

Councillor Media and Social Media Policy

Purpose	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: • effectively promote Council's services, programs and initiatives • provide clear information about Council processes and decisions • build trust and credibility with media and social media following • 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 policy outlines appropriate activities in relation to the Mayor and Councillors engagement with the media and/or social media, consistent with their obligations under the Model Code of Conduct. Further, it outlines the role of the Governance and Communications Department in providing assistance to Councillors, as well as the actions that may occur in the event of breaches of this Policy. 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 integral to Council's success.
Scope	This policy applies to all Councillors of the City of Darebin, it does not apply to Council staff 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. The Governance and Communications Department is responsible for managing official media relations and social media management on behalf of the City of Darebin.
Definitions and Abbreviations	The Governance and Communications Department is part of the Customer and Corporate Division. The Executive Manager Governance Risk and Communications manages the Communications department. Within the department is Communications and Engagement team, which is responsible for internal and external communications including media relations and social media management. The Senior Adviser –

	Corporate Communications is responsible for media relations and management of Council's media inbox and dedicated phone line. 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. Delegated Councillors refers to a Councillor asked to respond to a media request on behalf of the Mayor. Darebin City Council refers to the organisation run by the Chief Executive and staffed by council officers. 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. 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, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube.
Background	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 is 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. 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. This Policy supports compliance with legislation and the Model Code of Conduct.
Principles	This policy has at its foundation the following guiding principles: 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. 3. Corporate media and social media will not be used to promote a 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.
Roles and Responsibilities	The Mayor 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: • 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). Responsive and timely provision of information is central to successful issues management and therefore, the Mayor and the Senior Adviser – Corporate Communications will respond on behalf of Council without consultation. 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 must be referred to the Mayor and/or the Senior Adviser – Corporate Communications.

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 Model Code of Conduct applies to their professional lives. Councillors should contact the Executive Manager of Governance, Risk and Communications 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 Executive Manager Governance, Risk and Communications 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 Governance and Communications 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.

Governance and Communications Department

1. The role of the Governance and Communications 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 individual Councillors.
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 Governance and Communications 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 Corporate Communications team is responsible for issuing media releases and contacting journalists about potential stories in accordance with the provisions of this policy. 6. Council's Governance and Communications Department is responsible for the development of social media content. 7. The Governance and Communications Department works collaboratively across Darebin City Council to carry out its responsibilities.
Standards of Conduct	Councillors understand that the Model Code of Conduct as prescribed at Schedule 1 of the Local Government (Governance and Integrity) Amendment Regulations 2024 apply to Councillor activity on social media or interactions with the media. Of particular relevance is section 1 (e)(ii) of the Model Code of Conduct: <i>A Councillor must do everything reasonably necessary to ensure that they perform the role of a Councillor effectively and responsibly, including by – acknowledging and supporting the Mayor in the performance of the role of the Mayor, including by refraining from making public comment, including to the media, that could reasonably be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where the Councillor has not been authorised by the Mayor to make such a comment.</i>
Official Spokesperson	• 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.
Operational and Organisational Matters	• 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 Media@darebin.vic.gov.au or 0448 826 487 • Social media is not used 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 Executive Manager, Governance Risk and Communications 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 foi@darebin.vic.gov.au for consideration and response.

Key Accountabilities - Media	Managing the media in both proactive and reactive settings requires the cooperation of many parties as outlined below. 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. Councillors - Act as the primary spokesperson when delegated by the Mayor. 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. General Managers - Provide guidance on the development of media responses and act as spokespeople for operational issues. Senior Adviser – Corporate Communications - Primary point of contact for all media interaction, including management of the Media mobile phone and email inbox. Develops media responses in collaboration with subject matter experts, and relevant General Manager for approval by the CEO and Mayor as appropriate. Oversees all interactions with the news media. Develop proactive media releases related to project or portfolio responsibilities. Support coordination of media responses. 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. All other staff - Refer any direct media enquiries immediately to the Media inbox. Under no circumstances may a staff member speak directly to the media
Key Accountabilities – Social Media	Managing our social media platforms in both proactive and reactive settings requires the cooperation of many parties as outlined in the table below. Mayor - is the key spokesperson for Council and manages content on their own social media channels, in line with this policy. 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. 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. General Managers - Provide guidance on the development of social media plans. GMs sign off on sensitive content. 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, 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. 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 with the Governance and Communications Department. Refer issues outside of their remit to the Senior Adviser - Digital.

	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. Customer Service staff - Respond to routine requests that come through social media.
Contacting Governance Risk and Communications Department	All media inquiries should be immediately referred to media@darebin.vic.gov.au or 0448 826 487.
Media Monitoring	The Governance and Communications Department monitors all media activity for the City of Darebin. Councillors wishing to obtain a particular news item about Council, can contact the Media inbox for assistance.
Social Media Monitoring	The Governance and Communications 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.
Media & Social Media Contact in Emergency Situations	In all circumstances, the Governance and Communications 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.
Election Protocols – Councillors pre-selected or nominated as a candidate in Federal or State Elections	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. 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. <i>*See also Councillor Guidelines for State and Federal Elections for more information.</i>
Election Protocols – Local Government Elections	Any requests for media advice or assistance from Councillors during the election period must be channelled through the Chief Executive Officer. 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. 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. <i>*See also Election Period Policy 2024</i>

Dispute Resolution Process	Any disputes arising from the policy will be managed in accordance with the Councillor Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure.
Breach of Policy	Breaches of policies are treated seriously. Any concerns about non-compliance should be reported immediately to the CEO.

GOVERNANCE

Related Documents	This policy should be read in conjunction with the Model Code of Conduct.
Legislation/ Regulation	Election Period Policy 2024 per Chapter 11 Governance Rules Model Code of Conduct Darebin Community Engagement Policy
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Policy Owner/ Sponsor	Executive Manager, Governance Risk and Communications
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