

# TEMORA SHIRE COUNCIL



TEMORA  
*The Friendly Shire*

## Communications and Media Policy

DRAFT

**Review Details**

**ABOUT THIS RELEASE**

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**REVIEW**

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**PLANNED REVIEW**

Planned Review Date	Revision Description		Review by
March 2027	General Review		

## PURPOSE

The Communications and Media Policy provides a framework to assist Temora Shire Council when communicating directly or indirectly with the public. It ensures engagement directly with the public and indirectly, with media, by Council officials (Councillors and staff) is consistent, accurate, professional, and enhances Council's reputation.

Effective engagement assists Temora Shire Council in keeping the community informed, explaining decisions, and promoting community confidence in Council and its decisions.

The development of digital media means that people worldwide can access and actively engage in content. Therefore, how a Council is portrayed impacts greatly on how the organisation is perceived.

Communication platforms can be an effective tool to promote Council programs, events, and initiatives. Some platforms can also be invaluable in times of crisis or emergency when critical information needs to be communicated to the public.

Despite the many benefits, media also presents a variety of challenges and risks. These include:

- Maintaining the accuracy, reliability, and integrity of information
- Ensuring confidential information is managed appropriately, and
- The increased exposure and risk to reputation where information is not managed appropriately.

## SCOPE

This policy applies to all people who conduct work for Temora Shire Council in a paid or unpaid capacity. This may include Councillors, Council staff, volunteers, contractors, trainees, work experience participants and other stakeholders engaged to deliver Council services.

This policy applies to engagement between Council officials and the public, including media and social media. However, a social media policy exists as an expansion of this policy, due to its complexity and ever-changing environment and trends.

## PRINCIPLES

Temora Shire Council, Councillors, and staff, are committed to upholding and promoting Council's values of:

- We will make the best decisions we can, through:
  - Leadership and Respect - act decisively with knowledge and courage in the best interest of our community;
  - Integrity and transparency – act honestly and openly in all our dealings with a view to make equitable decisions;
- We will act with the community as our primary consideration, through:

- Community focus - engage with our community to provide services that respond to community need;
- Future custodianship – always act with the consideration of the impact of our actions on future generations;
- We will value the views and input of others, through:
  - Teamwork and cooperation – work together with open communication to achieve a common goal by sharing knowledge and support each other;
  - Effective partnerships – treat everyone with respect by being inclusive, non-judgemental and by valuing diversity;
- We will maximise our opportunities, through:
  - Innovation – encourage creative thinking and innovation based on detail knowledge and accept that bold actions carry a degree of risk; and
  - Continuous improvement – always strive to achieve our goals more efficiently through improvements in process or new technology.

The following four communications principles are common themes within Council’s values which determine and guide communication priorities and decisions:

1. **Openness** - We will act honestly and openly in exchange of information and knowledge sharing between our Council, the public and media. We will use communications platforms appropriate to the audience.
2. **Consistency** - We will ensure consistency of message by all Councillors and staff when communicating with the public and media.
3. **Accuracy** - The information and knowledge we share will be a source of truth for our Council and community, and we will prioritise the need to correct inaccuracies when they occur.
4. **Timeliness** - We will respond to enquiries in a timely manner, presenting Council as a professional, efficient and community-focused organization.

These principles should underpin every aspect of a Council’s engagement and all Council staff and officials should commit to upholding them.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS**

All engagement by Council officials must be conducted in a professional, efficient, respectful, and community-focused manner.

## **COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER**

The Communications Officer role is to:

1. Liaise with relevant staff members within the organisation to gather the information required,

2. Develop key messages, communication artefacts and documentation where appropriate,
3. 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,
4. Be responsible for reviewing media statements prior to their release,
5. Ensure that media statements are approved by the Mayor or General Manager prior to their release,
6. Notify frontline staff of current relevant information and key messages,
7. Develop and/or support media training and/or induction to be provided to relevant staff and/or Councillors,
8. Inform Councillors of media releases and other relevant communications distributed,
9. Maintain a record of all media enquiries and responses,
10. Ensure that media organisations and their representatives are treated professionally, equally and without bias,
11. Ensure that media enquiries are dealt with promptly,
12. Provide guidance to Councillors and Council staff approached by the media for comment to avoid misinformation and miscommunication,
13. Ensure that all media releases are published on the Council's website,
14. Ensure Council meets its legal obligations with respect to maintaining records of public communication, and
15. Maintain the accuracy and currency of Council's public facing communication platforms.

### **GENERAL MANAGER**

The General Manager is the official spokesperson for the Council on operational and administrative matters.

The General Manager 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).

### **MAYOR**

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 the General Manager or other Councillors when 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).

## **COUNCILLORS**

Where Councillors (including the Mayor) become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the General Manager.

When engaging with the public and media Councillors:

- Must not purport to speak for the Council unless authorised to do so.
- Must clarify when speaking 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, and
- Must seek information and guidance from the General Manager where appropriate before providing comments to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information, and have considered reputational or other risks.

Councillors are obliged to attend media engagement training provided as part of their induction, or refresher training, or as part of their ongoing professional development program.

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.

Councillors must direct any questions about their obligations under this policy to the General Manager.

## **COUNCIL STAFF**

Council staff must not communicate to the media or publicly about matters relating to the Council unless authorised to do so.

Council staff:

- Must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council
- Must not disclose Council information unless authorised to do so, and
- Must seek information and guidance from the General Manager or Communications Officer where appropriate before providing comment to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant information and have considered reputational or other risks.

If Council staff receive a media enquiry or they are invited by media to comment on a matter relating to the Council, they must refer the enquiry to the General Manager or Communications Officer.

Where Council staff become aware of potential issues that could result in media interest, they should provide this information to the General Manager.

The Council must provide training to Council officials who are authorised by the General Manager to engage with the media.

Complaints received are to be managed in accordance with Council's policy *G5 Complaints/Disclosure Reporting Mechanism*.

### **ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT STAFF**

The Manager and/or supervisor of civil works to be undertaken is responsible for community consultation and notifying those impacted.

Roadworks undertaken as a contractor to Transport for NSW (TfNSW), under the RMCC Contract, require works to be communicated a minimum of two (2) weeks prior to commencement of works, and may be carried out by TfNSW &/or Council.

Communications are to be provided to property owners prior to works, where:

1. there is direct impact by Council,
2. may impact property access, and/or
3. may impact pedestrian thoroughfare (of significant or extended nature in urban areas).

Communication platforms used for notification purposes may include:

- Media release to local newspaper
- Council newsletter
- Social media posts
- Face-to-face (i.e. door knocks, forums)
- Letter (mailed, email or letter box drop)

### **COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS**

The following communication platforms are used by Council for the purpose of information and knowledge sharing.

#### **1. THE MEDIA**

Council officials must comply with the Council's *Code of Conduct* when engaging with the media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a Council official.

Council officials must not share information or make comments to the media through either direct or indirect mechanisms that:

- Are defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening, or intimidating to other Council officials or members of the public,
- Contains profane language or is sexual in nature,
- Constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW, or is unlawfully discriminatory,
- 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,
- Contains content about the Council, Council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive,
- Divulges confidential Council information,
- Breaches the privacy of other Council officials or members of the public,
- 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,
- Could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment,
- Commits the Council to any action,
- Violates an order made by a court,
- Breaches copyright, and/or
- Advertises, endorses, or solicits commercial products or business.

## **2. NEWSLETTER**

The Council newsletter publication is used to communicate about:

1. local, state, and federal government information,
2. causes adopted by Council, and/or
3. organisations that are mentioned in Council's current Delivery Program or Operational Plan.

Organisations located in Temora Shire may apply via [communications@temora.nsw.gov.au](mailto:communications@temora.nsw.gov.au) to advertise in the calendar of events section of the newsletter. The following conditions may apply for inclusion:

- Priority will be given to events that have a tourism and/or community focus,
- Events that are not inclusive will not be listed, and
- Regular meetings will not be listed (i.e. community groups, special interest or religious groups).

## **3. COUNCIL WEBSITE**

The Council's website is used as a one-stop-shop for:

1. Sharing information and knowledge on Council services, policies, meetings,
2. Sharing information on building, works and projects in Temora Shire,



3. Paying for Council services, where appropriate,
4. Submitting applications, reservations, and expressions of interest,
5. Hosting open jobs and procurement opportunities within Council,
6. Promoting Council news, venues, and facilities,
7. Hosting public notices, and
8. Contacting Council.

#### **4. TEMORA SHIRE'S TOURISM WEBSITE**

The tourism website is used as a platform to:

1. Detail upcoming Council festivals and events,
2. List Temora Shire events and activities that drive tourism,
3. List businesses and activities that drive tourism,
4. Promote venues and facilities that drive tourism, and
5. Promote relocation to Temora Shire.

#### **5. SOCIAL MEDIA**

Since Social Media's inception, it has grown in popularity and influence, and is now fundamental in how people interact with one another, used for work and play purposes and how we consume information and ideas.

Despite its obvious benefits, social media is complex and presents a variety challenges and risks which necessitate a standalone policy: Temora Shire Council's Social Media Policy.

#### **6. PHONE**

Phone calls, incoming and outgoing, are a critical part to business operations at Council. This section aims to explain how we direct the public in contacting Council via phone and, refers to receiving incoming calls from the public.

Council's direct line should be the main point of contact for all incoming phone inquiries. Administration will triage calls to the appropriate department or Council official based on the information received in the call.

If the department or Council official is unable to receive the call at the time, administration staff should forward the contact and enquiry details to the relevant department and/or staff, ideally via email. Council officials should return the call as soon as possible. When a call remains unanswered after three attempts, Council official should attempt to make contact using other platforms (e.g. email), if available to them.

A direct line number or mobile may be given in communications when:

- Taking registrations for activity or event,
- The responsible official is the only person that can answer queries, and/or

- The subject matter is important, or urgent in nature.

Council is to retain a designated 24-hour emergency on-call contact via Council's direct line.

## 7. TEXT MESSAGES

One-on-one text messages between Council officials and/or the public is a crucial part of everyday business. This section refers only to bulk text messages. Bulk text messages refer to sending messaging to a mass audience.

Bulk text messages are an effective tool, and may be used when approved by the General Manager:

- During emergencies
- To promote major events and activities

According to the *Spam Act 2003*, Council must first gain permission from recipients prior to sending text messages. When sending bulk text messages, the platform used should be trusted and secure, and the message is to include an opt-out option for the recipient.

## 8. EMAILS

Emails are vital to business operations at Council. This section refers to bulk email distribution. Bulk email distribution refers to sending email to a mass audience.

Bulk email distribution is an effective tool for sharing useful or relevant information. Distribution lists are categorised into interest groups. To avoid spamming unnecessarily, information should only be sent to relevant distribution groups. Distribution of information may include:

- Newsletters,
- Notification of activities or events,
- Notification of local, state, or federal initiative, or
- Notification and updates of emergencies.

According to the *Spam Act 2003*, Council must first gain permission from recipients prior to sending bulk emails. When sending bulk emails, the platform used should be trusted and secure, and the message is to include an opt-out option for the recipient.

## COMMUNCAITIONS DURING EMERGENCIES

During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the Engineering Works Manager (with assistance from Communications Officer) will be responsible for coordinating communications on behalf of the Council.

Council officials must not provide comments or information that is inconsistent with official advice issued by the Council and any other agency coordinating the emergency response.

For further information on disaster response, refer to Temora Shire Council's Disaster Workforce Recovery & Continuity Business Plan.

## **COMMUNICATIONS IN THE LEAD UP TO ELECTIONS**

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.

As per the Code of Conduct, 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.

## **RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

Communications content created and received by Council officials, acting in their official capacity, is a Council record and may be subject to information access applications made under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009. These records must also be managed in accordance with the requirements of the State Records Act 1998 and Council's *Records and Information Management and Records Management Procedures for Councillors*.

## **CONCERNS OR COMPLAINTS**

Concerns or complaints about the administration of Council's communication platforms should be made to the council's General Manager in the first instance.

Complaints about the conduct of Council officials (including Councillors) in dealing with the media and/or on communication platforms may be directed to the General Manager.

Complaints about a General Manager's conduct in dealing with the media and/or on communications platforms may be directed to the Mayor.

## **LEGISLATION FRAMEWORK, STANDARDS, RELEVANT EXTERNAL POLICIES AND GUIDELINES**

- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998

- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
- Local Government Act 1993
  - Section 226 (a)
  - Section 226 (c)
  - Section 232 (f)
- Spam Act 2003
- NSW Government – Office of Local Government 22-37 Model Media Policy

## **INTERNAL RELATED DOCUMENTS**

- Temora Shire Council’s Model Code of Conduct
- Temora Shire Council’s Privacy Management Plan
- Temora Shire Council’s Social Media Policy
- Temora Shire Council’s Records and Information Management
- Temora Shire Council’s Records Management Procedures for Councillors
- Temora Shire Council’s Disaster Workforce Recovery and Continuity Business Plan

## **DEFINITIONS**

For the purposes of this Policy the following definitions apply:

### **COUNCIL OFFICIAL**

Includes Councillors, members of staff and delegates of the Council (including members of committees that are delegates of the Council).

### **MEDIA**

Means 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.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Means 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, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram.

### **PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Means information or an opinion (including information or an opinion forming part of a database and whether recorded in a material form) about an individual whose identity is apparent or can reasonably be ascertained from the information or opinion.