communications Policy
- Stakeholder Engagement Policy (once adopted)
- Social Media Policy

### **Links to Procedure**

Media Release template is available under 'Greater Hume Council' word templates which all staff can access via templates.

Official spokespersons are to be offered media training.

### **Links to Forms**

Media Release template

### **References**

Communications Strategy and Implementation Plan

### **Responsibility**

The Mayor and the General Manager are Council's official spokespersons on all matters.

The General Manager may nominate other staff to act as spokespeople for the Council.

The Mayor may nominate another Councillor to speak on a particular matter.

No staff member, other than those authorised by the General Manager is to handle an enquiry from the media without prior approval.

Information given to the media of a controversial, legal or ethical nature requires the approval of the General Manager and/or the Mayor.

Executive Assistants are responsible for the distribution of the approved media release.

### **Document Author**

Executive Assistant – Governance and Economic Development

### **Relevant Legislation**

Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009

Copyright Act 1879

Defamations Act 2005

Privacy and Personal Information Act 1988

Model Code of Conduct

### **Associated Records**

All media releases approved by General Manager are to be uploaded to Infoxpert folder Community Relations/Media Liaison/Media Releases/Outgoing, once issued.