Council Policy

Council policy title:	Media policy
Council policy ref no:	C/POL/16/107
Council policy owner:	Executive Manager Communications and Customer Service
Adopted by:	Bayside City Council
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1. Policy intent

Bayside City Council recognises the important role of media in shaping the community's perception and understanding of Council and its work. The intent of the policy is to ensure that Council's use of the media is intentional, planned, where appropriate, and addresses the community's concerns for accuracy, relevance and accountability.

2. Purpose/Objective

Council's goal is that the community clearly understands council's role and the contribution it makes to the liveability of Bayside, and as a result is highly satisfied with the quality of council's services and the advocacy it provides.

Council strives to keep the Bayside community well informed and provide opportunities to actively participate in council decision making processes.

Media plays an important role in forming public opinion. Media coverage of council activities is an effective means of raising awareness and increasing community understanding, and is critical to achieving council's goal.

Council aims to be accountable and transparent and recognises the important, independent role that the media plays in facilitating these aims.

Effective reputation management builds trust and confidence in Council to make sound, evidence based decisions in the public interest.

For the purposes of this policy social media is considered a form of media as it can simultaneously communicate a message to a large group.

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Social media is providing a voice to ordinary citizens and increasingly enabling direct participation in political and social issues.

Bayside City Council recognises that social media provides new opportunities for dynamic and interactive two-way communications which can complement other communication and further improve information, access and delivery of services.

As such, this policy aims to:
- Promote an open exchange of information between Council and the community via media
- Ensure all communication via the media is consistent, well informed, timely and appropriate
- Ensure appropriate authorisation and responsibility for information provided
- Limit the publication of inaccurate information
- Provide clear guidance for councillors and staff in dealing with media

3. Scope
This policy applies to all councillors, employees, contractors and volunteers of Bayside City Council. This policy also applies to agencies and individuals who provide services to Bayside City Council.

4. Roles & Responsibilities
This policy is to be implemented, monitored and evaluated by the Executive Manager Communications and Customer Service.

5. Monitoring, evaluation & review
Bayside City Council actively monitors media for relevant matters that impact on the Bayside municipality and Council's operations and reputation.

This policy will be published and promoted to councillors, staff, contractors and volunteers of Bayside City Council. Breaching this policy may result in action outlined by relevant codes of conduct.

6. Policy statement
Council is committed to proactively engaging with media and providing information in a timely and accurate manner.

Our aim is to achieve accurate and balanced coverage of Bayside City Council decisions, operations and policies and maximise awareness of the role and contribution of Council to making Bayside a better place.

Effective communication with media supports this objective by:
- facilitating transparent, open and accountable government
- explaining council decisions and the impact of decisions
- increasing awareness of services, events, facilities and opportunities for involvement and participation
- advocating the needs of the Bayside community
- encouraging and supporting behaviour change for social and environmental benefit
- promoting Bayside business and tourism

Consistent controls are needed to mitigate the risk of inaccurate information being published. Councillors, employees, contractors, agents and volunteers are expected to take responsibility for information provided 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.

6.1 Proactively seeking media coverage

Council staff will seek 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.

The Communications Department will provide advice and support to other departments to create newsworthy opportunities and target media appropriately. The Communications Department will write and seek necessary approvals for media releases and liaise directly with the media to follow up and coordinate opportunities including but not limited to photo opportunities and interviews.

6.2 Responding to media enquiries

All media enquiries will be referred to and managed by the Communications Department. This ensures the most appropriate spokesperson and accuracy of information provided to the media.

6.3 Protocols for determining the spokesperson

The Communications Department will use the following protocols to determine the most appropriate spokesperson.
- The Mayor is the primary spokesperson on major issues and decisions made by Council
- At the Mayor's or the Deputy Mayor's discretion or via a Council resolution at the Annual Meeting, another Councillor may be designated as spokesperson
- At the Mayor's discretion the Chief Executive Officer may be designated as spokesperson for Council decisions or policy matters
- The Chief Executive Officer is the spokesperson on operational matters but will delegate routine matters to appropriate Executive Team members or other staff
- Staff with specialist knowledge may be authorised by the Chief Executive Officer to speak with media on a case by case basis. This shall generally be limited to matters where comment of a technical nature is required.
- Communications officers are authorised spokespersons on matters of fact or clarification only

6.4 Commentary in the media – Employees

When commenting in the media employees are reminded of the commitment in the Staff Code of Conduct to uphold standards of conduct and behaviour that protect the reputation of Bayside City Council both during and outside of work.

Employees will limit their comments to explaining decisions taken by Council and contain their comments to being representative of the collective council position.

If the topic is not the subject of a council decision employees will limit their comments to operational matters.

Employees are also reminded of their obligation as outlined in the Local Government Act 1989 to, among other things, act impartially and with integrity, accept accountability for results and provide responsive service.

The same principles must be applied when commenting in social media.

The organisational Social Media Policy 2015 governs the use of social media by staff.

6.5   Commentary in the media - Councillors

When commenting to the media councillors are reminded of the commitment to the Councillor Code of Conduct 2016, particularly the values and behaviours:
- Respecting differences of opinions during debate but respecting Council's decision even when in disagreement
- Where possible providing no surprises to each other in the public domain

Councillors will not comment on administrative or operational matters.

In making comments to the media, councillors should make it clear where their comments reflect their personal views and not the views of Council on issues that may be contrary to a Council adopted position or on matters not yet considered by Council.

Councillors are also reminded of their obligation as outlined in the Local Government Act 1989 to, among other things, act with integrity and impartially exercise his or her own responsibilities in the interests of the local community.

The same principles must be applied when commenting in social media.

Councillors are encouraged to consider using social media as a method of engaging constituents and increasing understanding of issues and the role of Council.

As a form of media, councillors' should be mindful that their social media presence contributes to the perception and reputation of Council. It is important that the roles and activities that councillors undertake as elected public figures are not impacted or mistaken for private and personal activities. Councillors are therefore required to make it clear if their use of a social media site is in their public or their private roles.

When using social media to conduct council business councillors should:
- clearly identify their role as a councillor
- contain content to their role as a councillor and councillor duties ie clearly separate personal content from content related to their role as a councillor
- not comment on organisational administrative or operational matters

- make it clear that their comments reflect their personal views and not the views of Council on issues that may be contrary to a Council adopted position or on matters not yet considered by Council
- not bring Council into disrepute

The following content should not be published under any circumstances:
- Abusive, profane or sexual language
- Content which is false or misleading
- Confidential information about Council or third parties
- Discriminatory material in relation to a person or group based on age, colour, creed, disability, family status, gender, nationality, marital status, parental status, political opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, race or social origin, religious beliefs/activity, responsibilities, sex or sexual orientation
- Illegal material or materials designed to encourage law breaking
- Materials that could compromise Council, employee or system safety
- Materials which would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks)
- Material that would offend contemporary standards of taste and decency
- Personal details or references to councillors, Council staff or third parties, which may breach privacy laws
- Statements which may be considered to be bullying or harassment

As the designated spokesperson for Council, advice and support will be provided to the Mayor by the Communications Department to maintain a social media presence.

Training will be offered for all councillors. Administrative support will not be provided to councillors to set up, maintain or manage their own social media accounts.

It is councillors' responsibility to ensure that content posted to their social media accounts observes requirements for electoral matter under the Local Government Act 1989.

7. Related documents

Staff, councillors and agents of Bayside City Council are expected to demonstrate standards of conduct and behaviour that are consistent with relevant legislation, regulations and policies.

Relevant legislation includes the following:

- *Defamation Act 2005* (Vic)
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Vic)
- *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic)
- *Information Privacy Act 2000* (Vic)
- *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* (Vic)
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (*Vic)

Council policies and guideline provisions which must be adhered to in relation to dealing with the media include the following:

- Bayside City Council Councillor Code of Conduct
- Bayside City Council Staff Code of Conduct
- Bayside City Council employment contracts
- Bayside City Council Prevention of Discrimination, Harassment and Victimisation Policy 2012
- Bayside City Council Disciplinary Guideline 2008
- Bayside City Council Customer Focus Policy and Customer Service Standards
- Bayside City Council Information Privacy Policy 2012
- Bayside City Council Records Management Policy 2011
- Bayside City Council Community Engagement Policy 2014
- Bayside City Council Social Media Policy 2015

Please note: This policy is current as at the date of approval. Refer to Council's website (www.bayside.vic.gov.au) or staff intranet to ensure this is the latest version