

Councillor Media and Social Media Policy

<p>Purpose</p>	<p>This policy provides a framework to ensure that the Mayor and Councillors assist the City of Darebin to manage its media relations and in turn, its reputation successfully. Media and social media are important channels to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>The policy outlines appropriate activities in relation to the Mayor and Councillors engagement with the media and/or social media, consistent with their obligations under their Standards of Conduct. Further, it outlines the role of the Communications, Engagement and Customer Experience Department in providing assistance to Councillors and the actions that may occur in the event of breaches of this Policy.</p> <p>It is imperative that Council has a policy and protocol which ensures Council is capable of keeping pace with the increasing immediacy of news. The policy of having defined spokespeople and a centralised media contact is central to Council's success.</p> <p>This policy does not relate to the activities of Council staff.</p>
<p>Scope</p>	<p>This policy applies to all Councillors of the City of Darebin.</p> <p>This policy applies to any/all interaction with external news media and engagement with any public facing social media platform, including any/all such interaction using a pseudonym.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This policy does not apply to Council staff. <p>The Communications, Engagement and Customer Experience Department is responsible for managing official media relations and social media engagement on behalf of the City of Darebin.</p>
<p>Definitions and Abbreviations</p>	<p>The Communications, Engagement and Customer Experience Department is part of the Governance and Engagement Division.</p> <p>The Manager of Communications, Engagement and Customer Experience manages the Communications, Engagement and Customer Experience Department.</p>

	<p>The Communications, Brand and Digital team is part of the Communications, Engagement and Customer Experience Department.</p> <p>The Communications, Brand and Digital Coordinator manages the Corporate Communications and Digital teams, which are responsible for media relations and social media management and engagement.</p> <p>The Communications team is part of the Communications and Engagement Department and is managed by the Communications Coordinator.</p> <p>The Digital Advisor is a member of the Communications team.</p> <p>Authorised Social Media Publishers are staff across Council who have authority to post and comment on social media from corporate accounts. Approval must be made in writing by the Digital Advisor or Communications Officers, within the Communications, Brand and Digital team.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Delegated Councillors refers to a Councillor asked to respond to a media request on behalf of the Mayor.</p> <p>Darebin City Council refers to the organisation run by the Chief Executive and staffed by council officers.</p> <p>Media: For the purposes of this policy, the term media refers to all mainstream external news channels, including (but not limited to) newspapers, radio, television, online news services, industry publications and magazines.</p> <p>Social Media: For the purposes of this policy, the term social media refers to a range of digital platforms and social networking tools and forums including (but not limited to) Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and blogs.</p>
<p>Background</p>	<p>Communicating with or via the media including social media plays a large role in Council's interaction with the community. All media and social media interaction are undertaken broadly to enhance or protect the City of Darebin's reputation and engage with residents and local businesses. Media coverage influences community perceptions, informs residents of Council's activities and applies a level of scrutiny to Council's functions.</p> <p>Consistent with the principles of good governance, it is important that Council has clear standards and guidelines in place which outline the appropriate use of media and social media channels by Councillors.</p> <p>This Policy supports compliance with legislation and the Councillor Code of Conduct.</p>
<p>Principles</p>	<p>This policy has at its foundation the following guiding principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. External communication is based on a considered strategy with a clear understanding of audience, desired outcome, appropriate channel(s), impacts on community, government relationships, reputation management and legal liability. 2. The primary audience for all media and social media comment is the Darebin community.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Corporate media and social media will not be used to promote Councillor's personal, business or political interests, including interests as a candidate in an election. 4. Media commentary and social media engagement will be tailored to the channel(s) being used. 5. All media and social media commentary will be entirely consistent with any adopted or established Council position (when in place). 6. All media and social media commentary will respect any decision taken by Council. 7. Notwithstanding the above principles, this policy is not intended to limit a Councillor's right under the <i>Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006</i> to express a view or opinion.
<p>Roles and Responsibilities</p>	<p>The Mayor</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Mayor is the official spokesperson for Darebin City Council and the decisions of Council, unless otherwise delegated by them. 2. The role of the Mayor as spokesperson for Darebin City Council is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly articulate and explain and promote the deliberations and decisions of Council • promote participation in, and understanding of, democratic processes and decisions • promote awareness and utilisation of Council services • amplify important Federal and State government messages at a local level • promote opportunities for residents to participate more fully in community life • protect the city's reputation from harm caused by negative events or negative or incorrect media coverage. 3. Posts and responses from the Mayor's official channel on social media platforms are to be made by the Mayor. 4. It is not the role of the Mayor to discuss operational matters or organisational issues. These issues include employment matters, relations between officers and Councillors, breaches of the staff code of conduct, and other matters as defined in ss 46-49 of the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> (including any amendments to it). <p>Responsive and timely provision of information is central to successful issues management and therefore, the Mayor and the Manager of Communications, Engagement and Customer Experience will respond on behalf of Council without consultation where required.</p>

Councillors

1. The Mayor is the official spokesperson of Council. Councillors are entitled to express independent views 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.
2. Councillors referring to or referencing a council decision must do so fairly and in the full and proper context in which the decision was made.
3. Any/all contact between the media and individual Councillors should be referred to the Mayor and/or the Communications Engagement and Customer Experience Department, preferably ahead of any response being provided by a Councillor.
4. Councillors must be mindful that any response or public comment will likely be perceived as being made as a Councillor of the City of Darebin irrespective of whether they use the title "Councillor" in their communication or the media channel being used including personal, professional or other social media channels.
5. Councillor's professional work is not subject to this Policy, however Councillors must be mindful that the Code of Conduct applies to their professional lives. Councillors should contact the Manager of Communications Engagement and Customer Experience where their public statements to media and on professional social media channels puts them in conflict with Council policies.
6. It is the role of both the Mayor and Councillors to endeavor to ensure that the messages communicated through the media and social media are clear and consistent accurate and factual and do not seek to deliberately harm the reputation of the Council.
7. It is the role of the Mayor and Councillors to endeavor to prevent reputational damage to the Darebin City Council.
8. Councillors will endeavor to ensure that any information or activities that may be considered a risk to Council's reputation are brought to the attention of the Manager Communications Engagement and Customer Experience and/or the CEO as soon as possible.
9. If speaking with the media, Councillors must make it clear that they are not speaking on behalf of Council – unless the Mayor has delegated that authority to them on a particular issue.

10. Councillors must ensure that any such comment is devoid of any content that could reasonably be construed as being, derogatory, offensive or insulting to any person including a member of council staff.

11. Councillors must ensure that any such comment is devoid of any content that could reasonably be constructed or interpreted as being criticism derogatory, offensive or insulting to the organisation of the Darebin City Council or any part thereof. This does not preclude individual Councillors from advocating for change to a Council policy or service level, so long as they declare the statement as a personal view.

12. It is not the role of Councillors to discuss operational, organisational matters or issues. These issues include, but are not limited to, the planning, organising and execution of day-to-day activities, including, employment matters, operational decisions, relations between officers and Councillors, breaches of the staff code of conduct, and other matters as defined in s46-49 of the Local Government Act 2020 (including any amendments to it).

Delegated Councillors

1. If delegated, 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 Engagement and Customer Experience Department is recommended before responding to enquiries from the media.
2. If delegated, Councillors approached to comment on General Business items that have been raised or are intended to be raised in the Chamber must 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.

Communications Engagement and Customer Experience Team

1. The role of the Communications Engagement and Customer Experience 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 Department's role to promote and build the profile of

	<p>individual Councillors.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Council’s Corporate Communications Team is responsible for issuing media releases and contacting journalists about potential stories in accordance with the provisions of this policy. 3. Proactive media coverage and social media is the responsibility of Council’s Communications Engagement and Customer Experience Department, or under CEO delegation to another Business Unit. 4. The Corporate Communications team will contact the media to seek coverage of a story where a news story is identified and/or it is decided that Council should release details of an event or issue. 5. Council’s Communications Engagement and Customer Experience Department is responsible for issuing media releases and contacting journalists about potential stories in accordance with the provisions of this policy. 6. Council Communications Engagement and Customer Experience Department is responsible for the development of social media content. 7. The Communications Engagement and Customer Experience Department works collaboratively across Darebin City Council to carry out its responsibilities.
<p>Standards of Conduct</p>	<p>Councillors understand that the Standards of Conduct as prescribed by the Regulations and included in the Code of Conduct in accordance with section 139(3)(a) of the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> apply Councillor activity on social media or interactions with the media. Of particular relevance in this context are the following Standards:</p> <p>“Treatment of Others</p> <p><i>A Councillor must, in performing the role of Councillor, treat other Councillors, members of Council staff, the municipal community and members of the public with dignity, fairness, objectivity, courtesy and respect, including by ensuring that the Councillor;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Takes positive action to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation</i> • <i>in accordance with the Equal Opportunity Act 2010;</i> • <i>Supports Council in fulfilling its obligation to achieve and promote gender equality, and;</i> • <i>In considering the diversity of interests and needs of the municipal community, treats all persons with respect and has due regard for their opinions, beliefs, rights and Responsibilities”.</i> <p>...</p> <p>Councillor must not discredit or mislead Council or public</p>

	<p><i>In performing the role of a Councillor, a Councillor must ensure that their behaviour does not bring discredit upon Council.</i></p> <p><i>In performing the role of a Councillor, a Councillor must not deliberately mislead Council or the public about any matter related to the performance of their public duties.”</i></p>
<p>Official Spokesperson</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All posts and interactions on Darebin City Council Social Media channels and platforms will be made from an official account (eg Darebin City Council, Darebin Arts Centre, Northcote Town Hall etc), managed by a staff member who is an authorised social media publisher* “Official Spokesperson”. • Posts and comments will not be made from personal accounts.
<p>Operational and Organisational Matters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only the Chief Executive Officer or staff authorised by them can provide official comment to the media about operational matters on behalf of Darebin City Council. • All/any requests for comment on organisational policies, business and operations must be immediately referred to the Manager Communications Engagement and Customer Experience. • We do not use social media to address operational issues except to echo a media statement. These comments would be made from a corporate account. Information about individual staff or residents is protected under the Privacy Act. Councillors must immediately refer all such enquiries to the General Manager Governance and Engagement for consideration and response. • Councillors must 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 for consideration and response.
<p>Key Accountabilities - Media</p>	<p>Managing the media in both proactive and reactive settings requires the cooperation of many parties as outlined below.</p> <p>Mayor - Primary spokesperson for the City of Darebin on policy issues, citywide issues and intergovernmental issues, as well as major issues of community significance. The Mayor may also choose to delegate matters or enquiries to other councillors.</p> <p>Councillors - Act as the primary spokesperson when delegated by the Mayor.</p> <p>CEO - Provides guidance on the development of media responses in consultation with the Mayor and has ultimate accountability for media responses. Where media issues relate to administrative, operational or staff performance issues, the CEO or delegated Officers will respond.</p> <p>General Managers - Provide guidance on the development of media responses and act as spokespeople for operational issues.</p>

	<p>Senior Adviser – Corporate Communications - Primary point of contact for all media interaction. Develops media responses in collaboration with subject matter experts, Manager of Communications Engagement and Customer Experience and relevant General Manager for approval by the CEO and Mayor as appropriate. Oversees all interactions with the news media.</p> <p>Develop proactive media releases related to project or portfolio responsibilities. Support coordination of media responses.</p> <p>Managers - Provide subject matter input in a timely manner to enable deadlines to be met on all media responses. Act as subject matter experts in the development of proactive media releases.</p> <p>All other staff - Refer any direct media enquiries immediately to the Communications Engagement and Customer Experience Department or delegated media advisor. Under no circumstances may a staff member speak directly to the media</p>
<p>Key Accountabilities – Social Media</p>	<p>Managing our social media platforms in both proactive and reactive settings requires the cooperation of many parties as outlined in the table below.</p> <p>Mayor - is the key spokesperson for Council and manages content on their own social media channels, in line with this policy.</p> <p>Councillors - not to post any comment or content or to respond to any comment or posting in any way contrary to this policy or which might be construed as officially representing the City.</p> <p>CEO - Provides guidance on the development of social media plans and has ultimate accountability for social media. The Mayor will be briefed on upcoming media campaigns.</p> <p>General Managers - Provide guidance on the development of social media plans. GMs sign off on sensitive content.</p> <p>Council Senior Adviser – Digital / Authorised Social Media Publishers - Primary point of contact for all social media engagement. Develops social media plans in collaboration with subject matter experts, Manager Communications Engagement and Customer Experience and relevant General Manager for approval by the CEO and Mayor as appropriate. Oversees the budget to promote Council’s policies and programs via social media.</p> <p>Have authority to post and comment on social media using a corporate account on behalf of Darebin City Council. Develop social media plans in collaboration Communications Engagement and Customer Experience and Engagement Department. Refer issues outside of their remit to the Senior Adviser - Digital.</p> <p>Managers - Provide subject matter input in a timely manner to enable deadlines to be met on all media responses. Act as subject matter experts in the development of proactive media releases. Managers sign off on content through a communications or social media strategy.</p> <p>Customer Service staff - Respond to routine requests that come through social media.</p>
<p>Contacting Communications Engagement &</p>	<p>The Communications Engagement and Customer Experience Department is available at all times to assist with media enquiries.</p> <p>If contacted by the media directly, Councillors should immediately contact the Senior Adviser – Corporate Communications by phone or email, or in their absence the</p>

<p>Customer Experience Department</p>	<p>Manager Communications Engagement and Customer Experience If contacted by the media directly after hours, Councillors should immediately contact the Manager Communications Engagement and Customer Experience or the Chief Executive Officer. If the Manager Communications Engagement and Customer Experience or the Chief Executive Officer is not available to contact, Councillors should decline to comment themselves and they should advise the enquirer that a response will be arranged as soon as is practicable.</p>
<p>Media Monitoring</p>	<p>The Communications Engagement and Customer Experience monitors all media activity for the City of Darebin. Councillors wishing to obtain a particular news item about Council, can contact the Communications and Engagement Department for assistance.</p>
<p>Social Media Monitoring</p>	<p>The Communications Engagement and Customer Experience Department monitors all social media engagement for the City of Darebin. Councillors wishing to obtain a particular item about Council are welcome to contact the Department for assistance.</p>
<p>Media & Social Media Contact in Emergency Situations</p>	<p>In all circumstances, the Communications Engagement and Customer Experience Department, in consultation with the Chief Executive and the Darebin Emergency Management Group (DEMG), is responsible for releasing any information to the media, and publishing to social media, about an emergency situation. The Mayor will be briefed and consulted as appropriate.</p>
<p>Election Protocols – Councillors pre-selected or nominated as a candidate in Federal or State Elections</p>	<p>Councillors who are a Prospective Candidate or a Nominated Candidate in a Federal or State election should ensure that any comment made to the media and posts and comments made on social 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.</p> <p>A Councillor who is a Prospective Candidate or a Nominated Candidate in a Federal or State election must differentiate between their role as a state or federal candidate and role as a Councillor when making public or social media comment, and must ensure that they do not use a Council media opportunity, events, council meetings, network meetings and council-related external activities to further their platform as a candidate in, or in any manner connected with, the relevant election.</p> <p><i>*See also Councillor Guidelines for State and Federal Elections for more information.</i></p>
<p>Election Protocols – Local Government Elections</p>	<p>Any requests for media advice or assistance from Councillors during the election period must be channelled through the Chief Executive Officer or the Manager Communications Engagement and Customer Experience.</p> <p>In any event, no media advice and/or assistance or media releases will be provided in relation to election campaign matters, or in regard to publicity that involves specific Councillors.</p> <p>Councillors will not use their position as an elected representative or their access to Council staff and other Council resources to gain media attention in support of matters that could be construed as relating to an election campaign.</p> <p><i>*See also Election Period Policy 2020</i></p>
<p>Dispute Resolution Process</p>	<p>Any disputes arising from the policy will be managed in accordance with the provisions set out in the Councillor Code of Conduct, Sections 13 and 14.</p>

Breach of Policy	Breaches of policies are treated seriously. Any concerns about non-compliance should be reported immediately to the CEO.
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GOVERNANCE

Related Documents	This policy should be read in conjunction with the Councillor Code of Conduct.
Legislation/ Regulation	Election Period Policy 2020 per Chapter 11 Governance Rules Darebin Councillor Code of Conduct 2021 Darebin City Council's Good Governance Framework 2022 Darebin Community Engagement Policy 2020 Councillor Guidelines for State and Federal Elections 2018 Darebin City Council's Information Privacy Policy 2020
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