

Council Policy

Communications

Policy Statement

This policy provides understanding of the different communication channels Northern Beaches Council use, their intended purpose and the roles and responsibilities of staff in accessing and using them to ensure all communications are well coordinated, effectively managed and responsive to the diverse information needs of the community.

Principles

Council is committed to delivering its Community Strategic Plan – Shape 2028 (CSP) and the vision of ‘a safe, inclusive and connected community that lives in balance with our extraordinary coastal and bushland environment.’ Communication with the community is a key function that underpins understanding and awareness of the how the community can contribute to, and how Council is delivering, on the CSP outcomes and goals.

Communication will be in a manner that is:

- accessible and available in multiple formats to accommodate diverse information needs;
- informative and proactive, promoting awareness about the decisions of Council, policies, programs, services and decisions;
- open and transparent, encouraging two-way communication through a variety of channels that demonstrates how feedback has been used to support decisions;
- positive and builds an engaged and highly satisfied community;
- consistent, timely, accurate and responsive to our community needs; and
- respectful of the democratic process acknowledging Council resolutions represent the majority view.

Scope and purpose

This policy applies to Council staff and defines the parameters for staff and business units who:

- are authorised to administer or contribute to the development of Council’s official communication tools;
- propose to use social media or digital sites to promote the Council’s policies, programs, events and services;
- use social media in a personal capacity.

Communications channels

Council’s communication channels includes digital media including websites, social media and other online sites, print media and broadcast media. These communication channels are for the use of the organisation’s programs, events and services only. The Communications Team and only authorised staff administrators are permitted to approve content through workflow processes prior to being published.

Council supports the free promotion of not-for-profit community groups who run events and programs that benefit the local community via the 'Event Calendar' on Council's website. Council reserves the right to reject any listing if it is deemed commercial, outside the Council area and/ or not in keeping with Council's values.

Where community-run events and programs receive Council grant funding, they may be eligible for promotion through selected Council communication channels, at the discretion of the Communications Team.

Branding

All public communication materials and channels must adhere to and reflect Council's adopted identity, employing the Brand Identity Guidelines.

Media relations

Media enquiries are managed by authorised staff in the Communications Team and only they are responsible for the coordination of all responses to enquiries. The Communications Manager is responsible for ensuring the appropriate workflow processes are followed, prior to approval and distribution.

All other Council staff are not authorised to communicate with the media unless directly permitted by a relevant Director or the Chief Executive Officer.

Unauthorised release of Council information by staff will be referred to Council's Code of Conduct.

Spokespeople

The Mayor is the official spokesperson of Council. If the Mayor is unavailable, he/she can delegate to the Deputy Mayor or other Councillor.

The Mayor is responsible for the allocating of public speaking roles at Council organised events requiring Councillor participation.

The Chief Executive Officer is the official spokesperson on high-level operational matters. Directors, Executive Managers and/or Managers can act as spokesperson on medium-low level operational matters, following approval from the Chief Executive Officer.

Digital channels **Website**

Council's websites host a range of content specific to services, events and programs, as well as offering self-service products that offer 24/7 flexibility that will conform to a minimum Level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2 (WCAG 2.1).

All website content must be approved through a workflow process by authorised staff administrators and/ or the Communications Manager prior to it being published online.

The Executive Manager, Community Engagement and Communications must approve all requests for the development of sub-sites, including websites and social media pages.

Social media

Social media includes all online communication tools that allow user participation and interaction. Social media is used by Council as part of a communications or community engagement plan and / or as part of a communications strategy. Social media is acknowledged for its great potential as:

- a two-way mechanism to encourage feedback and comment from the community;
- listening mechanism to improve our understanding of community attitudes towards topics or issues; and
- as a way of fostering debate on a topic or issue.

The Communications Team and or/ authorised administrators selectively use approved social media tools to:

- promote selected services, events, projects, policies and activities;
- enhance the Northern Beaches as a visitor destination;
- develop stronger relationships with community members;
- provide an accessible way for customers and the community to communicate with Council;
- support and complement the use of traditional media;
- expand Council's community engagement opportunities; and
- provide essential updates to the community during a crisis or emergency.

Council also uses specific online media sites selectively to:

- protect Council's reputation by monitoring social media activity that relates to Council;
- place Council's statements of facts directly onto the public record; and
- respond or clarify an issue in detail.

Managing, moderating and maintaining approved social media sites

Only approved site administrators/ authors may post content on behalf of Council on social media sites. This includes posting text, videos and photos, interacting with other social media users and responding to questions and requests. Moderation, monitoring and responding is the responsibility of the approved site administrators/ authors only.

Dealing with offensive behaviour in social media

Council will not tolerate content that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, breaches a Court suppression order, or is otherwise unlawful. Such content will be removed.

Users who breach Council's Communications Policy may be banned from accessing Council's social media sites. Council also reserves the right to moderate content from individuals who seek to monopolise and dominate Council's social media sites for their own purposes.

Council staff use of social media

Council recognises that staff may wish to use social media in a personal capacity. Staff should be aware they are personally responsible and liable for content they publish or comments they may host on their own accounts on any form of social media.

Staff should take measures to ensure their personal comments cannot be mistaken for the official view of Council, impact on the staff member performing their role within Council or make comments on Council business or policy.

Council's Code of Conduct applies to staff use of social media and requires staff act in a way that enhances public confidence in local government at all times and to not place themselves in a position where they have a conflict of interest.

References and related documents

Northern Beaches Council documents:

- Code of Conduct
- Access to Information Policy
- Disability Inclusion Action Plan
- Community Engagement Policy and Matrix
- Customer Experience Strategy
- Digital Transformation Strategy
- Community Strategic Plan – Shape 2028

Related legislation:

- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA Act)
- Local Government Act 1993
- Independent Commission Against Corruption Act
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 NSW
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 2009 NSW
- State Records Act 1998
- Copyright Act 1968 Cth; and
- Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000 Cth.

Definitions

Communication channels	Includes digital media, websites, social media, other online sites, print media and broadcast media.
Council staff	Persons employed or engaged by Council including casuals and contractors.
Social media	Applications that enable users to create and share information or ideas with others or to participate in social networking, whether known now or developed in the future.

Responsible Officer

Executive Manager Community Engagement and Communications.

Review Date

July 2022

Revision History

Revision	Date	Status	TRIM Ref
1	9 July 2019	Draft Policy referred to Council Meeting 23 July 2019	2019/382423
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