

MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOLS POLICY

STRATEGIC POLICY

Responsible Department:	Office of the General Manager
Responsible Section:	Community and Economy
Responsible Officer:	Department Leader – Community and Economy

Objective

The purpose of Cabonne Council's Media and Social Media Protocols Policy is to ensure the interface between Council and media/social media is managed appropriately to maximise the benefits for Council, and to minimise the risk of adverse publicity and misunderstanding due to inaccurate information or inappropriate sharing of information.

Cabonne Council has a clear corporate brand that is recognisable and presents Council as a professional and credible organisation. This Policy aims to protect the image and reputation of the organisation by clearly defining how media and social media should be engaged with, and establishes the framework which governs activities that ensure the organisation is professionally presented in a unified, responsive, consistent, lawful, and positive manner within media, digital, community, and social environments.

Introduction

Scope

This Policy applies to the Mayor, all Councillors, and Council staff when representing Council in the media/social media.

This Policy applies to verbal and written comments in the media, public speaking engagements, media releases and the use of social media.

Policy

Media – interviews, media releases, media statements

Any comment made to a journalist or member of a media organisation is to be consistent with Council's *Code of Conduct* and accurately reflect the decisions and values of Council. Cabonne Council's Community and Economy

team (Leader – Community and Economy and/or Communications and Marketing Coordinator) must be notified of any media queries made to elected officials or staff.

The Mayor and General Manager are Council's official spokespersons. In the event that the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor will generally fulfil the official spokesperson role.

Other Council staff and representatives may be authorised as a spokesperson to comment in the media on behalf of Cabonne Council on matters relevant to their accountability within Council. Only authorised Council spokespersons may be interviewed by the media or provide approved responses ensuring the community receives the most accurate information.

Approval as an authorised spokesperson will be made on a case-by-case basis, according to the subject matter of the enquiry. Approval may be granted by the Mayor or the General Manager.

Council recognises the important role the media plays in informing the public about the work of the Organisation and its facilities and businesses. Subject to operational and legal constraints, Council provides the media with as much information as is practical and possible about this work, as long as it is clearly in the public interest for such matters to be known.

Council employees may communicate with the media as private individuals provided:

- They do not comment on Council business or policy;
- They are not identified as Council employees;
- Their comments are not perceived as representing Council's official position or policy.

Council staff shall not engage in media activity which may be to the personal advantage or detriment of a Councillor.

During Local Government election campaigns, Councillors must ensure that their media comments are made as a candidate and are clearly distinguished from their role as a Councillor.

Council will not, for operational and legal reasons, comment on any matter that is the subject of an ongoing investigation or consideration, under consideration by the Land and Environment Court, a development matter being considered by Council, or where it is not in the public interest for the matter (or the details of the matter) to become publicly known. In some cases, an issue may be subjected to the public interest test (GIPA Act) to determine what information should/can be released, or information may be withheld to avoid potential defamation/privacy breaches.

The integrity and security of confidential documents, confidential matters in Council business papers, or information in an authorised media spokesperson's possession, or for which the spokesperson is responsible, must be maintained and managed in line with Council's *Code of Conduct*.

Council staff and elected officials should be aware of defamation laws when commenting in the media/social media.

As a guide, under Defamation Act 2005, published material that identifies a person (not necessarily by name) and meets any of the below criteria may be considered defamatory:

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

- Injures the person's professional reputation.

Statement of procedures for information being sent to the media

Cabonne Council media releases:

- Are to be prepared and co-ordinated based on information provided by the responsible Council officer.
- Should quote authorised Council spokespersons only.
- Must be approved by the Executive Leadership Team.
- Provide contact of the communications team to manage enquiries
- Must be distributed via e-mail to Councillors, Executive Staff, and key staff as required, and all local media and, when appropriate, targeted external media.
- Must be uploaded to the Cabonne Council website at the time of release.
- Filed in line with Council's Records Management Policy.
- Council spokespersons are to be available for interview to provide additional information, audio, footage, and photographs following the distribution of media releases (if required).

Media statements

A media statement is a written response provided to any media specifically prepared to address an enquiry.

- All media statements are to be co-ordinated by the Community and Economy team, with information to be provided by the responsible Council officer in a timely manner
- Should quote an authorised Council spokesperson
- Must be distributed via e-mail to the respective media outlet making the enquiry and the relevant Department Leader, and Executive Leadership Team notified.
- Filed in line with Council's Records Management Policy.

Media Interviews

A media interview is any conversation with a journalist - either by phone, or in person – that may be reported on by that journalist. The following protocols apply to Cabonne Council's authorised media spokespersons:

- Do not provide personal comment on, or speculate about, Council decisions, policy or issues
- At all times, adhere to the interview topic and the facts; avoid speculation
- The Community and Economy Team must be notified of any inaccurate quotations relating to the interview so that an appropriate response can be determined
- Ensure adequate preparation for the interview
- Be open, honest and co-operative
- Avoid saying 'no comment' if you are unsure how to answer a question; instead let the journalist know you will endeavour to get back to them with a response where possible
- Avoid providing comment (as opposed to factual information) - whether 'on' or 'off' the record – to the media

- In line with privacy legislation, do not provide client contact details (for example, details relating to volunteers, community members etc) or confidential information about a client to the media without prior permission from the client
- Where possible, all enquiries must be responded to on the day of the enquiry, unless otherwise negotiated through the Community and Economy Team and the respective journalist
- Intentionally providing misleading, or inaccurate information to the media, is considered a breach of this Policy and may be a breach of Cabonne Council's *Code of Conduct* Policy
- Be aware of defamation laws. Media interviews may be conducted in association with a planned media event, to provide additional information on approved media releases or as a response to a specific enquiry.

Social Media

Social media provides the platforms for creation and sharing of information and ideas via 'virtual communities' and online networks. Social media encourages and invites communication, collaboration, discussion, and debate. It also enables the development of social and professional networks, groups, followers, and contacts for users.

This policy relates and applies to social media platforms currently maintained by Council, which include:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- YouTube

Council's official social media platforms are administered by Council's Community and Economy Team to ensure consistency of content, brand compliance, accuracy, tone, and style.

Elected Officials and Cabonne Council staff should be aware that any social media activity or interaction, either official or personal, is public, permanently available, traceable, and able to be reproduced elsewhere.

Content, comments, and digital activity may also form part of an evidentiary brief in *Code of Conduct* matters, or in more serious matters, tendered as evidence, such as civil claims or investigations by the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) or police.

Elected Officials and Cabonne Council staff should also be aware that, whether they intend it or not, what they post online in a private capacity may reflect on Cabonne Council. They should therefore behave in a way that upholds the values and reputation of Council, consistent with the *Code of Conduct* and other policies.

Elected Officials and Cabonne Council staff are reminded that 'shares', 'likes' or 'retweets' may be viewed as an endorsement of the original post.

Elected Officials and Cabonne Council staff can make personal comments on their social media platforms but must make clear that any views are their own opinions as an individual and not those of Cabonne Council.

An Elected Official's personal social media platform must include a disclaimer to the following effect:

"The views expressed, and comments made on this social media platform are my own and not that of the Council".

Elected Officials must also ensure that their use of social media, and Council's IT resources or other mobile/telephone devices, is consistent with Council's *Code of Conduct*.

Council media releases and other content that has been authorised according to this Policy may be uploaded onto and Elected Official's social media platform. Elected Officials and Cabonne Council staff may, in consultation with the Community and Economy team, upload publicly available Council information onto their social media platforms.

Emergencies

Only authorised and accurate public information should be posted in relation to emergencies. Information should not be posted that contradicts advice and public information issued by the agency coordinating the emergency response.

In the event of an emergency, publishing information on Council owned and operated social media sites is the responsibility of the Community and Economy team, with approval from the General Manager or their delegate.

Breaches of this Policy

Breaches of this policy by Elected Officials may result in an investigation of the alleged breach in line with Council's complaint handling policy, the Local Government *Guidelines on Investigations*, and the *Code of Conduct*.

Complaints should be referred to Cabonne Council's General Manager in the first instance, in accordance with the NSW Office of Local Government's *Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*.

Breaches of this policy by Council staff may result in the staff member being subject to the *Safe and Respectful Behaviours* procedure, and may be considered a breach of Council's *Code of Conduct*.

Standards of Conduct

For the purposes of Cabonne Council's standards of conduct, third parties engaging on social media platforms must not post or share comments, photos, videos, electronic recordings, or other information that:

- Is defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to Council officials or members of the public.
- Contains profane language or is sexual in nature.
- Constitutes harassment and/or bullying as prescribed in Cabonne Council's *Code of Conduct*, or is unlawfully discriminatory.
- Contains content about the Council, Council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive.
- Breaches the privacy of Council officials or members of the public.
- Contains allegations of suspected breaches of Cabonne 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*.
- Violates an order made by a court.
- Breaches copyright.
- Advertises, endorses or solicits commercial products or business.
- Constitutes spam.
- Would be in breach of the rules of the social media platform.

Removal of Content

Where a person uploads content onto a social media platform that is of a kind specified under our *Standards of Conduct*, the moderator may remove that content.

Prior to removal, the moderator must make a record of the content (for example, a screenshot). If the moderator removes content, they must, where practicable, notify the person who uploaded the content that it has been removed and the reason(s) for its removal.

If a person uploads content that contravenes this policy, that person may be blocked or banned from Council's social media platforms.

References

- Cabonne Council Brand, Style and Writing Guidelines
- Community Engagement Policy
- Social Media Acceptable Use Protocols

History

Minute No.	Summary of Changes	New Version Date
06/11/08	Media Policy	7 November 2006
10/10/16	Adopted by Council at October 2010 meeting	18 October 2010
13/09/30	Readopted as per s165(4)	17 September 2013
18/07/14	Social Media included. Section about Chairpersons talking to media on behalf of Council deleted. Section on wards deleted. Section on economic development taking precedence on Council website deleted. Job titles updated	24 July 2018
22/03/14	Complete edit of policy, including clauses from Model Social Media Policy. Update of terms, job titles, and positions within the organisational structure.	22 March 2022