

**Policy Number: SVC –COR-PO-024-01**

## **AIM**

To ensure that the relationship between Council and the media is well managed, consistent and accurate in order to maximise communication opportunities and minimise the risk of adverse publicity.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Snowy Valleys Council Media Procedure.

## **LEGISLATION**

### ***Relevant Legislation:***

Government Information (Public Access) Act 2010

Copyright Act 1968

Defamation Act, (NSW) 2005

Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998

### ***Relevant Council Policies***

Code of Conduct

Delegations of Authority

Media Policy for Mayor and Councillors – SVC-COR-PO-028

## **DEFINITIONS:**

**Media:** Any commercial, community or citizen publishing entity or property. This includes all digital and traditional publications, sites or applications.

**Council's Digital Assets:** Any page published on the internet where content is moderated and controlled by Council staff or third party contractors on Council's behalf.

**Social media:** User-driven online tools and publishing platforms based on interaction, collaboration or conversation. Includes, but is not limited to social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ and Instagram.

**Online content:** Any comments or images posted on Council's digital assets including, but not limited to, Council's website(s), YouTube and social media platforms.

**Media release:** A written statement issued by Council that provides information or states Council's position on a matter of council business, policy or public interest.

**Media comment:** A verbal or written statement issued by Council that states Council's position on a matter of council business, policy or public interest.

**Council spokesperson:** The designated official spokesperson for the matter.

## **SCOPE**

This policy applies to all Council officials as defined in the Code of Conduct and includes Councillors, employees and members of council committees (including Section 355 committees) of the Snowy Valleys Council.

## **POLICY OBJECTIVES**

- To implement a consistent, proactive approach to the promotion of Council initiatives, projects and media management.
- To promote an open exchange of information between Council and the media
- To facilitate accurate and timely responses for the media.
- To minimise the risk of inaccurate information being published that may bring Council's reputation into disrepute.
- To clearly identify the roles and responsibilities in respect to their interactions with the media.
- To ensure appropriate authorisation and responsibility for providing information for media relations.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

In line with our organisational values and Community Engagement Framework, the following principles govern our interactions with the media:

1. Integrity and transparency – employees and Councillors should be open, honest and reliable when engaging with the media, conducting activities professionally and ethically.
2. Respect - employees and Councillors should respect the people they communicate with through media, valuing different opinions and endeavouring to build effective relationships.
3. Innovation and continuous improvement – employees and Councillors should aim to improve their media performance, by listening to their audience and engaging with them.
4. Accountability – employees and Councillors should take personal accountability for what they say and do while interacting with the media.
5. Courage – employees and Councillors should have the courage to use media as a way of engaging with our community, where appropriate.

## **Staff and the media**

1. Media enquiries should be directed through the Communications Officer.
2. Council staff should not speak to or approach the media about matters relating to Council unless authorised to do so.
3. Council employees may speak to the media or submit Letters to the Editor as private individuals, ensuring that:
  - a. They do not comment on Council business or policy;
  - b. They are not identified as Council employees;
  - c. Their comments are not perceived as representing official Council position or policy.
4. When deemed appropriate and authorised by the General Manager, a Council staff member may become the sole spokesperson on a specific issue, event or initiative within their operational portfolio to ensure consistency of message.
5. Council staff should avoid providing information 'off the record' during media interviews.

## **Councillors and the media**

1. All Councillors have a right to express a private opinion on any issue, regardless of whether that opinion supports or reflects Council's official position, however if their opinion does not support Council's decision they should then indicate the formal Council decision on the matter in addition to their opinion on the matter.
2. Councillors must be clear that they are speaking as individuals and not on behalf of Council;
3. Councillors may issue media releases under their own name, however any announcements, launches or timelines for council projects are to be made in an official council media release.
4. Councillors are required to seek a briefing by the General Manager or other responsible staff member on topics for which they are the authorised spokesperson.
5. If a Councillor has taken a lead role in a specific project or initiative, they will assume spokesperson responsibilities.

## **Social Media**

Snowy Valleys Council encourages the appropriate and professional use of social media to aid the efficient and effective conduct of Council business and to promote its various services, activities, programs and events.

Social media is recognised as an important channel used in conjunction with traditional methods to communicate, listen to, engage and collaborate with the community and enhance the delivery of services.

At all times, use of social media by Council staff should be done in a professional manner in accordance with relevant policies and legislation, and consistent with Council's values.

### **a) Authorisation to comment**

Official social media accounts refer to any Snowy Valleys Council managed social media account, profile, platform or presence.

Comments made through official social media accounts are representative of Council and can only be made by those staff members authorised to do so under delegation by the General Manager.

### **b) Personal use of social media**

Personal or private use of social media by a staff member is considered to be a private matter. Staff are required to consider the Code of Conduct when making any form of comment about an elected member of Snowy Valleys Council or staff member.

Staff members making public comment on a private social media account must make it clear that any comment relating to Council are not official, and that they are speaking on behalf of themselves.

Staff members must ensure that any personal comments do not compromise their capacity to perform their role in an unbiased manner. Comments relating to Council and its programs and activities should not be derogatory, and all care must be taken that confidential information relating to council is not revealed on a private social media platform.

## **Defamation**

When making comment in any form of media (including online), staff members and Councillors should familiarise themselves with the provisions contained in the Defamation Act 2005.

As a guide, published materials that identifies a person (not necessarily by name) and meets any of the following criteria may be considered defamatory:

- Exposes a person to ridicule
- Lowers the person's reputation in the eyes of the community
- Causes people to shun or avoid the person
- Damages the person's professional reputation

## **Record Management**

Comments and interactions that take place on Council's social media accounts are deemed to be official records as per the State Records Act 1998.

Staff are to ensure that content related to their respective area is to be appropriately recorded in Council's record management system.

## **Breaches**

Any deviations by Councillors to this policy may be deemed to constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct and appropriate action will be taken.

Any deviations by staff to this policy are subject to disciplinary action.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Council – Elected members of Council**

Elected members of Council are responsible for the adoption of this Council policy and the consideration of resources towards the implementation of this policy.

Councillors are able to make comments to the media, provided that these comments are identified as their own personal opinion, and are not representing the official position of Council.

### **Mayor**

The Mayor is Council's official spokesperson on all policy, strategic and political matters and is the authorised signatory for Letters to the Editor on these issues.

### **General Manager**

The General Manager is Council's official spokesperson on all operational and administrative matters and is the authorised signatory for Letters to the Editor on these issues.

### **Directors and Division Managers**

Directors and Division Managers are able to make statements to the media providing there has been approval granted by the General Manager and consultation with the Communications Officer.

Directors and Division Managers are also responsible for the implementation, appropriate resourcing, compliance and monitoring of this policy and any associated procedures in their work area.

### **Communications Officer**

The Communications Officer:

- is the central point of contact for the majority of inbound media enquiries
- acts as a support to staff who wish to promote their activities, services, programs or events to the community through the media
- coordinates media responses and key messages
- reviews, edits and distributes media releases, official statements, editorials and background information to the media
- implements Council's proactive media program
- oversees Council's official social media platforms
- is the custodian of Council's corporate brand

### **Staff**

Council staff are responsible for notifying the communications team of any potential contentious or sensitive issues relating to Council as soon as the potential issue arises.

Staff are responsible for working collaboratively with the Communications Officer to develop and deliver timely, relevant and engaging communication pieces for the community.

### **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Council enjoys a regular, positive presence in relevant media, both traditional and online.

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Communications Officer

### **ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS**

**External** - Nil

**Internal** - Community Engagement Framework  
Communications Strategy and Plan  
Branding Guidelines  
Code of Conduct  
Media Policy for Mayor and Councillors – SVC-COR-PO-028  
Media Procedure – SVC-COR-PR-010

### **Superseding Policy No. and Title:**

GOV.14 – Communications Policy - Tumut Shire Council  
TSC-EXE-PO-118-0 – Social Media Policy - Tumbarumba Shire Council  
TSC-EXE-PO-94-01 – Press Releases Policy – Tumbarumba Shire Council

**Policy prepared by:** Communications Officer

**History table:**

<b>Version Control No</b>	<b>Development /Amendment Date</b>	<b>Approval Date</b>	<b>Resolution Number</b>	<b>Activity log</b>
0				Prepared by Communications Officer
0		22/02/2018	M031/18	Presented to Council meeting for public Exhibition
1		26/04/2018	M087/18	Adopted by Council