



Draft

**Media and
Communications
Policy**



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Document Control

Policy	Draft Hilltops Council Media and Communications Policy	Policy Number	
Author/Reviewer	General Manager	Review Period and Date	Reviewed 2 yearly

- This Policy shall be reviewed within 12 months of an election, and thereafter at intervals of no greater than two years.
- Any review will ensure this Policy continues to meet all statutory requirements and the operational needs of Hilltops Council.
- The Policy may also be reviewed at other times as determined by Hilltops Council.

Document History

Date	Status	Version	Resolution	Description
17 January 2019	Draft	0.1		Draft Hilltops Council Media and Communications Policy
3 April 2019	Draft	0.2		Forwarded to Policy Review Committee for review and comment
22 May 2019	Draft	0.3		Presented to Council for public exhibition
22 May 2019	Draft	0.4	19/136	Placed on public exhibition for submissions



1. Introduction

The Hilltops Council Media and Communications Policy provides a framework for communication between Council and its stakeholders. The effective dissemination of information and communication is a vital element in building a positive identity for Council through the greater community awareness of its services, activities, achievements and resources. The policy provides guidelines for how communication should be delivered and how Hilltops Council should act in their daily communications with external stakeholders through all communication mediums.

2. Policy Statement

Hilltops Council encourages open communication with the media, with an emphasis on promoting a positive, progressive and professional image of Council. This provides an opportunity to keep the community informed and involved in dialogue about Council activities, services and programs. The objectives of this policy are to promote an open exchange of information between Hilltops Council and the media as well as to promote positive coverage of council affairs that is fair, reliable and accurate. To ensure that comment made publicly by authorised spokespersons is accurate, reliable and in the best interests of Council, there are limits on who can provide information, and the level of information those persons can provide.

The Communications Manager in consultation with the General Manager and Mayor are responsible for developing, authorising and distributing external communications on behalf of Council and the Local Government Area. All corporate communication of Council must be consulted at the inception of all projects requiring media contact, social media interaction, public relations, marketing, graphic design, community consultation, photography, video production and external websites. All communications must comply with the Media and Communications Policy.

3. Policy

For the issuing of media statements and responses to media enquiries the Mayor and General Manager are the official spokespersons on Council affairs.

Generally, the Communications Manager is responsible for co-ordinating and receiving media enquiries. The Communications Manager may refer some media enquiries directly to the Mayor or General Manager.

Councillors and the media

- 3.1 Councillors may not speak to the media on behalf of Council unless authorised by the Mayor.
- 3.2 Councillors should support Council decisions and refrain from using the media to make negative personal reflections on each other or comments that could be interpreted as such and which are reasonably likely to undermine public confidence in the Council, Council Officers or local government generally.
- 3.3 As members of the community, Councillors are entitled to enter into public debate in their private capacity and make comment on Council affairs, provided they clearly state that such public comment reflects their personal opinion and not that of the Council or a Council Committee.

Council Employees and the media

- 3.4 Council employees should support Council decisions and refrain from using the media to make negative personal reflections on each other or comments that could be interpreted as such and



which are reasonably likely to undermine public confidence in the Council, Councillors or local government generally.

- 3.5 Council employees must not make political or controversial statements in or to the media relating to Council affairs, decisions and/or events, or about Councillors or other Council Officers which are likely to generate negative publicity for Council.
- 3.6 No comment can be made to the media, or information distributed, without the specific approval of the Mayor or the General Manager. The General Manager may from time to time delegate authority to Directors. Directors may nominate specialist members of staff to respond to technical questions on operational matters only. The Mayor and/or the General Manager must approve of other information before it is issued or distributed to the media.
- 3.7 Council employees should support Council decisions and refrain from using the media to make negative personal reflections on each other or comments that could be interpreted as such and which are reasonably likely to undermine public confidence in Council or local government generally.
- 3.8 Council staff must not make political or controversial statements in or to the media relating to Council affairs, decisions and/or events, or about Council officials which are likely to generate negative publicity for Council.

4. Personal Comments

As members of the community, Councillors and Council employees are entitled to enter into public debate in their private capacity provided they clearly state that such public comment reflects their personal opinion and not that of that of Council or a committee of Council. When exercising this right any views must be clearly identified as personal only; with no reference to being a Councillor of Hilltops Council. Similarly, Council employees may communicate with the media as private individuals, with the following restrictions:

- That they do not comment on Council business or policy.
- That they are not identified as Council employees.
- That these comments are not perceived as representing Councils official position or policy attained by virtue of their public position.

Council will openly discuss matters of interest with the media, unless disclosure of certain information contravenes Council's obligations of confidentiality or privacy, duty of care or could infringe other laws or regulations that govern its operations. Council reserves the right not to comment on specific issues.

Media organisations and their representatives will be treated equally and without bias.

Defamation law applies to Councillors and Council employees as it does to other members of the public. It could be considered defamatory to harm another person's reputation verbally or through the written word.

Council recognises that ill-considered and uninformed comments can cause dire consequences and legal implications in the event of an emergency, disaster, crisis, or sensitive issue. Accordingly, only the Mayor and General Manager are authorised to speak to the media on these occasions. Unauthorised release of Council documents by employees or Councillors will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

The Communications Manager is responsible for coordinating and distributing articles, columns and newsletters on behalf of the Mayor or the Council and is responsible for ensuring the information contained in the document is accurate, checked and distributed in an approved format.



The Communications Manager is responsible for preparing and distributing media releases. All media releases must be approved by the General Manager and Mayor prior to release and must be in an approved format. Approval by General Manager only is required for strictly operational matters.

Photos of individuals will not be provided to the media for their use unless consent for use of the image has been obtained.

5. Social Media

To maintain the professional integrity of Council's corporate social media sites, only Communications Manager or such other person authorised by the General Manager, are authorised to post comments on social media sites on Council's behalf.

When using social media in an official capacity on behalf of Council, Council employees must:

- maintain the high standard of professionalism expected of all employees
- never engage in behaviour that is harassing, bullying, illegal or in breach of Council's Code of Conduct whether using an official or private social media account
- represent Council professionally when publishing content in an official capacity
- adhere to the protocols outlined in paragraph 9.1 relating to who is authorised to post comments on Council's behalf
- under no circumstances disclose information or make commitments on behalf of Council unless authorised to do so.

6. Committee members and the media

Members of Council Committees must not comment to the media on matters relating to the Committee without the approval of the Mayor and/or General Manager and should not make comments that are contrary to decisions of Council.

7. Related Information

The Draft Media and Communications Policy should be read in conjunction with Hilltops Council:

- Council's Code of Conduct which reflects the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW
- Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW