



PITTWATER COUNCIL

Council Policy – No 196	Adopted:	OM: 04.11.2013
	Reviewed:	
	Amended	
	Revoked	

TITLE:	MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY
STRATEGY:	CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY
BUSINESS UNIT:	ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE
RELEVANT LEGISLATION:	GOVERNMENT INFORMATION (PUBLIC ACCESS) ACT 2009 (GIPA) LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1993
RELATED POLICIES:	NO. 165 - PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION NO. 170 - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY NO. 134 - PRIVACY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Objective

To set out approved guidelines for all forms of communication with the public on Pittwater Council's behalf.

To ensure the media are provided with factually correct and timely information.

To reinforce to the public and staff that the Mayor and the General Manager are the chief spokespersons for the Council.

To uphold the principles of open government as set out by Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 and Pittwater's Strategic Plan, *Pittwater 2025*.

Background

The Media & Communications Policy is administered by the Community Relations team in the Administration & Governance business unit of Council. The Council's Community Relations team is responsible for:

- booking, editing and proofing the Council's newspaper advertising
- upholding and strengthening the Pittwater Council brand through graphic design, imagery, colours and logos
- overseeing and editing external communication materials including those online
- issuing all media releases and distributing online and via social media
- acting as the Council spokesperson under delegation from the General Manager

- arranging media interviews, photo opportunities and media conferences as required
- assisting with the Council's strategic communications planning
- editing and writing speeches
- publication of the quarterly residents newsletter The Pittwater Report and the monthly e-newsletter The Pittwater Report Online
- scripting and production of videos as required
- managing the Council's social media presence
- enhancing the Council's image/profile through controlled campaigns using print and electronic communications
- organising civic events as required eg. citizenship ceremonies, Australia Day events, Volunteers Christmas Party.

POLICY STATEMENT

External communications

All external communication materials must uphold the Pittwater Council brand, including logos, imagery, design elements and approved corporate colours. The Community Relations team is responsible for ensuring these materials uphold the Pittwater Council brand and follow approved corporate standards.

All external communications should use a plain English approach wherever possible. We recognise that members of the public are generally not experts on subjects we are communicating about and our choice of words should reflect this.

We believe that the future of external communication is online, either web-based or via social media. However we also acknowledge that some members of the public do not have access to online communication for a variety of reasons. On that basis online communication materials should also be made available as paper-based copies wherever possible.

We believe in integrating external communication wherever possible so the widest audience can be reached. On that basis, communication on a particular topic or issue will utilise a range of methods which includes but is not limited to the website, print advertising and promotional material such as brochures, posters, video, social media and the media. External communication on issues of major concern or importance should have an accompanying community engagement plan where feedback from the local community is actively sought.

References to a third party which are derogatory or defamatory must be avoided at all times. This includes comments by staff distributed by email or on social media sites when the staff member concerned identifies themselves as an employee of the Council.

Text, photographs or other images sourced from a third party may be subject to copyright law. If so, the owner of the text or image must give consent before the material is used in any Council publication. A printed acknowledgement or royalty fee may also be applicable.

Images of children aged under 18 must not be published in any form unless a consent form has been completed and signed by the parent/guardian concerned.

There are five types of Council advertising:

- Corporate ie. community noticeboard fortnightly in the Manly Daily (coordinated by Community Relations)
- Recruitment (coordinated by Corporate Development)
- Tenders (coordinated by Community Relations)

- Statutory eg. development consents issued, annual financial statements (coordinated by Community Relations)
- Display advertising eg. events and/or services (coordinated by Community Relations)

Once the Council has decided to adopt a draft policy, plan or other document for public exhibition, an advertisement shall be placed in the Manly Daily no more than 10 working days after the Council resolution.

Requests from third parties to use the Council's brand in promotional material must be referred to the Community Relations team for review and approval.

Requests from third parties to link their websites to the Council website must be referred to the Community Relations team for review and approval.

Media liaison

All media statements are prepared by the Community Relations team and must be approved before release by the General Manager or his delegate and where appropriate, the Mayor. Media statements issued on behalf of the Council must be in the approved format.

All media enquiries must be referred in the first instance to the Community Relations team. In the absence of the Community Relations team, media enquiries should be referred to either the Mayor or the General Manager. All media outlets will be treated fairly, equally and without bias and their enquiries responded to within 24 hours.

Staff must not communicate with the media unless prior approval has been obtained from the General Manager or his delegate. Providing approval is given staff may provide factual information to the media on Council business or policy matters.

Council employees and Councillors must not discuss staff, confidential legal advice or commercial-in-confidence matters with the media.

Councillors may communicate with the media regarding matters in the public interest or Council policy, provided their comments are not perceived as representing the Council's position if they are providing an alternative viewpoint.

Council employees may speak to the media as private individuals with these restrictions: they do not comment on Council business or policy; they are not identified as Council employees; and their comments are not perceived as representing the Council's position or policy.

Contractors or service providers employed by Council must refer all media enquiries relating to Council to the Community Relations team.

All Council and Committee meetings are open to the media, except those dealing with staff issues, confidential legal advice or commercial-in-confidence matters and those under Section 10A of the Local Government Act.

Filming and recording of Council meetings may only be done with the approval of the Council.

All Council documents that are on the public record are open to perusal by the media, except those relating to staff, confidential legal advice and commercial-in-confidence matters. All file perusals and access to information requests by the media are subject to the provisions of related legislation and Council policies dealing with privacy and public access to information and require written application under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009.

Unauthorised release of Council documents by staff or Councillors to the media may be a breach of Council's Code of Conduct and may be subject to disciplinary action.

In the event of an emergency in the Pittwater Council area involving the threat of or serious injury to and/or death of residents, Councillors or Council staff, or significant damage to Council assets, the following procedure will apply to all Councillors and Council staff:

- The Senior Communications Officer must be notified immediately of details of the incident. The Senior Communications Officer is on 24-hour call.

- Details of the incident must not be discussed with any media representative unless approved in advance by the General Manager.
- Requests to film or photograph Council staff, properties or events for news and current affairs purposes during an emergency must be referred to the General Manager for prior approval.

The Mayor is the Council's official spokesperson and is responsible for providing comment on Council policy and other matters of public interest.

The General Manager is the Council's official spokesperson responsible for providing comment on Council policy and all operational matters relating to the Council.

In the absence of the Mayor and the General Manager, the Deputy Mayor, Acting General Manager or other staff may be delegated to be the Council's official spokesperson, subject to the General Manager's approval. These staff are responsible for providing comment on Council policy and matters of fact relating to Council business.

The Community Relations team will seek a clarification or retraction in cases where a media story concerning the Council is factually incorrect. However, we acknowledge that the media are independent and will seek out all sources of information to report a story – not just the Council.

Social media

Pittwater Council believes that social media is a widely accepted form of communication and accordingly has a social media presence. Responses and posts on the Council's social media sites are coordinated by the Community Relations team.

Council recognises that social media is a two-way form of communication. We also recognise that social media is a legitimate means by which the public may raise issues or ask questions of the Council. Where possible we will post a response to a question or issue raised by the public within two working days.

We respect the right of the public to post comments on our social media sites that may not be complimentary to the Council. However, defamatory, derogatory or racist comments will be removed and users posting such comments may be blocked as a result.

We observe the principle that anything you would not responsibly say directly to a person should never be said or written about them on social media. This principle applies even when a member of the public is posting negative or critical comments about the Council.

'Following' or 'liking' a site or individual does not constitute an endorsement by the Council. It is merely an acknowledgement that the site or individual concerned is of public interest in the broad sense.

We recognise the right of Council staff and Councillors to have personal social media sites with the following restrictions:

- they do not post negative comments on Council business or policy
- their posts are not perceived as representing the official Council position or policy.

Any inappropriate posts by staff or Councillors on a social media site that brings the Council into disrepute, is slanderous or inappropriate in any form may breach Council's Code of Conduct and be the subject of disciplinary action.

Posts by the Council on Facebook and Twitter are archived in the Council's records system on a quarterly basis.

Commissioning/Opening of Public Infrastructure

That, subject to a Council resolution to the contrary in any particular case, the Mayor be responsible for performing the commissioning/opening of any new infrastructure owned by Council or for which Council has that right.

Plaques – New Civic Buildings

The name of the person opening the new project will be placed on plaques for major new public buildings.

Definitions

Media statement: A written statement issued by the Council that states its position on a matter of Council business, Council policy or the public interest.

Media comment: A verbal statement issued by the Council that states its position on a matter of Council business, Council policy or the public interest.

Council spokesperson: The Mayor, General Manager or delegated staff member authorised to speak on a matter of Council business, Council policy or the public interest.

Social media: all forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content.

Branding: the visual identifiers of the Council's public image may be expressed by colours, a landmark (ie. logo) and other design elements.

Related Policies/Documents

Communications Guide & Protocol

Community Engagement Policy

Disaster Management Plan

Code of Conduct