

Media Policy for the Mayor and Councillors

TITLE:

Media Policy for the Mayor and Councillors

PURPOSE:

This policy provides a framework to ensure that the Mayor and Councillors assist the City of Darebin to manage its media relations successfully. Media is an important channel to:

- effectively promote Council's services, programs and initiatives
- provide clear information about Council processes and decisions
- promote opportunities for residents to get involved
- ensure Darebin speaks with a strong, honest and authoritative voice on all matters pertaining to its operations and values, and
- manage and enhance Darebin's reputation.

The **Guideline** supports the Media Policy and is designed to ensure that the Mayor and Councillors do not use the media for purposes other than Council business and as outlined in this policy.

POLICY

The Mayor is the official spokesperson for Darebin Council and the decisions of Council, unless otherwise delegated by him/her.

The role of the Mayor as spokesperson for Darebin Council is to:

- clearly articulate and explain the deliberations and decisions of Council
- promote participation in and understanding of democratic processes and decisions
- promote awareness and take-up of Council services
- promote opportunities for residents to participate fully in municipal life
- protect the city's reputation from harm caused by negative events or negative or incorrect media coverage.

It is not the role of the Mayor to discuss operational, organisational issues. Only the Chief Executive and staff authorised by him/her can provide official comment to the media about operational issues on behalf of the City of Darebin. All requests for official City of Darebin comment on organisational policies, business and operations must be referred to the Communications and Marketing Department.

Individual Councillors are entitled to express independent views through the media, however they must make it clear that any unofficial comment is their personal view, and does not represent a position adopted by the Council as a whole.

It is the role of both the Mayor and Councillors to endeavour to ensure that the messages communicated through the media are clear and consistent, and positively portray the Council as a decisive and responsible governing body.

DEFINITIONS

Media: For the purposes of this policy, the term media refers to all mainstream external news channels, including newspapers, radio, television, online news services, and magazines. It does not refer to blogs and social networking tools and forums (refer to employee Social Media Policy).

City of Darebin/Darebin City Council: The City of Darebin or Darebin City Council refers to the organisation run by the Chief Executive and staffed by council officers.

Council/Darebin Council: Council or Darebin Council refers to the nine elected representatives (including the Mayor) whose role is to represent their constituents and make strategic decisions for the city.

SCOPE:

This policy applies to the Mayor and Councillors (Darebin Council).

This policy applies to all interaction with external news media.

While other public communication channels such as blogs and social networking forums are not within the scope of this policy, the Councillor Code of Conduct outlines the responsibilities of elected representatives using these channels.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION:

- Freedom of Information Act
- Privacy Act
- Protected Disclosure Act

RELATED PROCEDURES/DOCUMENTS

- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Councillor Guidelines: Pre-selection or nomination as candidate in Federal or State election

RESPONSIBILITY

The Communications and Marketing Department is responsible for managing official media relations on behalf of the City of Darebin.

The Office of the Chief Executive is responsible for managing the Councillor Code of Conduct.

Media Relations Guideline

1. Purpose

This guideline supports the Mayor and Councillor Media Policy and is designed to ensure that the Mayor and Councillors do not use the media for purposes other than Council business and as outlined in this policy.

2. Scope

The guideline covers the Mayor and Councillors and all contact with the external news media.

3. Guideline

MEDIA RELATIONS GUIDELINE

Purpose

As a local government authority accountable to its residents and ratepayers, the City of Darebin attracts ongoing interest from local, national, and local government sector media. Media coverage is a powerful tool to enhance the City of Darebin's reputation, but media attention also has the potential to harm the city's reputation if not handled appropriately. This makes it important to manage the City of Darebin's media relations professionally, proactively, and with integrity.

This guideline aims to help ensure that the Mayor and Councillors assist the City of Darebin to manage its media relations successfully, effectively promoting Council services and initiatives, keeping residents informed, and ensuring Darebin speaks with a strong, honest and authoritative voice on all matters pertaining to its operations and values.

Sections

1. Media enquiries about City of Darebin (organisational) policy and operations
2. Media enquiries about Council and the decisions of Council
3. General enquiries about Council policies and issues
4. Media opportunities for Councillors pre-selected or nominated as candidates in Federal or State elections
5. Information about staff, and requests under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act
6. Media contact in emergency situations
7. Media monitoring
8. Communications and Marketing Department support
9. Contacting the Communications and Marketing Department

1. Media enquiries about City of Darebin (organisational) policy and operations

- Only the Chief Executive and staff authorised by him/her can provide official comment to the media on behalf of the City of Darebin.
- Directors have delegated authority from the Chief Executive to respond to media enquiries, in consultation with the Communications and Marketing Department, relating to their policy and operational portfolios.
- All media enquiries relating to City of Darebin policies, operations and issues must be directed to the Communications and Marketing Department, who will determine a spokesperson and gather relevant information to respond to the enquiry, in consultation with the Chief Executive as necessary.
- Councillors who become aware of issues or potential issues that could lead to adverse media outcomes for the City of Darebin should contact the Communications and Marketing Department.

2. Media enquiries about Council and the decisions of Council

- The Mayor is the official spokesperson for Darebin Council and the decisions of Council, unless otherwise delegated.
- The Mayor may deal directly with media outlets to respond to media enquiries about Council decisions and deliberations.
- Comment on Council business should be confined to Council plans and strategies and decisions made by Council. The Mayor and Councillors should not discuss matters that have not yet been before Council with the media.
- Staff who receive media queries relating to Council and the decisions of Council will direct them to the Communications and Marketing Department. The Department will answer process questions and clarify detail about decisions on the public record. However all requests for comment on the decisions or deliberations of Council will be referred to the Mayor.

3. General enquiries about Council policies and issues

- From time to time Councillors will be approached by media and asked their opinion about issues or items before Council. To maintain Council's reputation with stakeholders and the community and to ensure that Council key messages are clear and consistent - at all times - consultation with the Mayor, Chief Executive or Communications and Marketing Department is recommended before responding to enquiries from the media.
- Whether they have responded to a media query or proactively provided media comment on Council matters, Councillors are required to advise the Mayor and Communications and Marketing Department that they have engaged with the media.
- If Councillors provide their opinion to the media on matters before Council they should make it clear that they are not speaking on behalf of the whole Council – unless the Mayor has delegated that authority to them on a particular issue.
- Councillors will often be approached to comment on General Business items that have been raised, or are intended to be raised, in the Chamber. In this instance they should make it clear that Council has made no decision in relation to the item raised and will consider the matter in due course. This guards against the potential perception that a pre-emptive decision has been made before a report is considered.

- Councillors should never discuss confidential Council business items with the media.
- Councillors are not to comment to the media on organisational, operational issues but to refer them to the Chief Executive, relevant Director or Communications and Marketing Department.

4. Media opportunities for Councillors pre-selected or nominated as candidates in Federal or State elections

- Councillors who gain pre-selection, or otherwise nominate, as a candidate in a Federal or State election should ensure that any comment made to the media in their capacity as a Councillor is limited to matters concerning Council and is not used in a manner that furthers their platform as a candidate in, or is connected with, the relevant election.
- A Councillor who gains pre-selection, or otherwise nominates, as a candidate in a Federal or State election should ensure that they do not use such a media opportunity to further their platform as a candidate in, or in any manner connected with, the relevant election. See *Councillor Guidelines: pre-selection or nomination as candidate in Federal or State election* for more information.

5. Information about staff and residents, and requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI)

- Information about individual staff or residents is protected under the Privacy Act. Refer all such enquiries to the Communications and Marketing Department.
- Councillors should not respond directly to requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act. All requests for information under the Act must be referred to the Records Management Coordinator (who is our Freedom of Information and our Privacy Officer) for consideration and response.

6. Media contact in emergency situations

The Communications and Marketing Department, in consultation with the Chief Executive and the Darebin Emergency Management Group (DEMG), is responsible for releasing any information to the media about an emergency situation. Please alert the Communications and Marketing Department to any emergency situation they may not yet be aware of.

7. Media monitoring

The Communications and Marketing Department monitors all media activity for the City of Darebin. If you are seeking a particular news item about the City of Darebin, contact the Communications and Marketing Department and they will be able to source it for you. Print media clips are free, radio and TV clips incur a fee.

8. Communications and Marketing Department support

The role of Council's media unit, within the Communications and Marketing Department, is to help promote the programs, initiatives, services and strategic policy decisions of Darebin City Council and to support the Mayor as spokesperson for the Council. It is not the media unit's role to promote and build the profile of individual councillors.

For this reason, media unit support is reserved for actual Council decisions and does not extend to promoting and explaining General Business items raised by Councillors – until they have been considered and a majority Council decision has been made. This includes support for photo opportunities, which Councillors can arrange themselves in relation to a General Business item.

9. Contacting the Communications and Marketing Department

The Communications and Marketing Department is available at all times to assist with media enquiries. Please refer to the City of Darebin Phonebook for current phone numbers, or contact team members via email. All Communication Advisors have mobile phones so they can be contacted if a situation is urgent or out of hours. If you can't reach the Manager or a Communications Advisor, anyone in the Communications & Marketing team can take your call and refer it appropriately.