

RANGITĪKEI DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEDIA POLICY

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Date by which review
must be completed: September 2024

Version number: 1.0

Media Policy

OVERVIEW/ INTRODUCTION

Rangitikei District Council is a local authority responsible for representing and servicing the Rangitikei district.

As a democratic organisation, Rangitikei District Council may attract considerable interest from local and national media, with the potential to both enhance and detract from the overall reputation of the organisation.

It is important for Rangitikei District Council to maintain positive working relationships with media outlets. In order to achieve this, all staff are to share an understanding and commitment to the processes in place for the positive management of media relations.

This Media Policy provides a clear framework for engaging with all media organisations. This includes national, metropolitan and local print, radio, television and digital media. This Media Policy has been set to ensure that Council meets the community's expectations relating to accuracy, relevance and accountability.

Rangitikei District Council will use this policy, in conjunction with the Social Media Policy, to assist the Mayor, Councillors, Chief Executive Officer and staff in understanding Council's communication processes when handling media enquiries, identifying spokespersons for media interviews, preparing media statements and making comments to the media.

OBJECTIVES

1. Ensure a consistent approach when working with the media.
2. Protect Council's reputation by ensuring consistency, accuracy and relevance in information made public by Council.
3. Promote a positive perception of Council by informing the community in a manner that is timely, accessible, clear, concise, accurate, non-political and consistent with Council decisions and policies.

SCOPE

This Policy relates to all verbal, printed, electronic and online communications. This Policy recognises that on occasions, staff may interact with the media in three primary capacities:

- as a private individual, or
- as an elected member or staff member
- as an official spokesperson of Rangitikei District Council

All of these roles, and the responsibilities associated with them, are addressed in the Policy.

Part 1. Media Management

MEDIA RELATIONS

Media Relations involves working with media for the purpose of informing the public of an organisation's mission, policies and practices in a positive, consistent and credible manner.

Media relations are a key part of Council's operations as a community leader and advocate within the District.

Traditional media (print, television, magazine, radio) and social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube) provide opportunities for Rangitikei District Council to communicate and engage with the community and stakeholders.

Council will maintain good working relationships with all media organisations including local and national print, radio, television and digital media.

ROLE OF THE COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT TEAM

All media enquiries must be referred to, coordinated and managed by the Communication and Engagement Team.

The Communication and Engagement Team will write and seek necessary approvals for media releases and statements.

The Communications and Engagement Team will liaise directly with the media to follow up and coordinate enquiries.

The Communication and Engagement Team will provide advice and support to all Council departments to create newsworthy opportunities and target media appropriately.

Council-initiated news stories must be coordinated and managed by the Communication and Engagement Team.

The Communication and Engagement Team will support the Mayor in their role as Council spokesperson. This includes liaison with media and ensuring the Mayor is appropriately briefed/supported as spokesperson.

SPOKESPERSONS

The Mayor is the spokesperson on decisions made by Rangitikei District Council.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Group Manager – Democracy & Planning are the spokespeople for council on all operational matters, including civil emergency and activated Business Continuity Plans.

In circumstances in which the enquiry has a particular focus or calls for the spokesperson to have specific knowledge, the CEO may defer to a Group Manager, who may in turn delegate to a third-tier Manager. In the circumstance where a Group Manager or third-tier Manager is unavailable to make a comment, please refer to the CEO for direction.

If the enquiry is minor and/or regarding something that is a matter of public record, the enquiry can be answered immediately by a member of the Communications and Engagement Team, or a referral made to the journalist to visit Council's website for the relevant information.

ENQUIRIES

To ensure consistency and timeframes are met, all media enquiries received by Council staff or elected members are to be directed immediately through to the Communications and Engagement Team via the following methods:

- Internal form (would need to develop one)
- Email
- Phone call

All enquiries will be acknowledged by the Communications and Engagement Team once received. The Communications and Engagement Team will then take responsibility in the coordination and preparation of the response.

RESPONSE TIMES

Most media enquiries received will include a deadline for response.

Rangitikei District Council will, when possible, endeavour to meet the stated deadline by placing priority on responding to enquiries allocated to them by Council's Communication and Engagement Team. If no deadline is advised, we will return a response within a maximum of 72 hours of receiving the enquiry.

In the event that a deadline cannot be met due to the complexity of the request or the need to seek information from a cross-section of departments, a member of the Communications and Engagement Team will contact the journalist and advise of an alternative time frame.

MEDIA TRAINING

While the Mayor, CEO and Group Manager – Democracy & Planning are the Spokespersons for the majority of media enquiries, there may be a need for other staff to act as Council spokesperson from time-to-time. Group Managers, tier-three Managers and Team Leaders will undergo media training, with frequent refresher training advised.

INTERVIEW BRIEFING

In the event an interview from a broadcasting outlet is requested, the Communications and Engagement Team will coordinate with the relevant Spokesperson.

The Communications and Engagement Team will be responsible for asking the interviewing body for more information about the topic or angle being covered in the interview.

Full briefing notes for the interviewee will be prepared by the Communications and Engagement Team. Briefing notes will be provided a minimum 24 hours prior to the interview taking place. Briefing notes will be signed off by the interviewee and the CEO.

If necessary, a practice interview will be conducted between the interviewee and a member of the Communications and Engagement Team.

The Communications and Engagement Team will request a copy of the interview once it has gone to air.

COUNCILLORS AND THE MEDIA

Councillors must abide by the Elected Member Code of Conduct when engaging with the media.

In recognising that an individual Councillor may have a view that differs from the official Council position, Councillors who express personal views should qualify their remarks to indicate this is a personal view.

When approached by the media, Councillors have the following options available to them:

- Make a comment (not as the official spokesperson).
- Decline to make comment and refer the journalist to the Mayor to make official comments.
- Defer the enquiry to the Communications and Engagement Team for an official response to be prepared.

To minimise apprehended bias, Councillors must take a reserved approach when speaking to media prior to a matter coming before Council. This does not mean that Councillors cannot publicly make comment on a forthcoming issue, but Councillors should carefully consider the meaning and potential interpretation of their comments.

Individual Councillors wishing to initiate their own communication, through any channel, must make it clear that they are expressing their 'individual' view and not the 'official' view of Council.

Councillors are responsible for ensuring that information they are providing is accurate and consistent with legislation and policies.

Involvement of other Councillors at media engagement events

The Mayor can invite other Councillors to participate in any media engagement opportunity, especially if it relates to that Councillors' Ward or Committee appointment.

If several Councillors attend a media engagement event, then the Mayor will determine which order these Councillors might speak and/or appear, if at all (including on Council's social media).

2. Communications Methods

Rangitikei District Council utilises a variety of communication tools to provide the media and community with timely information.

MEDIA RELEASES

As part of the overarching media engagement schedule of Rangitikei District Council, media releases will be used to send important information to a range of media outlets. Media releases are an official statement for the purpose of providing information or making an announcement directed for public release. Journalists and editors receive the media release and decide if they want to write a story based on the information provided. The story angle taken by a journalist may differ from the one presented in the media release. Council has no influence on editorial decisions.

All media releases are written by the Communications and Engagement Team and signed off by the CEO and Spokesperson used prior to being sent to the media or uploading to the Council website.

All Councillors, the Executive Leadership Team, and Communications and Engagement Team receive a copy of media releases once distributed.

Protocol for quoting in media releases:

- District-wide, policy-oriented or highly political stories are to quote the Mayor.
- Stories connected to a specific ward or geographic location can be quoted by a ward Councillor and/or the Mayor. This is at the discretion of the Mayor.
- Stories arising from the work of a committee can be quoted by a Councillor who serves on that committee and/or the Mayor.
- Operational issues are quoted by the CEO.
- Staff with specialist knowledge may be quoted in media releases with the permission of the relevant delegated authority.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media platforms enable two-way communication – the public can comment and connect with the Council, and the Council can broadcast its messages out into the community.

The Communications and Engagement Team oversees the management of all Rangitikei District Council's social media platforms.

All of the Council related social media accounts must include the correct logo and spelling of the organisation, a brief descriptor of the organisation, state its relationship to Rangitikei District Council and Public Conditions of Use linked to the Council's website where the Social Media Policy is.

To view the full Social Media Policy, please follow this link - [Social Media Policy - Rangitikei District Council](#).

3. Accountability and Responsibility

Accountability and responsibility for this policy is outlined below.

3.1. Council

- Responsibility to ensure this Policy is consistent with Rangitikei District Council's Strategic Direction and Policies
- Responsibility for the decision to approve this Policy by Council Resolution

3.2. Chief Executive Officer

- Overall responsibility for compliance with this policy
- Overall responsibility for enforcing accountability
- Overall responsibility for providing resources
- Overall responsibility for performance monitoring
- Sign off on key media stories/responses and/or delegation of sign off.

3.3. Mayor and Councillors

- Responsibility for compliance with this policy
- Responsibility for enforcing accountability
- Responsibility for providing resources
- Responsibility for performance monitoring

3.4. Group Manager

- Responsibility for compliance with this policy
- Responsibility for enforcing accountability
- Responsibility for providing resources
- Responsibility for performance monitoring

3.5. Manager (Third-tier)

- Develop frameworks and procedures in compliance with this policy
- Enforce responsibilities to achieve compliance with frameworks and procedures
- Provide appropriate resources for the execution of the frameworks and procedures

3.6. Employees, Contractors and Volunteers

- Participate where required in the development of frameworks and procedures in compliance with this policy
- Comply with frameworks and procedures developed to achieve compliance with this policy

4. Evaluation and Review

This policy will be reviewed on request of Council or in the event of significant change in the Executive Leadership Team, significant changes to legislation applicable to the subject matter of the policy or, in any other case, during each Council term (generally three years).

5. Related Documents

Social Media Policy

6. Reference Resources

Local Government Act

Privacy Acts

Freedom of Information Act