

Media

Council policy

1 Policy statement

We will uphold and promote the principles of openness, consistency, accuracy and timeliness in our dealings with media.

We will use various forms of media to keep our community informed and explain our decisions to build and promote community confidence in Council.

2 Scope

This policy applies to all Council representatives and employees, as well as representatives of media organisations.

3 Definitions

Council representative	Councillors, contractors, consultants, volunteers, delegates of the Council and members of Council committees who represent or act on behalf of Blacktown City Council.
Employee	Any person with an employment contract with Council who works on a full time, part time, casual or term contract basis.
Media	Any print, broadcast and online media used for communicating information to the public, including, but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, internet publishers, radio, and television broadcasters
Media Coordinator	a person appointed as set out at Section 5 of this policy
Personal information	Any 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	Any 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. Examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Yammer, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and Wikipedia
Volunteers	Any person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task. Any person who donates their time for an organisation without being paid.
We, us, our	Blacktown City Council

4 We will uphold and promote the principles of media engagement

4.1 We are committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of media engagement.

Openness	We will ensure that we promote an open exchange of information between our council and the media.
Consistency	We will ensure consistency by all councillors and staff when communicating with the media.
Accuracy	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	We will ensure that we respond to media enquiries in a timely manner.

5 We will administer media enquiries and statements through a Media Coordinator

5.1 We appoint a suitably qualified member(s) of council staff to coordinate media requests and/or media statements.

5.2 The Media Coordinator's role is to:

- a. be the lead point of contact for all media enquiries, requests for interviews, requests to film or photograph council staff, facilities or events for news and current affairs purposes, and during emergencies such as natural disasters or public health incidents (see section 8)
- b. be responsible for preparing all media statements prior to their release
- c. liaise with relevant staff members within the organisation where appropriate
- d. ensure that media statements are approved by the Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer prior to their release
- e. develop and/or approve media training and/or induction to be provided to relevant staff and/or councillors
- f. maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses
- g. ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias
- h. ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly
- i. provide guidance to councillors approached by the media for comment to avoid communication of misinformation
- j. ensure that all media releases are published on the Council's website.

6 We will be clear on who can engage with the media

6.1 The Mayor and Chief Executive Officer are the official spokespersons for Council and are responsible for ensuring that all media engagement by council officials is conducted in a professional, timely and respectful manner.

- a. The Chief Executive Officer is the official spokesperson for the Council on operational and administrative matters.

They 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).

- b. 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*).

If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as the Council's spokesperson.

The Mayor may delegate their role as spokesperson to other councillors where appropriate, (for example, where another councillor is best placed to comment, because the issue is of particular interest to them, or it is within their particular area of expertise).

6.2 Councillors are not spokespersons for Council.

- a. 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.
- b. When engaging with the media councillors:
- must not purport to speak for the Council unless authorised to do so
 - 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)
 - must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
 - must not disclose council information unless authorised to do so
 - must seek information and guidance from the Media Coordinator 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.
- c. 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.
- d. Where councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Media Coordinator.
- e. Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this policy to the Media Coordinator.

Also refer section 9

6.3 Staff are not spokespersons for Council.

- a. Council staff must not speak to the media about matters relating to the Council unless authorised by the Media Coordinator to do so.
- b. 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 Media Coordinator.
- c. 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.
- d. If authorised to speak to the media, Council staff:
 - must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
 - must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so by the Media Coordinator
 - must seek information and guidance from the Media Coordinator 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.
- e. Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the Media Coordinator.

6.4 We will provide media training to Council officials who engage or are authorised to engage with the media. For councillors, this will be provided as part of their induction or refresher training or as part of their ongoing professional development program.

7 We will set appropriate standards for conduct when engaging with the media

- 7.1 Any Council representative or employee must comply with our Code of conduct when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a council official.
- 7.2 They must not share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms that:
 - a. are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other council officials or members of the public
 - b. contains profane language or is sexual in nature
 - c. constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the *Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*, or is unlawfully discriminatory
 - d. 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
 - e. contains content about the Council, council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive
 - f. divulges confidential Council information

- g. breaches the privacy of other council officials or members of the public
- h. contains allegations of suspected breaches of the Council's code of conduct or information about the consideration of a matter under the *Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*
- i. could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment
- j. commits the Council to any action
- k. violates an order made by a court
- l. breaches copyright
- m. advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business

8 We will utilise the media during emergencies

- 8.1 During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the Media Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating media releases and statements on behalf of the Council.
- 8.2 Council representatives and employees 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. Regarding expression of personal views, Councillors should refer to Section 6.2 and Staff should refer to Section 6.3.
- 8.3 Training on media engagement during emergencies will be provided to councillors and relevant staff and other Council officials, as required.

9 Councillors may engage with the media as candidates in the lead up to elections

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 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 the council or produced by the council or with council resources.

10 We will maintain records of all media contact and content

- 10.1 We will ensure media content created and received by council representatives and/or employees acting in their official capacity is saved as a council record in line with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* and the Council's approved records management policies and practices.
- 10.2 We will make available any media content created and received by council representatives and/or employees in line with information access applications made under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*.

11 References and approvals

Category	Code of conduct
Reports	PO1689 GM340007, CEO440008
Date created	16 July 2014
Version	2
Last review	June 2024
Approval	Council
Next review	June 2028
Owner	Chief Executive Officer
Responsible officers	Executive Manager Communications and Marketing Media Coordinator
Related policies	Code of conduct Social media
Related delegations	n/a
Related law	Local Government Act 1993 Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 State Records Act 1989
Related documents	Office of Local Government's Model Media Policy Filming on public land application form
Attachments	nil