Media, Communications and Social Media Policy

Strategic Reference	Outcome 3 – Community Strategy 2.3 – Continuous improvement in communications and engaging the community. Outcome 5 – Leadership Strategy 3.4 – Council Members are strong advocates for the community. Strategy 3.5 – Council reports openly and transparently on its performance. Strategy 3.8 – Council Members demonstrate 'good governance' in their roles.
File reference	AR17/6305
Responsibility	Office of Chief Executive Officer
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Next review date	March 2029
Applicable Legislation	Copyright Act 1968 (Cth) Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935 (SA) Defamation Act 2005 (SA) Fair Trading Act 1997 (SA) Fair Work Act 1994 (SA) Freedom of Information Act 1991 (SA) Local Government Act 1999 (SA) Local Government (Elections) Act 1999 (SA) Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA) Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth) Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) State Records Act 1997 (SA) Civil Liability Act 1936 (SA)
Related Policies	Community Engagement Policy Code of Conduct for Council Employees Behavioural Management Policy – Council Members Caretaker Policy Information Security Policy Privacy Policy Records Management Policy Volunteer Policy

1. Purpose

This policy establishes Council's commitment to effectively engage with the media, wider community and stakeholders in a professional, accurate, timely and positive manner. It also nominates the official spokesperson(s) for the Coorong District Council for all forms of response and public comment. This policy also recognises the opportunities that social media provides for dynamic and interactive communication, which can complement traditional communication methods.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all official engagements and communications provided by employees, Elected Members, volunteers, agents and contractors on behalf of Council with the public (using traditional media and social media). This policy also applies to public use of official Coorong District Council social media platforms.

This policy does not cover public consultation or general Council correspondence, or the use of social media in a personal capacity where no reference is made to Council-related matters.

3. Definitions

"Employee" or "Staff" means any person who is employed by the Coorong District Council, but also includes any contractors, volunteers (including committee members), trainees, work experience students and consultants undertaking work for, or on behalf of the Council, whether they are working in a full-time, part-time or casual capacity.

"Digital Platforms" include social media, email, eNewsletters, text messaging, websites, videos, Local Services App etc.

"Media" refers to traditional mediums including print, radio, television, letters and press releases.

"Moderation" means the editing or removal of content posted to a social media site (for example, to remove offensive material).

"Social Media" means platforms and applications that enable users to create and share content, or to participate in social networking, allowing the community to comment, provide feedback and engage online.

4. Responsibility

Council requires a corporate approach when engaging in two-way connections with the media and the community, whether it is through traditional mechanisms or online, to ensure a consistent, factual and positive image is created. Council deems that issues which are of interest to the public are reviewed and the relevant facts are established before any comments are made on behalf of Council.

Speaking on behalf of Council

4.1 The Mayor is Council's official spokesperson, unless Council has appointed another Elected Member to act in this capacity. Close liaison with the Mayor and the Chief Executive Officer is essential for consistent reporting.

4.2 Elected Members may not speak on behalf of Council unless authorised to do so by the Mayor, or unless Council has clearly spoken (as a body) and granted permission to do so.

4.3 The Chief Executive Officer has delegated authority from the Coorong District Council to make official statements on behalf of Council and to respond to media enquiries and is principal spokesperson for Council in relation to all operational matters, including the delivery of services and the implementation of Council policy.

4.4 Media enquiries should be directed to the Executive Officer, who coordinates and determines the most appropriate method of response. If the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer is contacted directly by the media, they have the authority to respond and it is recommended that the Executive Officer is made aware of the enquiry.

4.5 The Chief Executive Officer may delegate the authority (clause 4.3) to a departmental director or other appropriate Council staff member to make public comment to the media on specific matters relating to administration or Council activities, on a case by case basis.

4.6 Comments made by the official spokesperson, be it the Mayor, Chief Executive Officer or a delegated spokesperson from the Elected Members or administration, must truly reflect the will of the Council as expressed in its meetings.

4.7 Comments made by the official spokesperson must not show disrespect for Council, its decisions, its decision-making process, Elected Members, Council management or staff.

4.8 Comments made by the official spokesperson must not give the media or any unauthorised person information brough to Council in confidence.

Elected Members as Individuals

4.9 As a member of the community, Elected Members retain the right to make public comment or speak to the media. However, any public comments made by Elected Members are to be clearly identified as their opinions only and do not necessarily represent the position of Council, nor unduly reflect on any Council decision.

4.10 If questioned by the media on their opinion regarding business yet to come before Council, Elected Members should refrain from commenting to remove the risk of prejudicing the business in the Chamber.

4.11 Elected Members speaking as individuals must not give the media, or any unauthorised person, information brought to Council in confidence.

4.12 For policy regarding communications relating to Local Government Elections, please refer to the Caretaker Policy.

Staff

4.13 Staff must not speak to the media on any issue relating to the Council or Council business, Elected Members or staff unless specifically authorised to do so by the Mayor or the Chief Executive Officer.

4.14 Such authorisation will be obtained through the relevant departmental director.

4.15 Staff who are contacted directly by a journalist or media outlet should refer them to the Chief Executive Officer.

4.16 Staff, as members of the public, retain the right to their own opinion, but must ensure that any comments made in the public domain cannot be construed as being representative of the Council or the administration. Staff must not show disrespect for Council, its decisions, it decision making process, Elected Members, Council management or staff.

4.17 Staff speaking as individuals must not give the media or any unauthorised person information presented to Council in confidence.

Proactive Media Management

4.18 Where media coverage of an event or issue is required or anticipated, the Executive Officer should be notified of the opportunity in order to best coordinate responses. The Executive Officer will determine the most appropriate method of media interaction.

Response to Social Media (Spokespersons)

4.19 Only the official spokespersons, or senior staff authorised by the Chief Executive Officer (for specific situations) may provide information via Council's official digital and social media platforms.

4.20 Only staff authorised to manage social media platforms may respond to enquiries from our community (including both public and direct messages), in accordance with relevant procedures.

Moderation

4.21 Moderation applies to social media only. For the purposes of social media, Council takes a position of post-moderation as opposed to pre-moderation of content. Council retains the right to remove content that does not adhere to the guidelines identified in section 5 of this Policy, or other associated

policies. Where individuals are noted for breaching this policy, they may be blocked from providing further comment via such social media platforms.

4.22 Council reserves the right to disable, hide or remove comments under circumstances including:

- Resource management: comments may be switched off when the post generates, or is likely to generate, engagement that exceeds available staff resources or occurs outside business hours.
- Safety and civility: in order to maintain a safe, courteous and friendly environment, comments can be disabled if they breach guidelines such as containing offensive language, harassment, bullying or defamation.
- Relevance: comments may be turned off on posts that are no longer relevant or where the information is outdated.
- Repetitive issues: repeated breach of guidelines on a particular post can trigger the decision to turn off comments.

5. Media, Communications and Social Media Principles

When engaging with the various media platforms, Elected Members and Council employees are expected to:

- Adhere to Council's respective Code of Conduct, policies and procedures
- Behave with caution, courtesy, honesty and respect
- Comply with relevant laws and regulations
- Reinforce the integrity, reputation and values of Council

The following is not permitted under any circumstances:

- Abusive, profane or sexual language
- Commentary which is false or misleading
- Confidential information about Council or third parties
- Discriminatory material in relation to a person or group based on:
  - age
  - colour
  - creed
  - disability
  - family status
  - gender
  - nationality
  - marital status
  - parental status
  - political opinion/affiliation

- pregnancy or potential pregnancy
- race or social origin
- religious beliefs/activities
- responsibilities
- sex or sexual orientation

- Illegal materials or materials designed to encourage law breaking
- Materials that could compromise Council, employee or system safety
- Materials which would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks)
- Materials that would offend contemporary standards of taste and decency
- Material which would being the Council into disrepute
- Personal details or references to Elected Members, Council employees, committee members or third parties, which may be inconsistent with Council's Privacy Policy
- Statements which may be considered to be bullying or harassment.

6. Availability/Accessibility

This Policy is available for inspection at Council's offices during normal business hours & Council's website and will be emailed to interested parties on request (please lodge request in writing via email to council@coorong.sa.gov.au)

7. Document History

This Policy shall be reviewed at least every three (3) years or more frequently if legislation or Council requires.

Version	Adopted	Minute No	Description of change(s)
1	25 June 2013	210/13	Original version
2	19 August 2014	195/14	Cyclical review
3	16 May 2017	072/17	Cyclical review
4	17 March 2026	063/26	Policy title renamed to incorporate reference to broader communications and social media Minor formatting Clauses 1 – 4 rewritten Reference to Council's Executive Officer made at clause 4.4 as part of the holistic media

			process New information inserted at clauses 4.18 – 4.21 to incorporate current practice into policy form