



WARRNAMBOOL
CITY COUNCIL

News & Social Media Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

Print, radio and online media are key communication tools that allow Council to engage with and inform the community about Council activities, programs, events services and initiatives. Collectively they play a critical role in facilitating transparency and public trust.

The intent of the policy is to provide a consistent and coordinated framework, ensuring Council's communications with the news media and our interactions on social media are accurate and professional.

Councillors and staff of Warrnambool City Council are expected to demonstrate standards of conduct and behaviour that are consistent with relevant legislation, regulations and policies. This policy provides understanding and guidance for Councillors, staff, contractors and volunteers on the use of news and social media for the purposes of promoting Council activities and the 'personal' use of social media where Warrnambool City Council is a topic of online discussion and should be read in conjunction with the Councillor and Staff Codes of Conduct.

1.2 Scope

The policy applies to all Council services, Councillors, employees, contractors (third party agents), volunteers and committees when representing Council in the media. This policy applies to all verbal and written comments in the media, public speaking engagements, media releases and the use of social media.

1.3 Definitions

Term	Definition
Council	Warrnambool City Council
Community	People who live, work in or visit Warrnambool
Social media	Internet-based tools that facilitate conversations. Use of social media by Council staff is covered in the Social Media Policy (2014).
Community engagement	The processes and interactions that occur between the Council, the general community and community groups.
Consultation	A two-way relationship with Council providing information to the community and community groups, accepting and considering feedback and providing information on outcomes.
News media	Radio stations, newspapers, television and websites that provide news coverage which meets standards described in the Australian Press Council's Statement of General Principles.
Social media	Internet-based tools that facilitate conversations
Blog/blogger	A blog is a website created by a person to record their opinions, interests, etc. A blogger posts content to the blog.

1.4 References

<p>Relevant Legislation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Comm) • Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Comm) • Copyright Act 1968 (Comm) • Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) • Defamation Act 2005 (Vic) • Disability Discrimination Act 1991 (Comm) • Fair Trading Act 1999 (Vic) • Fair Work Act 2009 (Comm) • Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic) • Local Government Act 1989 (Vic) • Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic) • Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic) • Racial Discrimination Act 1975 • Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 • Public Records Act 1973 (Vic) • Spam Act 2003 (Comm) • Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Comm) • Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)
<p>External Sources/Standards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of General Principles by the Australian Press Council (Appendix A)
<p>Council & Organisational Policies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor Code of Conduct • Staff Code of Conduct • Community Engagement Policy • Privacy Policy • Audio Recording of Meetings Policy • Caretaker (Elections) Policy • Councillors IT Equipment – Conditions of Use Policy • Risk Management Policy • Equal Opportunity Policy • Bullying and Harassment Policy • Acceptable Computer Use Policy • Sponsorship Policy • Records Management Policy

2. POLICY

2.1 Policy Statement

This policy outlines the importance of communicating with the news media in order to maintain Council’s commitment to being an open and accountable organisation.

In applying scrutiny to and coverage of Council activities, news media supports Council’s efforts to maintain strong relationships with our community and therefore a functional relationship between Council and news media is highly desirable.

The Policy describes the way in which Council will communicate decisions, policies, programs, services and activities to the community via news media and also acknowledges the role of social media. Social media can be used to engage the community and complements other forms of communication to improve access, community engagement and delivery of services.

The Policy complements Council's Community Engagement Policy which outlines Council's commitment to involving the community in decision-making.

2.2 Policy Objectives

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- Ensure news media receives accurate information in a timely manner
- Ensure that there are clear processes in place in using the media to communicate key Council decisions and messages.
- Detail the roles and responsibilities of councillors/staff in terms of media management, authorised spokespersons and the responsibility for pro-active promotion of Council services, events and activities.
- Provide guidelines for councillors and staff in the use of social media

2.3 Policy Principles

The following guiding principles set out how as Council and the organisation we will engage and interact with the community through news and social media platforms.

2.3.1 News Media Enquiries

Warrnambool City Council will endeavour to provide timely, accurate information to the news media to maintain the reputation and integrity of Council and to ensure openness and accountability.

In responding to inquiries from news media, Warrnambool City Council expects media coverage that conforms to standards set by the Australian Press Council (refer **Appendix A**).

News media inquiries will be addressed promptly and courteously and will be directed through the Communications Branch to ensure a co-ordinated, organisation-wide approach.

Media releases and responses issued by the Council will be archived electronically in the Council's records management system.

Inquiries via social media (including bloggers) will be considered as general inquiries and will be handled by either the Communications Branch or referred to City Assist unit for action through Council's Customer Request Management system.

2.3.2 Reporting on Council decisions

All media releases on Council decisions shall be coordinated through Council's Communications branch.

Once a decision is made by Council, media releases should reflect the decision of Council not the personal interpretations of Councillors or officers. This will help ensure the media and community understand the decisions of Council.

A summary of Council decisions is also reported through editions of Council's E-news editions. A subscription service to E-News is available through Council's website.

Audio recordings of Ordinary and Special meetings of Council are available for download on the internet via the Council's website by noon the day following the meeting (refer Council's Audio Recording of Council meetings Policy)

2.3.3 Authorised Media Spokespersons

The Mayor is the official spokesperson on behalf of Council on matters where the Council has an official position, the matter relates to a Council decision or policy, State or Federal matters affecting local government and local issues that impact the community.

The Chief Executive is the official spokesperson for all operational matters relating to the organisation including staffing and the structure of the organisation, and issues relating to service provision or day-to-day business of Council. Where appropriate the Chief Executive shall authorise relevant Council staff to speak on operational matters.

2.3.4 Councillors' role in the media

There may be times when a Councillor as an individual wishes to comment to the media about issues relating to Council. Councillors can express their own views through the media, however they must make it clear it is their own view and does not represent the position of Council. As stipulated in the Code of Conduct, Councillors (as a courtesy) should advise the Council's Communication manager of any media undertakings.

2.3.5 Media support

The role of Council's Communications Branch is to help promote the programs, initiatives, services and strategic policy decisions of Council and to support the Mayor and Chief Executive as official spokespersons.

Communications Branch support is reserved for actual Council decisions and activities and does not extend to promoting or explaining matters raised by Councillors through the media, unless they have been considered and a majority Council decision has been made.

2.3.6 Council social media accounts/sites

A number of Council operations and enterprises use social media as a promotional tool.

Those posting content on Council social media sites should be mindful of the prohibited content described in item 2.3.8 of this policy.

Social media posts should relate directly to the operation for which the social media account was established.

Approval for official Council social media sites shall be authorised through the Communications manager on behalf of the Chief Executive.

Council social media sites created or contributed to:

- Must be readily edited, improved or removed;
- Have a moderator appointed to regularly check the material posted on the site;
- should comply with Australian web standards for accessibility;

Council information should not be made available on non-compliant platforms.

Council staff establishing a social media site must consider if it is necessary and whether they have the time to commit to ensuring the site is effective.

Usernames and passwords for Council social media sites must be reported to the Communications Branch in order for them to assist in site moderation or retiring the site if required.

Statements or announcements posted by staff on Council social media sites:

- must be authorised by the Communications Branch;
- disclose only publicly available information;
- must be and comply with all relevant Council policies.

Staff using social media to disseminate information should be mindful of Australian competition laws and refrain from relaying, repeating or disseminating (e.g. retweeting) social media messages issued by other organisations including private businesses as to do so may promote one business over another or involve Council in matters outside the scope of local government activity.

2.3.7 Personal use of social media

Warrnambool City Council recognises that Councillors and Council staff use social media in their personal lives. This policy does not intend to discourage nor unduly limit personal expression or online activities. However, there is the potential for damage to be caused (either directly or indirectly) to the Council in certain circumstances via personal use of social media when users can be identified with Council.

Councillors and Council staff should be aware that content published on social media is, or may become publicly available, even from personal social media accounts.

Councillors and staff must ensure, they:

- are mindful that their behaviour is bound by the Councillor/Staff Codes of Conduct and therefore any views expressed should be clearly identified as their own and not those of Council;
- don't use a work email address to register personal social media accounts;
- don't make comments that are obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, discriminatory or hateful to, or about work, colleagues, peers or Council.

Councillors and staff must not post comments or images that are, or could be perceived to be:

- made on behalf of City Council
- so harsh or extreme in criticism that they raise questions about the capacity to work professionally or impartially as a Councillor or employee (such comments would not have to relate directly to their area of work)
- compromising the capacity to fulfil duties as a Councillor or staff member in an impartial and unbiased manner. This applies particularly where comment is made about Council policies and programs.
- so strong in criticism of Council that it could seriously disrupt the workplace. (Councillor/staff members should resolve concerns via internal dispute resolution mechanisms)
- unreasonable criticism of Council clients or other stakeholders
- compromising public confidence in Council.

When considering making personal comments, Councillors and staff should reflect on the following questions:

- could my comments cause Council stakeholders or Warrnambool residents to lose confidence in my ability to work in a professional manner?
- are my comments consistent with how the community expects Councillors/staff to operate and behave?
- could my comments lower or undermine the reputation of Council?
- are my comments lawful? For example, do they comply with anti-discrimination legislation and laws relating to defamation?

2.3.8 Prohibited news/social media content

The following are not permitted under any circumstances when Councillors or Council staff on behalf of Council engage with the community via the news and or social media:

- Abusive or profane language
- Content which is false or misleading
- Confidential information about Council or third parties
- Copyright or Trademark protected materials
- Discriminatory material in relation to a person or group based on age, ethnicity, disability, gender, nationality, marital or parental status, political opinion/affiliation, race, religious belief, sexual orientation,...
- Material that would offend contemporary standards of taste or decency

- Material that would bring the Council into disrepute
- Material that would breach applicable laws eg privacy, copyright, trade practices, etc
- Materials that could compromise a Council employee or systems safety
- Spam, meaning the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages
- Statements that may be considered to be bullying or harassment
- Personal details or references to elected members, Council employees or third parties, which may be inconsistent with Council Privacy Policies/requirements?

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Role	Responsibilities
All Users	<p>When using Council media platforms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adhere to Warrnambool's City Council's Codes of Conduct, policies and procedures • comply with relevant laws and regulations • seek authorisation/assistance from the Communications Branch • behave with caution, honesty and respect • have sound reasons for using social media for work; • use correct spelling and grammar; and • reinforce the integrity, reputation and values of Warrnambool City Council.
Staff and contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek approval from relevant manager for business strategy incorporating social media • Seek advice and authorisation from Communications Branch about using social media and developing a communications plan to support business strategy • Seek approval for council branding of social media & register social media account/tools/site with the Communications Branch • Seek training and development for using social media • Understand and comply with the provisions in this policy • Seek advice from the Communications Branch if unsure about applying the provisions of this policy • Be familiar with the end user licence agreements of any external social media tools being used
Managers and Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure staff and contractors are provided with a copy of this policy • Ensuring staff and contractors under their control comply with actions and procedures detailed in this Policy.
Information Services Branch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate secure access to support delivery of council business via social media • Regularly back up and archive internally hosted social media sites
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate the authorisation of use of social media tools for

Branch	<p>conducting council business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide advice and assist with the development of communication plans using social media• Educate staff and contractors about this policy and their responsibilities when using social media• Advise appropriate precautions e.g. disclaimers• Maintain a register of social media being used for conducting council business including records of the business case for using social media, its strategic imperative, the intended administrator, URL, login, password and audience• Monitor social media accounts/tools/sites registered for conducting Council business• Monitor social media for references to Warrnambool City Council• Refer matters where appropriate to Council's Governance & Risk branch where an issue is likely to be contentious or may create legal risk for the Council.
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4. GOVERNANCE

4.1 Owner

The Communication Manager is responsible for monitoring the currency and viability of this policy and updating it where required.

4.2 Review

Manager Communications will review the policy for any necessary amendments no later than three years after its formulation or after the last review.

4.3. Charter of Human Rights Compliance

It is considered that this policy does not impact negatively on any rights identified in the Charter of Human Rights Act (2007).

Warrnambool City Council is committed to consultation and cooperation between management and employees. The Council will formally involve elected employee health and safety representatives in any workplace change that may affect the health and safety of any of its employees.

4.4 Enforcement

For Council staff, contractors and volunteers alleged breaches of this policy may result in a Code of Conduct complaint, disciplinary action, performance management and /or review. Serious breaches may result in suspension or termination of employment or association.

For Councillors, any breach this policy may result in a Councillor Code of conduct complaint.

Warrnambool City Council reserves the right to remove, where possible, content that violates this policy or any associated policies

5. APPENDIX A



Statement of General Principles

Introduction

This Statement of General Principles forms part of the Council's Standards of Practice which are binding on all print and online publishers who are members of the Council. The Standards are applied by it when considering and adjudicating on complaints about particular instances of their practice.

The **Standards of Practice** comprise:

- the **Statement of General Principles**;
- the **Statement of Privacy Principles**;
- a series of **Specific Standards of Practice**, which apply the two Statements of Principles to particular aspects of media practice.

The Council's Advisory Guidelines may also be taken into account but are not binding Standards.

The Standards of Practice apply to text, headlines, photographs, graphics, captions, audio, video and all other forms of published material, but not to advertising.

Publishers and editors are responsible for taking reasonable steps to comply with the Standards in their print and online publications. This applies to actions by their employees and external contributors, including those who are not journalists.

Publisher members are also obliged under the Council's Constitution to cooperate with its handling of complaints. This includes publishing all Council adjudications relating to their particular publications.

Preamble to the General Principles

In a democratic society, all people have the right to freedom of expression and to be informed. These rights cannot be secured unless the press is free to publish facts and opinions without fear or favour.

Freedom of the press, however, carries responsibilities to the public. Liberty does not mean licence, and due regard must be given to other important freedoms, rights and values which are in the public interest.

Accordingly, the Press Council has laid down the following General Principles to which all publisher members are committed by the Council's Constitution.

The General Principles

Publications are free to publish as they wish by reporting facts and expressing opinions, provided they take reasonable steps to comply with the following Principles and the Council's other Standards of Practice.

Accuracy and clarity

1. Ensure that factual material in news reports and elsewhere is accurate and not misleading, and is distinguishable from other material such as opinion.
2. Provide a correction or other adequate remedial action if published material is significantly inaccurate or misleading.

Fairness and balance

3. Ensure that factual material is presented with reasonable fairness and balance, and that writers' expressions of opinion are not based on significantly inaccurate factual material or omission of key facts.
4. Ensure that where material refers adversely to a person, a fair opportunity is given for subsequent publication of a reply if that is reasonably necessary to address a possible breach of General Principle 3.

Privacy and avoidance of harm

5. Avoid intruding on a person's reasonable expectations of privacy, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.
6. Avoid causing or contributing materially to substantial offence, distress or prejudice, or a substantial risk to health or safety, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.

Integrity and transparency

7. Avoid publishing material which has been gathered by deceptive or unfair means, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.
8. Ensure that conflicts of interests are avoided or adequately disclosed, and that they do not influence published material.

Explanatory Notes

“**Person**” includes a group or category of people (provided it is reasonably specific and limited in number) and a corporation or other legal entity.

“**Sufficiently in the public interest**”: The necessary level of justification in the public interest is proportionate to the gravity of the potential breach of the Principles. Relevant factors to consider may include, for example, the importance in the public interest of:

- (a) ensuring everyone has genuine freedom of expression and access to reliable information;
- (b) protecting and enhancing independent and vigorous media; public safety and health; due administration of justice and government, personal privacy, and national security;
- (c) exposing or preventing crime, dishonesty and serious misconduct or incompetence (especially by public figures).