6.10.1 Media guidelines and procedures

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Introduction

The media is an independent source of information for readers/listeners/viewers and can be a very useful communication tool for Council.

Through the media, Council is able to communicate important information to residents and stakeholders about its projects and initiatives, services, programs, and activities.

The media also plays a vital role in facilitating transparency and public trust.

This procedure is designed to strengthen and build on Council’s existing relationship with the media and ensure that information is provided to the media in an accurate, timely and professional manner, and subsequently increase the likelihood of useful and balanced information being presented through the various media channels.

It also aims to ensure there is some consistency in the way that individual Councillors and Council staff deal with the media on a day to day basis.

Council has a dedicated Communications and Events Manager to oversee the strategic direction of Council communications and staff of Council’s communications and events team.

Media Enquiries

All media enquiries should be in writing and directed to the Communication and Events team (communications@begavalleynsw.gov.au) who will action the request and coordinate a response.

The Communication and Events Team will direct the inquiry to the appropriate person or team; with Councillors, the General Manager, Directors, Managers, Coordinators and responsible officers all included as appropriate.

Enquiries will be addressed and responded to in a timely manner. The Communication and Events Manager will seek to determine and/or negotiate an appropriate deadline with the requesting journalist (within 24 hours wherever possible).

Responses to media enquiries are provided in written form (using the media enquiries template) to reduce the risk of comments being inaccurately recorded or taken out of context.

The Communication and Events team will, on behalf of Council, send the approved response to the media agency with an attribution to the appropriate staff member or Councillor. A copy should be provided to the Director Community Environment and Planning.

Council staff contacted directly by the media are encouraged to speak about specific projects and initiatives, but need to first obtain the approval of their Manager and/or Director and clear the issue with Council’s Communication and Events Manager.

Media Releases

Media releases are used to:

- Inform the media and community about newsworthy Council projects and initiatives
- Assist with the relay of accurate and up-to-date information to Shire residents and visitors to the area
- Congratulate/commend individuals and organisations
- Defend Council from unwarranted criticism.

All media releases are to be issued by Council’s Communication and Events Team.
Council staff are required to provide timely factual information on the issue for drafting by the Communication and Events Team.

All media releases should include a quote, with the quotes to be cleared by the person quoted before approval and distribution. The entire release must be approved by the Manager or Director whose area the subject matter concerns. (or the Mayor when a release is issued on behalf of the Councillors as an elected group) and the Communication and Events Manager.

Media releases can be developed and released in conjunction with other groups/agencies but should be approved by a representative of both agencies (in Bega Valley Shire Council’s case the General Manager or relevant Director) and co-branded accordingly. All such joint releases should carry Council’s contact details.

Elected representatives are free to issue their own media releases as individuals, but they should do so with the best interests of the organisation in mind and must avoid making personal attacks on other Councillors and Council staff. Councillors issuing media releases should be mindful of the provisions of the Code of Conduct.

Media releases are not appropriate for every situation. The Communication and Events Team will advise Council staff on other, more appropriate channels that can be used to communicate information.

All media releases should be issued using Council’s Media Release template, follow the style guide and wherever possible with at least one appropriate image.

All releases (including images) will be distributed via email (bcc) to Councillors, the ‘Media’ distribution group, the ‘All Recipients’ distribution group, and communications@begavalley.nsw.gov.au.

Media releases will also be uploaded to Council’s website and saved into Content Manager.

**Media Statements**

Media statements are used to:

- Proactively inform the media and community about Council decisions and provide important updates on issues
- Respond to media reports or unwarranted criticism

All media statements will be drafted by Council’s Communication and Events Team, with input from the appropriate Council staff or Councillor.

Media statements are to be approved by the Manager whose area the subject matter concerns or a Director (or the Mayor when a statement is issued on behalf of the Councillors as an elected group) and the Communication and Events Manager.

Media statements are to be factual, concise and direct, with the aim to distribute important information to the media in a timely and succinct fashion.

They do not include quotes and won’t necessarily be accompanied by images.

All media statements should be issued using Council’s Media Statement template and follow the style guide, with distribution to be via email (bcc) to all relevant media outlets. A copy should also be distributed to Councillors and internal recipients list as identified by the Communications and Events Manager.

**Media Alerts**

Media alerts are used to:

- Proactively inform the media and community about a media event, political announcement or launch of an initiative or project
• All media alerts will be drafted by Council’s Communication and Events Team, with input from the appropriate Council staff or Councillor.
• Media alerts are to be approved by the subject matter Manager or a Director (or the Mayor when a alert is issued on behalf of the Councillors as an elected group) and the Communication and Events Manager.
• Media alerts are to be factual, concise and direct, with the aim to distribute information to the media about the event or announcement, in a timely and succinct fashion.
• Media alerts include the date, time and location of the event or announcement, and who will be available for the media to interview. Media alerts also provide background information on the event or announcement as context for the media.
• All media alerts should be issued using Council’s Media Alert template and follow the style guide, with distribution to be via email (bcc) to all relevant outlets and recipients only.
• The Communication and Events Team can assist in the organisation and delivery of a launch or announcement event.

Photographs
Bega Valley Shire Council provides a photograph with all of its media releases. These are a good way of giving Council a human face. Wherever possible, photographs should contain at least one person, and an elected Councillor where appropriate.

As a courtesy, always ask permission of people featured in a photograph to be sent with a media release or uploaded onto the web or social media sites. The law requires us to seek parental/guardian permission if using a photo of children for our media releases. We are also legally bound to seek permission when using a photo or video shot when the subject is in a private place.

The Communication and Events Team can provide a Media Permission form for signing by the person in the photograph or video.

Stock imagery for media release photos should be avoided. Always attribute the photographer if an image has been provided and approved by a person external to Council.

When providing a photo to newspapers it is important to name everyone in that photo in order from left to right. It is rare for a photo to be published without the full names of those people pictured.

Responding to Criticism

Criticisms about media content should be forwarded to Council’s Communications and Events Manager.

Formal complaints to media outlets (on behalf of Council staff) should only be made by a Director or the General Manager.

Letters to the Editor or official statements can be written in response to criticism, inaccuracies, assumptions or unfair comments. The Communication and Events Manager will advise on the most appropriate response for the situation. Letters to the Editor or official statements must be authorised by either the General Manager or a Director (or the Mayor where signed by th Mayor). Letters should be signed by the Mayor, General Manager or Director and sent from either the Mayor, General Manager or Communication email address.

Interviews

Councillors and Council staff are encouraged to co-operate with media requests for interviews, particularly when there has been a Council media release issued on the interview subject.
The Communication and Events Team will assist in setting up media interviews as this is often a successful method of further discussing issues, projects or activities that are of interest to the community.

The Communication and Events Manager can provide media interview coaching on interview techniques.

Where appropriate an elected Councillor should always be given the opportunity to comment in relation to Council projects and initiatives. Preference should be given to the Mayor the Deputy Mayor or official Councillor delegate on internal or external committees or organisations.

Councillors and Council staff should not provide information ‘off the record’ during media interviews.

The Communication and Events Manager should be notified of any interview requests prior to any interview being given

Council staff are not permitted to speak to the media without approval from their Manager or Director and clear the issue with Council’s Communication and Events Manager.

Council has regular scheduled interview times with the local media that can be utilised by any Councillor or Council staff member.

**Media Monitoring**

Council’s Communication and Events Team monitors the media and social media daily.

The Communication and Events Team will provide Council staff, Managers, Directors and General Manager with details of media or social media reporting that requires attention or response.

A weekly summary of media reports relevant to Council will be provided to the General Manager, Directors and Managers. Managers will ensure that relevant media summaries are provided to their staff and may request that staff members be added to the distribution list.

The Communication and Events Team receive and keep all local newspapers.

Council staff who are interviewed on radio and who would like to hear a copy of the interview are asked to let the Communication and Events Team know prior to the interview so a copy can be obtained. Council staff who would like to purchase a taped copy of someone else’s interview should contact the Communications and Events Manager.

**Monitoring Media Behaviour**

The Communication and Events Manager should be advised of any journalism that breaches the industry’s Code of Ethics (CoE), where appropriate action can then be taken if warranted.

Unacceptable breaches of the CoE include, but are not restricted to:

- Inaccurate reporting
- Use of editorial opinion outside of opinion columns
- Use of Council staff names, without consent, in news stories and Letters to the Editor.

For more information refer to the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance Journalist’s Code of Ethics [https://www.meaa.org/meaa-media/code-of-ethics/](https://www.meaa.org/meaa-media/code-of-ethics/)

If a media outlet is found to have breached the CoE, Council staff are required to inform the Communication and Events Manager who will take the appropriate action. This may involve making complaints direct to the media outlet, direct to the outlet’s corporate body, to the Australian Press Council or to the Australian Communications and Media Authority.
Communication and Events Manager’s Role

The Communication and Events Manager’s primary role is to establish strategic directions through a Communications Strategy for the maintenance and improvement of dialogue between Council and the community. A key part of this is releasing statements to the media for effective dissemination among the community without loss of the original message.

The Communication and Events Manager will keep elected representatives and senior staff updated with Council’s media coverage and its impact on Council’s brand and reputation.

Informing the Communication and Events Manager

Council staff are obliged to keep the Communication and Events Manager advised of any events, activities or issues that are likely to attract media and community interest. This importantly includes notification of operational matters that need to be relayed to the community. It is vital that the Communication and Events Manager be informed early of any Council action that is expected to impact the community.

The Communication and Events Manager will provide advice on the best way to deal with the issue or pass the information on to the community. If in doubt as to an action or issue’s importance, please contact the Communication and Events Manager as soon as possible. The Communication and Events Team will maintain a calendar of planned Council events or activities that may impact the community.

When the Communication and Events Manager is absent

Council’s Communication Officer is to act as a media contact when the Communication and Events Manager is absent. Responsibilities will include acting as a point of contact for media outlets, distributing pre-approved media releases, responding to in house media related enquiries, and providing updates to Council’s social media pages.

The Communication Officer will work with Council Managers, Directors and General Manager for urgent issues and approvals.

Training

All new employees are to be given a rundown of Council’s media policy as part of the induction process.

Council’s Communication and Events Manager is to coordinate media training workshops.

Recycling

Councillors and Council staff are encouraged to recycle old newspapers using the appropriate recycling bins.

Templates

Insert links to word template docs

- Media Release
- Media Statement
- Media Alert