



WARRNAMBOOL  
CITY COUNCIL

# **ELECTION PERIOD POLICY**

**DOCUMENT CONTROL**

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# ELECTION PERIOD POLICY

## 1.1 PURPOSE

During the period preceding a Council election the Council assumes a “caretaker role”. This period is defined in the Act as the ‘Election Period’.

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that the business of local government in the City of Warrnambool continues throughout an Election Period in a responsible and transparent manner in accordance with statutory requirements and established “caretaker” conventions.

Councils Procedure and proceedings functions are set out in Part 3 Division 2 of the 2020 Local Government Act the caretaker provisions that Councils must take heed of are contained in section 69.

## 1.2 SCOPE

This policy applies to all Councillors and staff.

During an Election Period the business of the Council continues, and ordinary matters of administration still need to be addressed. This policy establishes a series of caretaker practices which aim to ensure that actions of the Council do not bind an incoming council and limit its freedom of action.

## 1.3 DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition/Meaning
Act	Local Government Act 2020
Election Period	The period that: Starts at the time that nominations close on nomination day; and Ends at 6pm on election day
Nomination Day	The last day on which nominations to be a candidate at a Council election may be received in accordance with the Act and the regulations
Publication	includes any means of publication, including letters and electronic information on the Internet
Public Consultation	A process that involves inviting individuals, groups or organisations or the community generally to comment on an issue or proposed action or proposed policy, and which includes discussion of that matter with the public
Council Resources	Includes the financial, human and material resources of Council and includes – offices, vehicles, staff, hospitality, services, property, equipment (phones, computers etc.) and stationery etc.

## 2. POLICY

### 2.1 POLICY STATEMENT

This policy commits the Council during an Election Period to:

- not making any major decisions;
- not making decisions that significantly affect the municipality or unreasonably bind the incoming Council;
- ensuring that public resources, including staff resources, are not used for election campaign purposes, or in a way that may improperly influence the result of an election; and
- not publishing or distributing electoral matter, unless it is simply information about the election process.

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This policy prescribes the actions and procedures the organisation, Councillors and staff will implement during an Election Period in observance of the statutory requirements and in the interests of good governance and a fair election generally.

### **2.2 POLICY POSITION**

This policy applies during any Council Election Period and covers:

- Major decisions made by the Council;
- Scheduling consideration and announcement of major decisions;
- Use of the Council's resources including staff and materials published by Council;
- Access to information by Councillors and candidates;
- Council's online presence including social media;
- Communications and media services;
- Attendance and participation at Council organised activities and events;
- Public Consultation.

### **2.3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **2.3.1 Councillors**

Councillors are bound by sec. 76D and 76E of the Local Government Act 1989 regarding misuse of position and improper direction and improper influence. A breach of sec. 76D attracts serious penalties including possible imprisonment.

During an Election Period, Councillors must not use Council resources for campaigning to increase advantage over other candidates or to influence voters.

#### **2.3.2 Chief Executive Officer**

The Chief Executive Officer will ensure, as far as practicable, that all Councillors and staff are informed of the application of this policy at least 30 days prior to the commencement of an Election Period and instructions are provided to staff on the implementation of the procedures detailed in this policy.

During an Election Period the Chief Executive Officer will be the official spokesperson for the Council in relation to all matters.

## **3. PROCEDURES**

### **3.1 DECISION MAKING PROCESSES DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD**

- a) It is an established democratic principle that elected bodies should not unnecessarily bind an incoming government during an election period. The Council therefore commits to this principle in that it will make every endeavour to avoid making decisions that inappropriately bind the incoming Council. This includes a commitment to not making any "Major Decision" or "Significant Decisions" as specified in this policy.
- c) The Chief Executive Officer will ensure, as far as practicable, that matters of Council business requiring Major Decision or Significant Decision are scheduled for Council to enable resolution prior to the commencement of an Election Period or deferred where appropriate for determination by the incoming Council.
- d) Scope exists for Council to hold a Council meeting but only in the most urgent or extraordinary

circumstances or any statutory circumstances or any statutory processes that may arise. Refer *clause 3.1.3*

### **3.1.1 Major Decision**

- a) A 'Major Decision means any decision relating to:
  - (i) the employment or remuneration of a Chief Executive Officer, other than a decision to appoint an acting Chief Executive Officer;
  - (ii) termination or the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer;
  - (iii) committing the Council to expenditure exceeding 1% of the Council's income from general rates, municipal charges and service rates and charges in the preceding financial year; and
  - (iv) enabling the use of Council's resources in a way that is intended to influence, or is likely to influence, voting at the election.
- b) If Council considers that there are extraordinary circumstances where the community would be significantly disadvantaged by the Council not making a particular Major Decision, the Council will, by resolution, request an exemption from the Minister for Local Government.
- c) The prohibitions on Major Decisions apply to Special Committees and a person acting under delegation.

### **3.1.2 Significant Decisions**

- a) Over and above the decisions specified as Major Decisions, the Council will avoid making other decisions during an Election Period that are of a significant nature and which would unnecessarily bind an incoming Council.
- b) "Significant Decisions" include:
  - (i) Irrevocable decisions that commit the Council to substantial expenditure or major actions; and
  - (ii) Irrevocable decisions that will have a major impact on the municipality or the community.
- c) The Council acknowledges that it has an ongoing responsibility to act in the best interests of the community. Therefore, where a delay in making a "Significant Decision" would result in significant detriment to the local community, or the broader community, the Council may make an exception to this procedure. In making an exception to this procedure, the Council will deal with the matter impartially, having regard to the long-term interests of the community and as transparently as possible.
- d) In the case of a decision that significantly affects the municipality or binds the incoming Council, which is not expressly prohibited, a number of factors will be considered, including:
  - (i) The urgency of the issue - could a decision be reasonably deferred until the next Council is in place;
  - (ii) The possibility of financial and/or legal repercussions if it is deferred;
  - (iii) Whether the decision is likely to be controversial; and
  - (iv) The best interests of Council.

### **3.1.3 Council Meetings**

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*Note: The Council will not hold an ordinary Council Meeting during an Election Period. This section only applies to reports for an unscheduled Council Meeting, if such a meeting is called.*

In order to facilitate compliance with its commitment to ensuring appropriate decision-making during elections, Council adopts the following procedure:

- a) During an Election Period, the Chief Executive Officer will ensure that a “Caretaker Statement” is included in every report submitted to a Council meeting (if required) for a decision.
- b) The “Caretaker Statement” will specify one of the following:
  - (i) *“The recommended decision is not a “Major Decision” or a “Significant Decision” within the meaning of this policy”; or*
  - (ii) *“The recommended decision is not a “Major Decision”. The recommended decision is a “Significant Decision” within the meaning of this policy, but an exception should be made for the following reasons [insert reasons for making an exemption]”; or*
  - (iii) *“The recommended decision is to seek an exemption from the Minister because the matter requires a “Major Decision”; or*
  - (iv) *“The recommended decision is a “Major Decision”, but an extraordinary circumstances exemption was granted by the Minister for Local Government on [insert date]”.*
- c) During an Election Period, the Council will not make a decision on any matter or report that does not include one of these Caretaker Statements.

### **3.1.4 Delegated Committees and Advisory Committees**

The operation of all Delegated Committees and Advisory Committees will be suspended upon the commencement of an Election Period.

## **3.2 PUBLIC CONSULTATION DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD**

- a) Public consultations **are best to be avoided** during an Election Period.
- b) This clause does not apply to public consultation required under any statutory provisions, including the Planning and Environment Act 1987.
- c) Consultations may be undertaken during an Election Period to facilitate the day-to-day business of Council, to ensure matters continue to be proactively managed. Consultations will avoid any express or implied links to a Council election.
- d) Consultations under statutory provisions shall only proceed after express agreement by the Chief Executive Officer and then if it relates solely to the normal day-to-day business of Council.

## **3.3 COUNCIL PUBLICATIONS DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD**

### **3.3.1 Certification of Council publications during an election period**

- a) The Council will not publish material with public funds that may influence, or be seen to influence, voting in a Council election.
- b) The Council will not:

- (i) Print, publish or distribute; or
- (ii) Cause, permit or authorise to be printed, published or distributed on behalf of the Council;

any advertisement, handbill, pamphlet or notice during an election period unless it has been certified, in writing, by the Chief Executive Officer.

- c) This prohibition applies to all documents produced for the purpose of communicating with the community, including:
  - (i) Council newsletters
  - (ii) Advertisements and notices e.g. job advertisements, public notices of contracts etc.
  - (iii) Media releases
  - (v) Leaflets and brochures
  - (vi) Mailouts to multiple addresses
- d) Council will avoid all publication activity during an Election Period except where essential for the conduct of Council operations. Where printing, publishing or distributing a document is deemed essential to Council business during an Election Period the Chief Executive Officer's certification is required. Publication includes electronic information and web-based productions.
- e) The procedure for certifying publication is:

Step	Procedure
1	During an Election Period all proposed publications that are normally sent to the Communications unit and/or other Council units for publication e.g. Organisational Development for job advertisements must be sent in the first instance to the Manager Governance
2	The Manager Governance is responsible for checking that no election material is present (other than factual election process information). Refer clause 3.3.5
3	Should the proposed publication contain electoral material, it will be returned to the author for correction and re-submission.
4	Should the proposed publication not contain electoral material, the Manager Governance will send the material to the Chief Executive Officer for certification, by advising: <i>"This material has been checked and does not contain any electoral or electoral related matter to the best of my knowledge. Can you please certify in writing that you authorise for this material to be printed, published or distributed?"</i>
5	If the proposed publication is approved by the Chief Executive Officer, he/she will certify this in writing: <i>"I certify that the attached material is suitable for printing, publishing or distributing on behalf of Warrnambool City Council"</i>
6	The Manager Governance is responsible for maintaining the record of certification of documents and advising relevant officers of the publication approval.

- f) Councillors may publish campaign material on their own behalf, as long as the material does not originate from, or is authorised by, the Council or use Council logos.

### **3.3.2. Council's Online Facilities (includes Social Media)**

- a) The Council website is the main corporate site; there are separate websites for some activities including Warrnambool Art Gallery, Aquazone, Lighthouse Theatre, Surfside Holiday Park and Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village. The Council also has a number of social media sites including twitter feeds and Facebook pages.



- b) Council auspiced social media must not be used for election campaigning.
- c) At the start of an Election Period any online information on Council hosted sites about Councillors who are candidates will be restricted to their name and contact details.
- d) Council agendas and minutes of meetings do not require certification if they are published in the usual way on the website.
- e) Any references on Council's website to the election will only relate to the election process.
- f) Any new material published on Council's website during an Election Period that may be considered an advertisement, handbill, pamphlet or notice must be subject to the certification process.
- g) Any publication on social media sites such as, Facebook, twitter etc. which are auspiced by Council, will require certification by the Chief Executive Officer.
- h) During an Election Period Facebook and twitter posts are to be kept to minimum, normal day- to- day activities only. No launches or announcement of any new projects, policy initiatives, or programs must be made. Where possible, the functions that permit comments and posts by the public on Council social media will be disabled during an Election Period and if so, the Council will provide an explanation via social media on this being necessitated in accordance with this Policy.
- i) No new Council You Tube videos will be uploaded during an Election Period.
- j) Council's Communications unit monitors the Council's corporate website, Facebook site and twitter feeds between the hours of 8.15am and 5.00pm on weekdays (excluding public holidays). During an Election Period monitoring will extend to after hours and weekends and will be undertaken by the Communication unit which will have the editing access to delete any material posted that makes reference to candidates or a Council election.

### 3.3.3 Council Publications

- a) Any current Council publication which may be potentially affected by this policy will be reviewed by the Communication unit in consultation with the Manager Governance to ensure that any circulated, displayed or otherwise publicly available material during an Election Period does not contain material that may be construed as "electoral matter".
- b) Council's City Assist unit undertake an audit of brochures and pamphlets in all Council's customer service centres and remove any which might contain electoral matter prior to an Election Period.
- c) Any references to Councillors in Council publications printed, published or distributed during an Election Period must not include promotional text.
- d) Emails that are part of the normal conduct of Council business should not require certification. However, emails with multiple addressees, used for broad communication with the community, will be subject to the certification process.
- e) Mass mail outs or identical letters sent to a large number of people by or on behalf of Council must be subject to the certification process.
- f) Council staff should not prepare Councillors' private mail or electoral correspondence and such material must not be printed on Council stationery or using Council equipment.

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- g) Councillors may use the title “Councillor” in their election material, as they continue to hold that position during an Election Period. To avoid confusion, Councillors shall ensure that any election publication using the title “Councillor” clearly indicates that it is their own material and does not represent Council.
- h) Material printed or disseminated during an Election Period to publicise a function or event must be subject to the certification process.

### **3.3.4 Council Annual Report**

- a) Council is required to produce an Annual Report and this generally will coincide with an Election Period. This publication is not considered an ‘advertisement, handbill, pamphlet or notice’ and does not require certification.
- b) The Annual Report must not include material that is electioneering or that publicises the attributes or achievements of individual Councillors.
- c) A summary version of the Annual Report is regarded as a pamphlet and must be subject to the certification process.
- d) Printed copies of the text version of the Annual Report will only be distributed upon request until the expiration of an Election Period.

### **3.3.5 Electoral Material**

Material is definitely an electoral matter if it:

- Publicises the strength or weaknesses of a candidate;
- Advocates the policies of the Council or of a candidate;
- Responds to claims made by a candidate;
- Publicises the achievements of the elected Council;
- Publicises matters that have already been the subject of public debate;
- About matters that are known to be contentious in the community and likely to be the subject of election debate;
- Deals with Election Candidates statements;
- Refers to Councillors or candidates by name or by implicit reference.

## **3.4 USE OF COUNCIL RESOURCES DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD**

- a) Public resources must not be used in a manner that would influence the way people vote in elections. The Council commits to this principle in that it will ensure that Council resources are not used inappropriately during an Election Period. This includes a commitment to comply with the following procedures.
- b) The Council will ensure that due propriety is observed in the use of all Council resources, and staff are required to exercise appropriate discretion in that regard. In any circumstances where the use of Council resources might be construed as being related to a candidate’s election campaign, advice is to be sought from the relevant Director.
- c) Council resources, including offices, support staff, hospitality services, equipment and stationery will be used exclusively for normal Council business during an Election Period. and shall not be used in connection with any electioneering activity.
- d) No Council events, logos, letterheads, or other Warrnambool City Council branding can be used

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for, or linked in any way to, a candidate's election campaign.

- e) The Chief Executive Officer or any staff should not be asked to undertake any tasks connected directly or indirectly with electioneering.
- f) Photos or images taken by or provided by the Council are not to be used by Councillors for the purposes of electioneering or in support of their election campaign. This applies equally to images on Council websites that may be able to be copied. *Also refer to clause 3.7*
- g) No election material or active campaigning is to be conducted at Council sponsored events or to be displayed in any Council building.
- h) Staff must not undertake an activity that may affect voting in the election or authorise, use or allocate a Council resource for any purpose that may influence voting in the election.
- i) If staff that feel they are being placed in a compromising situation by a request from a Councillor they should refer the Councillor to the Chief Executive Officer for clarification.
- j) Any staff member who considers that a particular use of Council resources may influence voting in an election or provide an undue advantage for a candidate shall advise the relevant Director before authorising, using or allocating the resource. The Director in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer will decide if the use of Council resources is appropriate or not.
- k) Public events will only be organised and run if it is totally unavoidable to conduct such events during an Election Period and then only with the express permission of the Chief Executive Officer.
- l) Speeches for Councillors will only be prepared by staff in relation to events that are part of the normal services or operation of the Council and such speeches will not be circulated or available for publication.
- m) Neither the Council logo nor Council stationery will be used by Councillors in any way that relates to the election.
- n) Equipment and facilities provided to Councillors for the purpose of conducting normal Council business will not be used for campaigning purposes.
- o) Reimbursement of Councillor expenses incurred during an Election Period should only apply to costs incurred in the performance of normal Council duties, and not for campaigning and not for expenses that could be perceived as supporting or being in connection with a candidate's election campaign.
- p) Where Councillors have Council funded services, such as mobile phones, land lines and internet connections, and where it is impractical for Councillors to discontinue their use of these during the election, then Councillors will either reimburse the Council or not make a Council claim that exceeds normal usage levels for usage of those services during an Election Period.
- q) Councillors with their own private mobile phones may continue to seek reimbursement of telephone expenses incurred in undertaking Council business related calls. Councillors will be required to declare that those expenses were incurred in undertaking normal Council business.
- r) During an Election Period, Councillors shall not participate in any regional and or interstate travel in their capacity as a Councillor. In circumstances where it is imperative that the Mayor

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(or nominee) represent Council on a delegation or forum, the Council may by resolution approve such attendance. If consideration by the Council is impractical the Chief Executive Officer may determine the issue.

### **3.5 ACCESSING COUNCIL INFORMATION DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD**

- a) The Council recognises that all election candidates have rights to information from the Council administration and that it is important that sitting Councillors continue to receive information that is necessary to fulfil their elected roles.
- b) Neither Councillors nor candidates will receive information or advice from staff that might be perceived to support election campaigns, and there shall be complete transparency in the provision of all information and advice during an Election Period.
- c) Information and briefing material prepared by staff for Councillors during an Election Period will relate only to factual matters or to existing Council services to assist Councillors in conducting normal day to day activities.
- d) An Information Request Register will be maintained by the Manager Governance commencing on the opening of nominations. The Register will be a public document (available for inspection) that records all requests for information of a non-election nature by all candidates, and the responses given to those requests.
- e) Responses to candidate's requests will only be issued through the Manager Governance. Staff in receipt of a candidate request must refer the request and any proposed response to the relevant Director and Manager Governance. Only information that can be reasonably accessed will be released.
- f) Any Freedom of Information (FOI) application lodged during an Election Period will be dealt with where possible outside of an Election Period. (the FOI Act specifies a 45-day period in providing a response)

### **3.6 ASSISTANCE TO CANDIDATES**

- a) The Council affirms that all candidates standing for the Council election will be treated equally.
- b) Any assistance and advice to be provided to candidates as part of the conduct of a Council election will be provided equally to all candidates.
- c) All election related enquiries from candidates will be directed to the Returning Officer or, where the matter is outside the responsibilities of the Returning Officer, to the Manager Governance.

### **3.7 COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA SERVICES DURING AN ELECTION PERIOD**

- a) The Council's communication systems and media services will not be used in any way that might influence the outcome of a Council election.
- b) During an Election Period, staff must not initiate any public statement that relates to an election issue. Public statements are not only formal press releases but also verbal comments at meetings, functions and events where attending as part of their Council role.
- c) Council newsletters will not be printed by the Council during an Election Period.
- d) Any edition(s) of Council's C2C published within two months prior to the commencement of an

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Election Period will only contain general information pertaining to the election process and will not contain any photograph of a Councillor or candidate, or any statement by a Councillor or candidate. Articles will minimise references to specific Councillors and will not identify any Councillor in a manner that could promote a Councillor as an election candidate.

- e) In response to media inquiries the Chief Executive Officer, Directors or the Manager Communications will only provide a response and such information should relate only to current services and operations.
- f) During an Election Period, the Council initiated communications shall be restricted to the communication of normal Council activities.
- g) No media advice or assistance will be provided to Councillors in relation to election campaign matters.
- h) No publicity will be provided that involves specific Councillors during an Election Period.
- i) Councillors should not use their position as an elected representative or their access to staff and other Council resources or information in support of an election campaign. This includes photos or images provided by the Council for past Council activities.
- j) Any requests from Councillors for media advice or assistance during an Election Period will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer.
- k) Media releases will not mention or quote any Councillor(s) during an Election Period.
- l) Contact with the local media will be restricted to the communication of normal Council activities and responding to questions not involving an election or possible election outcomes.
- m) Publicity for Council events (if any during an Election Period) will be restricted to the communication of factual material and will not mention or quote any Councillor or candidate.
- n) Councillor participation at Council sponsored events during an Election Period will not be used to gain attention in support of an election campaign.

## **4. GOVERNANCE**

### **4.1 Policy Owner**

- a) The Manager Governance shall be responsible for monitoring the currency of this Policy.
- b) Staff enquiries regarding the implementation of this policy should be directed to either Manager Governance or the relevant Director.
- c) Councillor or candidate enquires should be directed to the Manager Governance or the Chief Executive Officer.

### **4.2 Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed no later than six (6) months prior a Council General Election.