

Media Policy

Policy Owner:	Executive Manager Communications
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Required by legislation:	N/A

1 Introduction

1.1 Waikato District Council utilises and engages with a range of media channels and tools, to share information and communicate decisions with our community.

This policy has been developed with the Trust and Confidence Strategy in mind: to be visible, trusted, and committed to engaging with our communities.

2 Purpose

2.1 This policy outlines the approach of Council to media engagement to ensure clear, consistent and accurate communication with the public while maintaining transparency and public trust as well as protecting the reputation and integrity of council.

This policy covers media enquiries and responses or statements to media that represents the official position of the Council.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Social Media Policy and the Staff or Elected Member Code of Conduct.

3 Definitions

Community Relations Specialist	Manages media enquiries, media releases and external communication to our own channels and media channels we feature in.
Controller	The person with delegated authority to lead and coordinate emergency management activities during an incident.
Elected member	Includes the Mayor, councillors and Community Board members.
Incident Management Team (IMT)	The team managing Council's response during an emergency or crisis situation.
Proactive media engagement	Planned outreach to media (e.g. media releases or targeted/ exclusive interviews) initiated by Council.

Story ahead

Early engagement with media before consultation or discussion in Council or committee meetings, particularly on high-interest topics likely to attract public attention.

4 Application

4.1 This policy applies to all council staff, elected members and authorised spokespeople of Waikato District Council when engaging with media representatives, including print, radio, broadcast and online.

4.2 The management of enquiries and content on social media is covered by our Social Media Policy.

5 Policy statements

5.1 General Principles of media engagement:

- Transparency: Provide open and honest communication with the media and public.
- Accuracy: Ensure all information shared is factually correct and up to date.
- Consistency: Maintain a unified voice across all media interactions.
- Responsiveness: Address media enquiries in a timely and professional manner.
- Confidentiality: Protect sensitive or confidential information in line with legal and ethical obligations.

5.2 Media spokespeople

All communication with the media must be approved by the Executive Manager Communications or the Community Relations Specialist. Only authorised spokespeople may directly communicate with the media on behalf of Council.

Authorised spokespeople are:

- The Mayor (or equivalent elected member) on political and governance matters.
- The Chief Executive on operational and strategic matters.
- The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) on specific operational and strategic matters.
- The Executive Manager – Communications for general media enquiries.
- Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) as authorised by ELT on technical matters.

Examples of different types of enquiries and appropriate spokespeople are outlined at the end of this document.

5.3 Media enquiries and responses on behalf of Council

All media enquiries should be directed to the Communications team to assess the request and manage the response. All responses must be coordinated and approved by the Executive Manager Communications (or delegated nominee) to ensure alignment with this policy's General Principles (5.1). Council staff must not speak to the media on behalf of Council unless directly authorised to do so.

5.4 Social media engagement

Council's official social media accounts are managed by the Communications team. Comments made on social media, by staff and elected members, that represent the views of Council must align with this policy, the Social Media Policy and relevant codes of conduct.

5.5 Proactive media engagement

For planned announcements, media releases or proactive media outreach, the Communications team will develop a plan with key messages in consultation with the relevant stakeholders on staff and elected members.

5.6 Crisis and emergency issues media management

The Communications Team will lead media responses during a crisis or emergency in coordination with Civil Defence, the IMT and relevant authorities. All staff must refer media enquiries to the IMT communications representative. Crisis media releases and responses will be approved by the IMT Duty Controller to ensure consistency in a crisis or emergency situation.

5.7 Proactive Councillor columns

Elected Members have the right to express a private opinion on any issue, whether or not that opinion reflects the Council's official position, but Councillors must be careful to identify the role in which they speak or write.

Whenever Councillors publicly express personal opinions, they must make it clear that they are speaking for themselves and not for the Council, unless they are delegated by the Mayor to do so, and/or they are supporting the Council's position.

When delegated by the Mayor to speak to the media, Councillors must do so in accordance with the Code of Conduct and the Social Media Policy.

5.8 Media training

The Communications team will provide media training, as required, for the Mayor, elected members, Chief Executive, ELT, and key SMEs to ensure effective communication is taking place.

5.9 Breaches

Breaches to this policy may result in disciplinary action in accordance with staff and elected member code of conduct policies.

6 Policy review

This policy shall be reviewed at three yearly intervals or as otherwise required by the Chief Executive or Communications Manager.

Appendices

Examples of Enquiries and Media Spokespersons:

There is not a one golden rule for who needs to speak to what (as it is dependent on the issue) but there are some general guidelines that will help

Media enquiry/ story	Spokesperson
Story ahead of Council meetings	Mayor
Story following a Council committee/ advisory group meeting	Chair of the committee (or delegated to other EM)
Strategic planning story (LTP, Annual Report etc)	Mayor or CE
Operational Council Matters	CE
Story responding to a central government announcement	Mayor
Emergency management	Controller/ ELT spokesperson
Story following an emergency to acknowledge efforts	Mayor
High-profile, high interest, significant and political	Mayor or CE
If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor will be quoted. If a Chair is unavailable, the Mayor's Office will determine the spokesperson. Operational stories that do not require a political spokesperson will quote staff only (office closure, roadworks, waste minimisation etc).	

Process for reactive media enquiries:

1. Any staff or elected member receiving media requests to comment on behalf of Council

- a. If a journalist approaches you with a request, take down the journalist's name, contact details, deadline, and a summary of the request.
- b. Forward the information to the Communications team by using the media@ inbox
- c. For simple media requests in which you are the SME, start preparing a response as soon as possible.
- d. If a media response is given before the Communications team is notified, details must be passed on to the team as soon as possible so follow-up can occur.

2. Assessment and response

- a. The Communications team will assess the request, identify the subject matter expert (if required), determine the appropriate spokesperson, and provide support through the response process

- b. Once a response is drafted by the SME it should be sent to the communications team for review before being finalised or sent back to the journalist.

3. Approval and delivery

- a. All media statements must be reviewed by the Communications team before release
- b. Once reviewed, the Communications team will arrange appropriate approvals:
 - Community Relations Specialist
 - Executive Manager - Communications - (matters with potential for high reputational risk)
 - Maaori Partnerships GM - (if the topic has a te ao Maaori or local tangata whenua impact or perspective)
 - GM/CE/Mayor
- c. The Community Relations Specialist will work with the authorised spokesperson to deliver the response, either in written form or via interview, depending on the media channel and request.

Process for proactive media releases

1. Identify the topic

- a. When a potential media release topic is identified (by staff, elected member, or through planned campaigns), the information should be shared with the Communications team.

2. Information gathering

- a. The Communications team will work with the relevant Subject Matter Expert (SME) to gather technical information, background context, images or other supporting material needed to draft the media release.
- b. Check in with the Maaori Partnerships GM to see if the topic has a te ao Maaori or local tangata whenua impact or perspective to include.

3. Drafting the release

- a. The Communications team will prepare the draft release, determining whether a quote from an authorised spokesperson is needed. Draft quotes will be prepared for review by the spokesperson.
- b. If the topic has a te ao maaori or local tangata whenua impact or perspective, check the draft with Maaori Partnerships GM.

4. Content approval

- a. The SME will review the draft release to confirm technical accuracy of all content.

- b. The authorised spokesperson will approve their quote and be provided with the full media release for awareness before publication.
- c. A minimum of 24 hours notice will be provided for approvals, except where urgent circumstances require a shorter timeframe.

5. Distribution planning

- a. The Community Relations Specialist will determine the most effective timing and distribution strategy for the release, considering:
 - i. Wide release to all media
 - ii. Exclusive to a specific publication
 - iii. Localised release to media in a specific geographic area

6. Release and internal sharing

- a. The release will be sent from the **media@waidc.govt.nz** inbox using the standard media banner, published to the Council website, and shared with the following:
 - i. **District-wide matters:** All councillors, CE and ELT
 - ii. **Localised matters:** Relevant ward councillors, CE and ELT, and the Mayor's Strategic Advisor (for consideration on whether to share with the Mayor).