
POLICY TITLE: **CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

FOLDER NUMBER:

POLICY OWNER / DIVISION: Office of the General Manager

POLICY OWNER / BRANCH: Strategy and Place

FUNCTION: Communications and Engagement

RELEVANT LEGISLATION: Local Government Act 1993 NSW
Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988 NSW
The Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 NSW
Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 NSW
The Privacy Act 1988
Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 NSW
Work Health and Safety Act 2011 NSW
Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW 2015
Australian Constitution
Copyright Act 1968 Cth
Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000
Office of Local Government Model Social Media Policy
2022

POLICY ADOPTION/AMENDMENT DATE: 9 April 2025

REPORT NUMBER: CS3/25

REVIEW YEAR: 2027

AMENDMENT HISTORY: NIL

RELATED POLICIES: Media Policy
Code of Conduct for Staff
Code of Conduct for Councillors
Social Media Policy
Social Media Policy for Councillors
Emergency Management Framework

INTRODUCTION

Communicating at Hornsby Shire Council during times of crisis

Crises can arise at any time. To best protect and serve our community, we need embedded plans and protocols to guide Council through unexpected internal and external change and challenges. This policy steps out a process for communications and engagement best practice to mitigate risk, and navigate and manage crises.

Strategic communication

At Hornsby Shire Council, we need to be prepared with a strategic response to any kind of crisis: operational, technological, social, environmental or reputational. Strategic communication blends five main communication components, each with their own strength and role. All these communication components work to support business risk mitigation, preparation, crisis response and recovery.

- Public relations
- Brand reputation management
- Media
- Internal communications
- Stakeholder engagement

Policy activation

This policy may be activated following a significant event that impacts or may impact the Hornsby Shire or Hornsby Shire Council. When an event has become an emergency which is being led by a combat agency, the Emergency Management Framework is activated, and all communications is led by the appropriate combat agency's Incident Management Team (IMT). Council Communications is coordinated by the appointed Media Liaison Officer, part of the IMT, in conjunction with the Local Emergency Management Officer (LEMO).

The General Manager is the only spokesperson for Council unless they explicitly delegate authority.

The LEMO coordinates and approves all Council efforts during times of crisis that fall within the Emergency Management Framework. Authorised Communications and Engagement team members develop and publish content on Council communications channels under the direction of the LEMO and appropriate combat agency IMT.

For all other crisis, such as reputational or public relations, the General Manager coordinates and approves all Council efforts during this time.

The Communications and Engagement team

Work with the Emergency Response Manager, team and Council subject matter experts

While preparing for and responding to crisis, the Communications and Engagement Manager and team should work with a cross-section of Council staff and the Emergency Response team to shape a strategic response to crisis.

Information will be shared via the Common Operating Procedure.

Draft responses to possible crises and key messages.

Strategic communications and key messages are written to context, audience type and organisational needs. The timing, method and purpose of strategic communications will differ depending on the nature of the crisis.

When drafting a response to crisis, we consider who we will be talking to, how often we will communicate, the type of language we will use and how we will direct people to seek support and information.

Balance speed and accuracy.

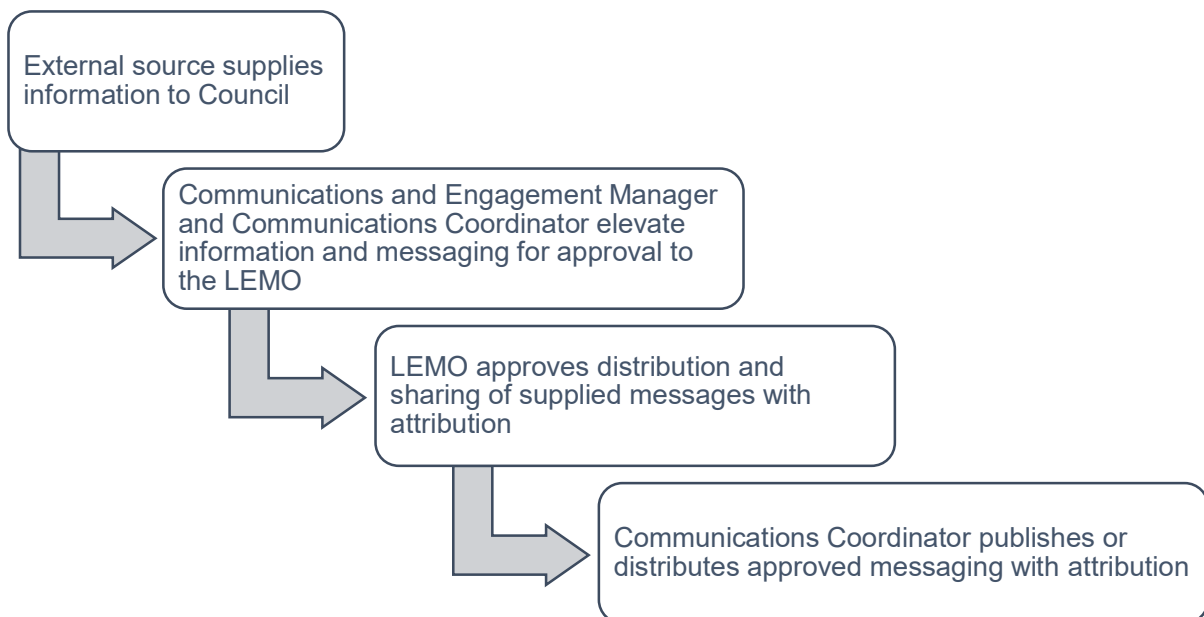
Speed is an advantage in crisis communications, but the strategic element lies in accuracy and the ability to position Council as a trusted source of information.

Consistency of messaging

To ensure consistent messaging both during and after an emergency, authorised users and Council officials must not share content which contradicts advice issued by the agency coordinating the emergency response, or agencies supporting recovery efforts.

Crisis communications approvals

When Council officers and representatives receive information or messages from an external source, they must follow the communications approval process.



Communication guidelines for Councillors

Where possible, Councillors can support Council in times of crisis by using their leadership and profile in the community to share approved messages on appropriate channels.

Councillors are permitted to reshare information supplied by Hornsby Shire Council and to direct community enquiries to the appropriate emergency authority.

When it comes to sharing messages, Councillors, staff and Council representatives should take care to only use messages and materials supplied by the Communications and Engagement team and approved by the LEMO.

Communications guidelines for Councillors are as follows:

- ✓ Never publish an embargoed statement before the approved date and time.
- ✓ Unless you are confident the information is already publicly available, consult the Communications and Engagement Manager about appropriate messaging and strategic release timing.
- ✓ Never speak on Council's behalf or commit Council to any action.
- ✓ Ensure you have the appropriate permissions from people and organisations when sharing images and videos.

MORE INFORMATION

If you have further questions or need more information about our crisis communications policy, please get in touch with our Communications and Engagement Manager.

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Phone: 02 9847 6070.