

Councillor Media Policy

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1. POLICY OBJECTIVE

This policy ensures the Mayor and Councillors have clear guidelines and direction around the use of the mass media and social media. The media is actively used to inform the wider community of Council's activities, decisions, strategic directions and stance on particular issues by planning, managing and delivering effective and consistent communication.

Social media provides a variety of opportunities for dynamic and interactive two-way communications between Councillors and their constituents. It complements traditional methods of communication and improves access to information and delivery of key services.

The Councillor Media Policy aims to:

- ensure that clear and consistent messages are communicated;
- minimise threats to the city's image and create positive perceptions of Greater Dandenong;
- create a positive image for Council as open, accountable and responsible; and
- ensure Councillors understand Council's media relations protocols and systems and have the skills to appropriately respond to the media if required.

This should be achieved by:

- working cooperatively with all media outlets;
- respecting the role and purpose of the media;
- promoting key messages and responding to media enquiries; and
- Councillors undertaking media training.

2. BACKGROUND

Greater Dandenong City Council utilises media outlets to ensure the community is well informed of its services, activities, events, decisions and strategic directions by planning, managing and delivering effective, consistent communications.

In turn, the media provides a vital information source for Council's audiences. Social media is considered by Council to be a key tool for community collaboration and engagement strategies and campaigns, promotion of Council events and services and general customer interaction.

Greater Dandenong City Council is committed to informing and influencing public opinion through building positive relationships with the media. This will ensure Council is represented in a unified and professional manner at every opportunity.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Councillors of Greater Dandenong City Council who may have interaction with media channels in their official capacity as Councillors.

4. DEFINITIONS

Media: A means of mass communication, including radio, television, newspapers, magazines and the internet, which reach and influence people widely.

Social Media: websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. It includes digital spaces where people may comment, contribute, create, publish, forward, post, upload and share content, including but not limited to:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube/Vimeo
- LinkedIn
- TikTok
- Yammer
- Pinterest
- Tumblr
- Flickr
- SnapChat
- Blogs
- Forums and discussion boards
- Podcasts
- Social media monitoring and scheduling programs
- Chat rooms or internet forums
- Instant messaging/MSN
- RSS (Really Simple Syndication)
- Video sharing sites
- Vodcasting
- Wikis

5. POLICY

5.1 MEDIA QUERIES: MAYOR AND COUNCILLORS

The mayor is the organisation's official spokesperson for:

- all policy matters and council decisions;
- statewide political issues affecting local government; and
- issues affecting public perception of the city.

The Mayor may ask the Chief Executive Officer, a director, Deputy Mayor, or another Councillor to make an official comment on their behalf.

As the chair or delegate of a Council Delegated Committee, Councillors may provide comment on matters relating to that Delegated Committee to the media.

Councillors will not provide information that is either formally declared 'confidential' or deemed 'confidential' or which may be considered privileged to their role as a Councillor to the media under any circumstances.

5.2 CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO)

The CEO is the official spokesperson for all operational matters pertaining to Greater Dandenong City Council as an organisation and corporate issues relating to strategic direction (e.g. Council Plan priorities, budget, etc). The CEO may, by agreement, refer a matter to the Mayor or Deputy Mayor for their comments, or otherwise may delegate responsibility to a director or council officer to make an official comment.

The Executive Manager Communications and Customer Service is available anytime to assist with media queries or responses that Councillors receive directly. All media queries by journalists to Council must be submitted in writing to Council's Media and Communications Unit for appropriate follow up and response.

5.3 MEDIA RELEASES

The Media & Communications Unit is responsible for coordinating the approval and distribution of all media releases on behalf of Greater Dandenong City Council.

5.4 QUOTATIONS

The Mayor will be quoted as the official spokesperson in the majority of Council media releases as deemed appropriate by the Media & Communications team. Other staff or Councillors may be quoted where relevant, or where the topic does not relate to overall Council policy and activity.

5.5 PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

Photo opportunities regarding corporate issues will be coordinated through the Media & Communications team. The Mayor and Councillors will be advised of relevant photo opportunities and invited to attend. If the media are not available or unable to make it to a photo opportunity, Media & Communications staff may arrange to take the photograph and provide it to them. Photos taken by Council staff or its contract photographers remain the property of Council and are subject to normal contract conditions.

5.6 DISTRIBUTION

Media releases will be circulated by email to local and major metropolitan media outlets (according to recipient lists managed by the Media & Communications Unit). A copy of each release will also be sent out to the Mayor, Councillors and executive team via Infosum, (Councillors' Weekly Information Summary) and placed on Council's website.

The Media & Communications Unit may determine to restrict circulation or target specific media outlets if the matter is specific to a particular audience or is only a matter of local interest.

The Media & Communications Unit will distribute all media releases, unless otherwise agreed.

5.7 MEDIA TRAINING

Regular training is important to increase the likelihood of Council's messages being accurately carried by the media; preparing for approaches from and interviews with metropolitan media, particularly radio and television; and helping to minimise damage in a crisis situation.

Councillors will be given the opportunity to undertake media training within three months of a general election or as deemed required. The Mayor will attend formal one-on-one media training within two months of being elected. All media training will be arranged by the Media & Communications Unit.

5.8 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is the use of computer-based and mobile technologies that facilitate the sharing of ideas, thoughts and information through virtual networks. It provides a low-cost, direct-to-user communications channel and is considered a key tool for community campaigns. Social media applies to those digital spaces where people may comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload and share content.

Council recognises that Councillors advocate on behalf of Council and the community through their own personal social media sites/community social media sites and this is a key tool for them to promote Council events and services to the wider public. These sites however are often reflective of Councillors' personal viewpoints and are not reflective of Council as an organisation.

While social media is built around the concept of 'conversation', it is important for Councillors on social media sites to always be courteous, patient and respectful. Content posted to social media is deemed to be in the public domain therefore only publicly available information should be disclosed.

Council provides Councillors with all the equipment necessary to support them in their roles as Councillors and it is understood that they may administer their personal social media sites through this equipment. Therefore, Councillors' personal/private social media sites, when managed or delivered through Council's platforms and equipment, are subject to the following restrictions:

- No photos or videos of non-public Council workplace spaces should be uploaded to personal social media accounts;
- No images, videos or information obtained internally from Councillor Briefing Sessions, Council's network, emails, correspondence or files may be uploaded to personal social media accounts or community social media sites without prior consent;
- Existing Councillor Code of Conduct obligations apply as they relate to general Councillor conduct principles including, but not limited to, inappropriate language, confidentiality, handling and use of confidential and personal information and misconduct.

When using social media for any purpose in an official capacity, Councillors are expected to:

- adhere to the Greater Dandenong City Councillor Code of Conduct and relevant Greater Dandenong City Council policies and procedures;
- behave with caution, courtesy, honesty and respect;
- comply with relevant laws and regulations; and
- reinforce the integrity, reputation and values of the Greater Dandenong City Council.

5.9 INAPPROPRIATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The following content is not permitted on any Council social media site, on social media sites accessed on any Council devices or through interactions on social media:

- abusive, profane or sexual language;
- content which is demonstrably false or misleading;
- information that has been determined confidential under the *Local Government Act 2020*;
- information that would reasonably be considered to be confidential about Council, any Councillors, any Council staff or any other third parties;
- copyright or trademark protected materials;
- discriminatory material in relation to a person or group based on an attribute which is protected by law including age, disability, family status, gender, nationality, marital status, parental status, political opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, race (including colour, ethnicity) or social origin, religious beliefs/activity, responsibilities, sex or sexual orientation or personal association with someone who has, or who is assumed to have, these characteristics;
- Illegal material or materials designed to encourage law breaking;
- material which would bring Council into disrepute;

- material or personal views and comments that could, or is reasonably likely to, cause reputational harm, offence, or damage to Council or that which is intended to cause reputational damage or offence to Council, any Councillor, any Council staff member or third party;
- material that could compromise Council, Councillor, employee or system safety;
- material which would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks);
- personal details or references to other Councillors, Council staff or third parties, which may breach privacy legislation; and
- Spam - the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages.

6. RESPONSE TO THE OVERARCHING GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2020

Section 9 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) states that Council must, in the performance of its role, give effect to the overarching governance principles. This policy gives effect to these principles by:

- complying with the relevant law (section 9(a) of the Act);
- giving priority to achieving the best outcomes for the municipality, including future generations (section 9b of the Act). This policy ensures that in relation to media and the public sharing of information, Councillors are compliant, act with integrity and act in the best interests of Council and the community;
- considering the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks (section 9(c) of the Act). While this policy has no impact on the economic and social sustainability of the municipal district, it has considered climate change and sustainability in its preparation (see section 9 of this policy);
- pursuing innovation and continuous improvement (section 9(e) of the Act). This policy has provision for evaluation, monitoring and review, as well as ongoing media training;
- collaborating with other councils, governments and statutory bodies (section 9(f) of the Act). A number of other council and best practice model policies were consulted in developing this policy; and
- ensuring the transparency of Council decisions, actions and information through the enactment of this policy (section 9(i) of the Act).

In giving effect to the overarching governance principles, a Council must also take into account the community engagement principles (section 56 of the Act), the public transparency principles (section 58 of the Act), the strategic planning principles (section 89 of the Act), the financial management principles (section 101 of the Act), and the service performance principles (section 106 of the Act).

While it is crucial that Council decisions are transparent and open to scrutiny, there is no specific legislative requirement for this particular policy to be subjected to a community engagement process. This policy has no financial impact on Council and the resources required to manage and administer it are allocated from existing resource budgets.

7. CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ACT 2006 – COMPATIBILITY STATEMENT

The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* has been considered in relation to whether any human right under the Charter is restricted or interfered with in any way by enacting any part of this policy. It is considered that this policy is consistent with the rights outlined in the Charter.

8. RESPONSE TO THE GENDER EQUALITY ACT 2020

The *Gender Equality Act 2020* has been considered in the preparation of this policy but is not relevant to its contents. The policy does not significantly impact any external Council services. It is purely administrative in nature and will not benefit any one gender group over another.

9. CONSIDERATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Council's Declaration on a Climate and Ecological Emergency, Council's Climate Change Emergency Strategy 2020-2030 and the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020* in relation to the overarching governance principle on climate change and sustainability have been considered in the preparation of this policy but are not relevant to its contents. The policy is administrative in nature and Councillors have been provided access to electronic formats of the policy so that hard copies are not required.

10. RESPONSIBILITIES

All Councillors of the Greater Dandenong City Council are responsible for management of their individual social media sites and usage, and adherence to this policy.

The Media and Communications team is responsible for the management of all corporate social media sites including content strategy and scheduling; monitoring and record keeping; responding to queries; and educating and providing advice to councillors as required.

The media has a responsibility to submit queries in writing through the Media and Communications Unit.

11. REPORTING, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Council commits to monitoring processes, regular information sharing and decision making to understand the overall level of success in this policy's implementation.

A formal media monitoring system is in place to capture any mentions of the organisation and individuals so that appropriate responses can be prepared and/or advice provided.

A periodic review of this policy will be undertaken to ensure any changes required to strengthen or update the policy are made in a timely manner.

12. REFERENCES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

Legislation

- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*

Related Council and Other Policies, Procedures, Strategies, Protocols, Guidelines

- Greater Dandenong City Council Appropriate Workplace Behaviours Policy
- Greater Dandenong City Council Councillor Code of Conduct
- Greater Dandenong City Council Council Plan 2021-2025
- Greater Dandenong City Council Privacy and Personal Information Policy
- Greater Dandenong City Council Workplace Equal Opportunity Policy
- Greater Dandenong City Council Mobile Devices Policy
- Greater Dandenong City Council Information Security Policy

13. APPENDIX - GUIDELINES FOR APPROPRIATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Content posted to social media sites is deemed to be in the public domain. Only publicly available information should be disclosed. Information confidential to Council and its stakeholders must not be disclosed.

Expertise - Do not comment outside your area of expertise. Do not commit Council or Council staff to actions or undertakings.

Disclosure - Only discuss publicly available information. Do not disclose confidential information, internal discussions or decisions of Council, employees or third parties. This includes publishing confidential, personal or private information where there is sufficient detail for potential identification of, Council staff, contractors, volunteers or third parties.

Accuracy - Be accurate, constructive, helpful and informative. Correct any errors as soon as practicable. Do not publish information or make statements which may be false or may reasonably be taken to be misleading or deceptive.

Identity - Be clear about professional identity or any vested interests. Do not use fictitious names or identities that deliberately intend to deceive, mislead or lie. Do not participate anonymously or covertly via a third party or agency.

Opinion - Clearly separate personal opinions from professional ones and be mindful of the Councillor Code of Conduct when discussing or commenting on Council matters. In general, don't express personal opinions using Council hashtags or other identifications. Only where this is not possible, consider using a formal disclaimer to separate official Council positions from personal opinions and distance Council from comments made by public and other outside interests.

Privacy - Be sensitive to the privacy of others. Seek permission from anyone who appears in any photographs, video or other footage before sharing these via any form of social media. If asked to remove materials do so as soon as practicable.

Intellectual property/copyright - Seek permission from the creator or copyright owner, to use or reproduce copyright material including applications, audio tracks (speeches, songs), footage (video), graphics (graphs, charts and logos), images, artwork, photographs, publications or music. Also seek permission before publishing or uploading material in which the intellectual property rights, such as Trademarks, are owned by a third party e.g. company logos. Seek permission from the website's owner wherever possible before linking to another site (including a social media application).

Defamation - Do not comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload or share content that is malicious or defamatory. This includes statements which may negatively impact the reputation of another.

Reward - Do not publish content in exchange for reward of any kind.

Transparency - Do not seek to buy or recompense favourable social media commentary. Encourage online publishers to be open and transparent in how they engage with, or review Council personnel, services or wares.

Respect - Always be courteous, patient and respectful of others' opinions, including detractors.

Discrimination, bullying and harassment - Be mindful of anti-discrimination, bullying, harassment and anti-stalking laws and do not publish statements or information or use social media tools in a way which may breach these.

Language - Be mindful of language and expressions that you use and accept that Council cannot filter that used by others.

Be safe - Protect personal privacy and guard against identity theft. Ensure passwords are managed and maintained appropriately.

Media - Do not issue statements or make announcements through social media channels unless authorised to do so.

Modification and moderation - Ensure that any social media sites created or contributed to can be readily edited, improved or removed and appropriately moderated.