


Council Policy

For internal use only

Council policy title:	Media Policy 2021
Council policy sponsor:	Director, Community and Customer Experience
Adopted by:	 Mick Cummins Chief Executive Officer
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1. Policy intent

The Media Policy 2021 (the policy) provides a clear framework for engaging with all media organisations, including metropolitan and local print, radio, television, student journalists and digital media, to ensure that Council meets the community's expectations for accuracy, relevance and accountability. The policy will enhance and protect the good reputation of Bayside City Council and reinforce its effective voice within, and on behalf of, the community.

2. Policy purpose

The intent of this policy is that all official Council communication will be a reflection of Council's commitment to informing the community in a manner that is timely, accessible clear, concise, accurate, non-political and consistent with Council decisions and policies.

The objectives of the policy are to:

- ensure all information provided to the media is consistent, accurate, timely and appropriate
- build the reputation of the organisation within the community
- provide clear guidance for employees, contractors, Councillors and volunteers regarding the relevant Council spokesperson for a range of scenarios
- provide clarity for Councillors regarding the spokesperson role of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor (or Councillor as delegate)
- ensure appropriate authorisation and responsibility for information provided.

3. Glossary - Definitions and Abbreviations

Term	Meaning
Media	A means or channel of mass communication, this includes video broadcasting, publishing, online/social media, and public events.
Spokesperson	The person with approval to speak to the media on behalf of Council, as designated below
Electronic and online communication	Any communication channel that is transmitted electronically, for example emails, video and e-newsletters or a channel that uses the internet, for example social media and websites.

4. Scope

The policy applies to Councillors, employees, volunteers, and contractors of Bayside City Council. The policy also applies to agencies and individuals who provide services to Bayside City Council. This policy relates to all verbal, printed, electronic and online communications including those prepared by the media, contractors, suppliers, sector and advocacy groups.

The responsibilities of Council employees, contractors, Councillors and volunteers regarding the use of social media is outlined in the organisational policy Social Media Policy 2021 and Social Policy Media Guidelines 2021. During a Council election this policy must be read in conjunction with the Election Period Policy.

5. Policy statement

Bayside City Council will use a variety of communication channels to inform, educate, engage and consult with the community on Council decisions, initiatives, policies, programs, activities and events.

Communication should reinforce the reputation and values of Council and its organisation, and be accurate, timely, impartial and consistent with legislation and policies. All communications will be written, produced and distributed in an accessible manner. Council will maximise the use of electronic and online communication to reduce printed material where practicable and appropriate.

Effective engagement with the media enables Council to:

- facilitate transparent, open and accountable government
- explain Council decisions and the impact of those decisions
- increase awareness of Council services, events, facilities and opportunities for involvement and participation
- advocate for the needs of the Bayside community
- encourage and support behaviour change for social and environmental benefit
- promote local tourism and the local economy.

5.1 Roles and Responsibilities including Council Spokespersons

In all communications, the Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer (or their delegates) are official spokespersons on behalf of Bayside City Council and its organisation.

The following table outlines the relevant Council spokesperson, further information is available at Attachment 1 – Media Relations Protocol.

Scenario	Spokesperson
Major decisions made by Council and associated issues*	Mayor
Major decisions made by Council and associated issues* - when the Mayor is unable to perform his/her duties or as delegated by the Mayor	Deputy Mayor
Other Council decisions and associated issues* - as delegated by the Mayor	Councillor
Council decisions or policy matters - as delegated by the Mayor	Chief Executive Officer
Organisational, operational or administrative matters	Chief Executive Officer
Declared municipal emergency (as defined in the Municipal Emergency Management Plan)	Chief Executive Officer
Activated Business Continuity Plan including all high-level administrative, operational, sensitive and management issues	Chief Executive Officer
Organisational, operational or administrative matters specific to a department or service area (delegated by the Chief Executive Officer)	Executive Team member
Promotion of specific Council services, events or facilities, when delegated by the relevant Executive Team member and Manager Communications, Engagement and Customer Experience	Employees with specialist or technical knowledge
Matters of fact or clarification only, in response to approved media statements	External Communications and Media Coordinator or Media and Publications Officer

* except in circumstances where section 5.3.1 of the Policy applies.

Individual Councillors wishing to initiate their own communication, through any channel, must make it clear that they are expressing their 'individual' view and not the 'official' view of Council. Councillors are responsible for ensuring that information they are commenting on, or providing, is accurate and consistent with legislation and policies.

Council employees are not authorised to speak on behalf of Council or the organisation, without first seeking permission through the Manager Communication, Engagement and Customer Experience and/ or the Chief Executive Officer.

Public comments made as private citizens need to be clearly reflected that they are personal opinions only.

5.2 Responsibilities of the Mayor and Councillors

All Councillors must comply with the policy and respect the respective roles of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Chief Executive Officer as spokespersons for the Council. When engaging with the media, the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor) must comply with the Councillor Code of Conduct Principles, Values and Behaviours.

In accordance with Section 18 (1)(b) of the Local Government Act 2020, the Mayor or Deputy Mayor are the principal spokespersons for the Council and must represent and respect Council decisions, regardless of their personal views. Councillors must also comply with the requirements of Part 6 – Council Integrity of the Local Government Act 2020.

The Act states that Councillors must not misuse their position to gain advantage for themselves or cause detriment to another person. It also refers to the improper use of information that has been acquired in their role as a Councillor, and not disclosing information that is considered confidential.

5.2.1 Spokesperson on Council decisions - Conflict of Interest

In circumstances where a Council decision is made and any Councillor/s are absent due to a declared conflict of interest, that Councillor cannot act as the Council spokesperson on the Council decision or associated issues.

5.2.2 Statements

Councillors, including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, must advise the Chief Executive Officer and/or Manager Communications, Engagement and Customer Experience of any contact with the media and refrain from making any statement prior to this advice.

Councillors contacted directly by the media must advise the media representative to contact the Mayor and/or the Communication, Engagement and Customer Experience Department.

The Mayor and Deputy Mayor must advise the Chief Executive Officer and/or Manager Communications, Engagement and Customer Experience prior to providing any statement that may be reported in the public domain.

Councillors must not promote any private business interests, in their role as delegated Council spokesperson. Councillors must not promote their political or personal interests as a registered candidate in a State or Federal Government election

5.2.3 Training and Support

Information on Councillors' responsibilities under this policy will be included in the Councillor Induction program. Mandatory media training will be provided to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor following election. Media training will be provided to other Councillors as delegated by the Mayor.

During the Mayoral term, ongoing support will be provided to the Mayor including liaison with media and ensuring the Mayor is appropriately briefed.

5.2.4 Election Period Policy

The Election Period Policy for General Elections will take precedence over this policy for the declared local government election period.

5.3 Role of the Communications, Engagement and Customer Experience Department

All media enquiries must be referred to, coordinated and managed, by the Communication, Engagement and Customer Experience Department. The Department will write, and seek necessary approvals, for media releases, scripts, briefing notes and statements. The Department will liaise directly with the media to follow up and coordinate enquiries.

The Department will provide advice and support to other departments to create newsworthy opportunities and target media appropriately. Council-initiated news stories must be coordinated and managed by the Department.

The Department will support the Mayor in their role as Council spokesperson. This includes liaison with media and ensuring the Mayor is appropriately briefed/supported as spokesperson. See Attachment 1 – Media Relations Protocol for further information.

5.4 Media Relations

Council will maintain good working relationships with all media organisations including metropolitan and local print, radio, television and digital media.

It will achieve this through:

- Providing clear, consistent and reliable information to the media in a timely manner at all times;
- Issuing regular media releases and statements;
- Responding promptly to media questions and working to meet mutually agreed deadlines - where this is not possible we will keep the media outlet advised of the timeline for our response;

- Initiating, developing and implementing positive media strategies that inform the community about Council activities and services, and enhance the reputation and image of the Bayside City Council.

In return, Council expects fair and balanced reporting, with an opportunity to represent Council's position on issues.

5.5 Promoting Council business

The Communication, Engagement and Customer Experience Department is responsible for developing, approving and implementing Council's media and external communications strategies with the relevant Senior Officer authorisation.

Council media and external communication strategies and resources will be used only to promote and disseminate the decisions, intentions, activities and actions of Council, and will not be used to promote individual Councillor or officer views or agendas that are inconsistent with or contrary to those of Council.

State or Federal politicians will only be represented through Council's media and external communication strategies where necessary to reasonably inform the community of important news.

5.6 Provision of Information

All employees, volunteers and contractors are expected to take responsibility for information provided to the Communication, Engagement and Customer Experience Department and observe the protocols for appropriate authorisation set out in this policy, to ensure communication with the media is well informed, accurate, timely and appropriate.

Council employees are expected to identify opportunities to proactively obtain media coverage to support achievement of Council's goals and objectives, within the scope of a broader communications plan.

Any employees delegated to represent Council (in accordance with section 5.2 of the Policy) must comply with the standards of behaviour outlined in the Staff Code of Conduct. As delegated Council spokespersons, employees must represent and respect Council decisions or operational matters regardless of their personal views.

Employees will not promote their personal, business or political interests, including interests as a candidate in an election, in their role as delegated Council spokesperson.

5.7 Media Requests from students

Students at all levels (primary, secondary, post-secondary) routinely request media statements or interviews with the Mayor or Councillors, as part of their journalism or media studies. Content produced by students may be published across a variety of

channels and subsequently re-published by major news outlets. The policy and any associated procedures must be followed for any media requests from students.

6. Monitoring, evaluation & review

Media coverage of Bayside City Council will be reported to the Executive Team on a quarterly basis. Compliance with, and the effectiveness of, the policy will be included as part of this quarterly reporting process.

Executive Team and Councillor feedback will be collected on an ongoing basis and will inform the evaluation. The policy will be reviewed within the first 12 months of each new Council term, or as a result of organisational changes.

7. Roles & Responsibilities

The policy is to be implemented, monitored and evaluated by the Manager Communication, Engagement and Customer Experience.

8. Related documents

Staff, volunteers, Councillors and contractors are expected to demonstrate standards of conduct and behaviour that are consistent with the following relevant legislation, policies and procedures.

Legislation	<p>Defamation Act 2005 (Victoria)</p> <p>Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Victoria)</p> <p>Local Government Act 2020 (Victoria)</p> <p>Information Privacy Act 2000 (Victoria)</p> <p>Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Victoria)</p> <p>Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Victoria)</p> <p>Wrongs Act 1958 (Victoria)</p> <p>Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth)</p> <p>The human rights implications of this policy have been properly considered and the policy has been found to comply with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Victoria).</p>
Policies	<p>Privacy and Data Protection Policy 2017 DOC/17/252752</p> <p>Community and Stakeholder Engagement Policy 2021 DOC/21/16007</p> <p>Election Period Policy DOC/19/346767</p> <p>Governance Charter 2018 DOC/18/117228</p> <p>Customer Experience Policy 2018 DOC/18/131506</p>

	Disciplinary Policy 2018 DOC/18/160713 Records Management Policy 2011 DOC/15/8767 Social Media Policy 2021 DOC/21/353166 Social Media Guidelines 2021 DOC/21/353165 Bayside Brand Guidelines DOC/18/301341 Writing Style Guide Election Period Policy DOC/19/346767 Election Period Communication Guidelines Staff Code of Conduct
Strategies/Plans	N/A
Procedures and Processes	Attachment 1 – Media Relations Protocol
Other	Councillor Code of Conduct 2020

Please note: This policy is current as at the date of approval. Refer to Council's website to ensure this is the latest version.

Attachment 1: Media Relations Protocol

This document seeks to provide guidance to Councillors and Council employees regarding the application of the Media Policy 2021 and should be read in conjunction with the policy.

Protocols

All Council media enquiries are to be directed to the Communication, Engagement and Customer Experience Department (the Department), which will liaise with the Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer to determine an appropriate response on behalf of Council.

Individual Councillors contacted directly by the media for an 'official Council comment' should refer the journalist to the Department.

Councillors can participate in official media relations activities by suggesting ideas for stories and/or photo opportunities about Council achievements, innovations, programs, services or events to the Department;

Council employees will promptly provide background information to the Department to assist in preparing responses. All responses will be prepared in collaboration with the relevant Executive Team member (or Manager) and approved by the Executive Team member/Chief Executive Officer and/or Mayor as per the delegated spokesperson guidelines.

Responses are to be in the best interest of the Council organisation and not for the personal advantage of any individual Councillor, or Council employee.

An official Council media release/response cannot be altered without the permission of the delegated spokesperson.

If there are factual inaccuracies the delegated spokesperson in conjunction with the Department will rectify the inaccuracy.

Regular summaries of media coverage will be provided to Councillors and employees including transcripts and videos as required.