



WARRNAMBOOL  
CITY COUNCIL

# News and Social Media Policy

POLICY TYPE: Council

APPROVAL DATE: August 7, 2023

REVIEW DATE: 2027

### DOCUMENT CONTROL

<b>Document Title:</b>	<i>Media Policy</i>
<b>Policy Type:</b>	<i>Council</i>
<b>Responsible Unit:</b>	<i>Communications Unit</i>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<i>Manager Communications</i>
<b>Document Status:</b>	<i>Final</i>
<b>Approved By:</b>	<i>Council</i>
<b>Adopted Date:</b>	<i>August 7, 2023</i>
<b>Review Date:</b>	<i>2027</i>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Purpose

Online and traditional news services, along with social media, provide opportunities for 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, accountability and public trust.

The purpose of the policy is to provide a consistent, coordinated approach to interacting with news and social media, ensuring Council's communications 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 and the associated procedures provide guidance for Councillors, staff, contractors and volunteers on the use of news and social media for the purposes of informing and engaging with the community about Council activities, responding to media enquiries and the personal use of social media where Warrnambool City Council is a topic of online discussion. This policy 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 (including Council advisory 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 online conversations.
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.

Political matters	Matters pertaining to the political direction of Council. This includes but is not limited to a decision of Council, an impending decision of Council, issues on which Council is campaigning or advocating for in the political arena and any matters on which Council is being asked to state a philosophical or ideological position.
Operational matters	Matters pertaining to the day-to-day operations of Council. This includes but is not limited to program delivery, Council services and programs, Council initiatives, and matters relating to staff.
News media	Radio stations, newspapers, television and websites that provide news coverage.

## 1.4 References

<b>Relevant legislation/standards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Comm)</li> <li>• Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Comm)</li> <li>• Copyright Act 1968 (Comm)</li> <li>• Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)</li> <li>• Defamation Act 2005 (Vic)</li> <li>• Disability Discrimination Act 1991 (Comm)</li> <li>• Fair Trading Act 1999 (Vic)</li> <li>• Fair Work Act 2009 (Comm)</li> <li>• Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)</li> <li>• Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)</li> <li>• Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)</li> <li>• Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic)</li> <li>• Racial Discrimination Act 1975</li> <li>• Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014</li> <li>• Public Records Act 1973 (Vic)</li> <li>• Spam Act 2003 (Comm)</li> <li>• Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Comm)</li> <li>• Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)</li> <li>• Gender Equality Act (2021)</li> <li>• Child Safe Standards (2022)</li> </ul>
<b>Council &amp; organisational policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillor Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Staff Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Community Engagement Policy</li> <li>• Privacy Policy</li> <li>• Governance Rules</li> <li>• Caretaker (Elections) Policy</li> <li>• Councillors IT Equipment – Conditions of Use Policy</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Risk Management Policy</li><li>• Equal Opportunity Policy</li><li>• Bullying and Harassment Policy</li><li>• Acceptable Computer Use Policy</li><li>• Sponsorship Policy</li><li>• Records Management Policy</li></ul>
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## 2. POLICY

### 2.1 Policy statement

In applying scrutiny to and coverage of Council activities, news media supports Council's efforts to maintain strong relationships with our community, therefore, a functional relationship between Council and a fair and balanced 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 social media. It also describes how Council will respond to requests for information from news media.

The Policy is aligned with Council's Community Engagement Policy which outlines Council's commitment to informing the community and, where appropriate, involving the community in decision-making.

### 2.2 Policy objectives

- Ensure news media receives accurate, useful and relevant information in a timely manner, taking into account the availability of staff, existing work commitments of staff and the urgency of the news item.
- Ensure that there are clear processes in place in interacting with the news 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 and procedures

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 enquiries from news media, Warrnambool City Council expects media coverage that is fair, balanced, relevant and in the public interest.

News media enquiries will be addressed within reasonable timeframes which are influenced by Council resources including the availability of staff. Enquiries will be directed through the Communications Unit to ensure a co-ordinated, organisation-wide approach.

### **2.3.2 Reporting on Council decisions**

All media releases on Council decisions will be coordinated through Council's Communications Unit.

Once a decision is made by Council, media releases should reflect the decision of Council, not the personal interpretations of Councillors or officers.

### **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 adopted by Council, matters affecting local government and local issues that impact the community.

The mayor may designate other Councillors as spokespersons. Examples of where this may be appropriate could include:

- a Councillor discussing matters pertaining to an advisory committee on which they serve;
- allocation of Councillors to a particular portfolio where a Councillor has a particular interest or level of expertise.

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

The Chief Executive Officer can provide ongoing authorisation to a Council business unit that allows for the promotion of that business through the media.

### **2.3.4 Councillors in the media**

Councillors can express their own independent views through the media, however they must make it clear any comment is their personal view and does not represent the position of Council. In making representations through the media, Councillors should abide by the Councillor Code of Conduct.

### 2.3.5 Chief Executive Officer in the media

The Chief Executive Officer's role in the media will be focused on operational matters.

### 2.3.6 Media support

The role of Council's Communications Unit 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 Unit 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.

### 2.3.7 Council social media accounts/sites

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

Social media platforms and apps not approved for use on devices owned by the Victorian and Australian governments are not to be used on Council devices.

Those posting content on Council social media sites should be mindful of the prohibited content described in item 2.3.7 of this policy.

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

Approval for establishing official Council social media sites is authorised through the Communications Manager on behalf of the Chief Executive.

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

- disclose only publicly available information; and
- comply with all relevant Council policies.

Staff using social media to disseminate information may consider sharing posts from community organisations or project partners, providing the post meets the objectives of a relevant Council plan, program or project.

Staff should be mindful of Australian competition laws and refrain from relaying, repeating or sharing social media messages issued by private businesses as to do so may promote one business over another, or involve Council in matters outside the scope of local government activity.



### 2.3.8 Prohibited 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, cultural background, disability, gender, nationality, marital or parental status, political opinion/affiliation, race, religious belief or 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; and,
- personal details or references to elected members, Council employees or third parties, which may be inconsistent with Council's Privacy Policy.

### 2.3.9 Child safety, gender diversity and equality

Those producing media content, print and online, should ensure the content reflects the diversity that exists in the Warrnambool community taking into account gender, age and cultural background.

Content should also be mindful of the 11 Victorian Child Safe Standards as defined by the Commission for Children and Young People.

### 2.3.10 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; and/or
- compromising public confidence in Council.

### 2.3.11 Moderation of online content

Council officers responsible for social media content will either report, remove or block posts or users that:

- abuse, harass or threaten others;
- racially or religiously vilify others;
- incite, induce or aid violence, discriminate, harass, victimise or provoke hatred towards others, or are likely to offend, insult or humiliate others, particularly on the basis of their race, colour, descent, national origin, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation or any disability;
- make defamatory or libellous comments;
- use insulting, provocative or hateful language or images;
- use obscene or offensive language or images;
- use material that infringes the intellectual property rights of others;
- are multiple versions of the same view in a discussion;

- promote commercial interests;
- are unrelated to the topic of a post;
- link to external non-government websites;
- promote personal and professional interests;
- are overtly party political (e.g. reference to candidates, fundraisers, support for political parties);  
or,
- incite, encourage or make reference to conduct that may constitute a criminal or civil offence.

### 3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Role	Responsibilities
All Users	<p>When using Council media platforms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adhere to Warrnambool's City Council's Codes of Conduct, policies and procedures;</li> <li>• comply with relevant laws and regulations;</li> <li>• seek authorisation/assistance from the Communications Unit;</li> <li>• behave with caution, honesty and respect;</li> <li>• have sound reasons for using social media for work;</li> <li>• use correct spelling and grammar; and,</li> <li>• reinforce the integrity, reputation and values of Warrnambool City Council.</li> </ul>
Staff and contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek approval from relevant manager for any business strategy that incorporates social media.</li> <li>• Seek advice and authorisation from the Communications Unit about using social media and developing a communications plan to support a business strategy.</li> <li>• Seek approval for council branding of social media and register social media account/tools/site with the Communications Unit.</li> <li>• Seek training and development for using social media.</li> <li>• Understand and comply with the provisions in this policy.</li> <li>• Seek advice from the Communications Unit if unsure about applying the provisions of this policy.</li> <li>• Be familiar with the end user licence agreements of any external social media tools being used.</li> </ul>
Managers and Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure staff and contractors are provided with a copy of this policy.</li> <li>• Ensure staff and contractors under their control comply with actions and procedures detailed in this Policy.</li> </ul>
Information Services Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate secure access to support delivery of council business via social media.</li> <li>• Regularly back up and archive internally hosted social media sites.</li> </ul>
Communications Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authorise the use of social media tools for conducting council business.</li> <li>• Provide advice and assist with the development of communication plans using social media.</li> <li>• Educate staff and contractors about this policy and their responsibilities when using social media.</li> <li>• Advise appropriate precautions e.g. disclaimers.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Monitor social media accounts/tools/sites registered for conducting Council business.</li> <li>• Refer matters where appropriate to Council's Governance &amp; Risk Unit where an issue is likely to be contentious or may create legal risk for the Council.</li> </ul>

### 4. GOVERNANCE

#### 4.1 Owner

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

#### 4.2 Review

Manager Communications will review the policy for any necessary amendments four 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 of 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