

Councillor Media and Social Media Policy

February 2020

Objective Document ID Number	A5404704
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Custodians	Communications and Engagement
Date Reviewed	February 2020
Review Purpose	Updates to 2014 Media Policy and create a new Social Media Policy
Endorsed by Date and Person	Executive Management Team
Date/s Issued and/or Communicated	February 2020
Date to be Reviewed	[Month] [Year]
Version Number	1
Chief Executive Policy Endorsement	

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1 Objectives

This policy provides a framework to ensure that the Mayor and Councillors assist the City of Darebin to manage its media relations and in turn, its reputation successfully. Media and social media are important channels to:

- effectively promote Council's services, programs and initiatives
- provide clear information about Council processes and decisions
- promote opportunities for residents to get involved
- ensure Darebin speaks with a strong, honest and authoritative voice on all matters pertaining to its operations and values, and
- manage and enhance Darebin's reputation.

The policy outlines appropriate activities in relation to the Mayor and Councillors engagement with the media and/or social media. Further, it outlines the role of the Communications and Engagement Department in providing assistance to Councillors and the actions that may occur in the event of breaches of this Policy.

It is imperative that Council has a policy and procedures which enable it to keep pace with the increasing immediacy of news. The policy of having defined spokespeople and a centralised media contact is central to Council's success.

This policy does not relate to the activities of Council staff.

2 Scope

This policy applies to all Councillors of the City of Darebin.

This policy applies to any/all interaction with external news media and engagement with any public facing social media platform.

This policy is to be read together with the Darebin Councillor Code of Conduct.

This policy does not apply to Council staff.

The Communications and Engagement Department is responsible for managing official media relations and social media engagement on behalf of the City of Darebin.

Relevant legislation

- Freedom of Information Act Privacy Act
- Protected Disclosure Act
- Local Government Act
- Privacy & Data Protection Act
- Health Records Act

This policy is to be read together with;

- Election Period Policy 2020
- Darebin Councillor Code of Conduct 2017
- Councillor Guidelines: Preselection or Nomination as a Candidate in a State or Federal Election
- Excellence in Governance Code of Conduct

- Darebin City Council's Confidentiality Policy: Handling of Confidential Information by Councillors 2016
- Darebin City Council's Privacy Policy 2015

3 Definitions

Communications and Engagement Department is part of the Governance and Engagement Division.

The Manager of Communications and Engagement manages the Communications and Engagement Department.

The Corporate Affairs team is part of the Communications and Engagement Department.

The Corporate Affairs Coordinator manages the Corporate Affairs team.

The Media Advisor is part of the Corporate Affairs team.

The Communications team is part of the Communications and Engagement Department and is managed by the Communications Coordinator.

The Digital Advisor is a member of the Communications team.

Authorised Social Media Publishers are staff across Council who have authority to post and comment on social media from corporate accounts. Approval must be made in writing by the Digital Advisor or Communications Officers.

Council or Darebin Council refers to the nine elected representatives (including the Mayor) whose role is to represent their constituents and make strategic decisions for the city.

Delegated Councillors refers to a Councillor asked to respond to a media request on behalf of the Mayor.

Darebin City Council refers to the organisation run by the Chief Executive and staffed by council officers.

Media: For the purposes of this policy, the term **media** refers to all mainstream external news channels, including (but not limited to) newspapers, radio, television, online news services, and magazines.

Social Media: For the purposes of this policy, the term **social media** refers to a range of digital platforms and social networking tools and forums including (but not limited to) Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and blogs.

4 Background

Communicating with or via the media including social media plays a large role in Council's interaction with the community. All media and social media interaction are undertaken broadly to enhance or protect the City of Darebin's reputation and engage with residents and local businesses. Media coverage influences community perceptions, informs residents of Council's activities and applies a level of scrutiny to Council's functions.

Consistent with the principles of good governance, it is important that Council has clear standards and guidelines in place which outline the appropriate use of media and social media channels by Councillors.

This Councillor Media and Social Media Policy 2020 also ensures compliance with legislation and the Councillor Code of Conduct.

5 Principles

This policy has at its foundation the following guiding principles:

1. External communication is based on a considered strategy with a clear understanding of audience, desired outcome, appropriate channel(s), impacts on community, government relationships, reputation management and legal liability.
2. The primary audience for all media and social media comment is the Darebin community.
3. Corporate media and social media will not be used to promote Councillors' individual personal, business or political interests, including interests as a candidate in an election.
4. Media commentary and social media engagement will be tailored to the channel(s) being used.
5. All media and social media commentary will be entirely consistent with any adopted or established Council position (when in place).
6. All media and social media commentary will respect any decision taken by Council.

6 Roles and Responsibilities

The Mayor

1. The Mayor is the official spokesperson for Darebin City Council and the decisions of Council, unless otherwise delegated by them.
2. The role of the Mayor as spokesperson for Darebin City Council is to:
 - clearly articulate and explain the deliberations and decisions of Council
 - promote participation in, and understanding of, democratic processes and decisions
 - promote awareness and utilisation of Council services
 - promote opportunities for residents to participate more fully in community life
 - protect Council's reputation from harm caused by negative events or negative or incorrect media coverage.
3. Posts and responses from the Mayors official channel on social media platforms are to be made by the Mayor or a staff member authorised to do so and are to follow an agreed plan.

4. It is not the role of the Mayor to discuss operational matters or organisational issues. These issues include employment matters, relations between officers and Councillors, breaches of the staff code of conduct, and other matters as defined in s46-49 of the Local Government Act 2019 (including any amendments to it).
5. Responsive and timely provision of information is central to successful issues management and therefore, the Mayor and the Manager of Communication and Engagement will respond on behalf of Council without consultation where required.

Councillors

1. Councillors are entitled to express independent views however they must make it clear that any unofficial comment is their personal view and does not represent a position adopted by the Council as a whole.
2. Any/all contact from the media to individual Councillors will be immediately referred to the Mayor and/or the Communications and Engagement Department ahead of any response.
3. Councillors must be mindful that any response or public comment will likely be perceived as being made as a Councillor of the City of Darebin irrespective of whether they use the title "Councillor" in their communication or the media channel being used, including personal, professional or other social media channels.
4. Councillors' professional work is not subject to this Policy, however Councillors must be mindful that the Code of Conduct applies to their professional lives. Councillors should contact the Manager of Communications and Engagement where their public statements to media and on professional social media channels puts them in conflict with Council policies.
5. It is the role of both the Mayor and Councillors to endeavour to ensure that the messages communicated through the media and social media are clear and consistent accurate and factual and do not seek to deliberately harm the reputation of the Council.
6. Councillors will endeavour to ensure that any information or activities that may be considered a risk to Council's reputation are brought to the attention of the Manager Communications and Engagement and/or the CEO as soon as possible.
7. If speaking with the media, Councillors must make it clear that they are not speaking on behalf of Council – unless the Mayor has delegated that authority to them on a particular issue.
8. Councillors must ensure that any such comment is devoid of comments that could reasonably be construed as being derogatory, offensive or insulting to any person.
9. If a Councillor has responded to a media query or proactively provided media comment on Council matters, Councillors must immediately advise the Mayor and the Manager Communications and Engagement.

10. It is not the role of Councillors to discuss operational, organisational matters or issues. These issues include, but are not limited to, the planning, organising and execution of day to day activities, including delivery of services, employment matters, operational decisions, relations between officers and Councillors, breaches of the staff code of conduct, and other matters as defined in s46-49 of the Local Government Act 2019 (including any amendments to it).

Delegated Councillors

1. If delegated, to maintain Council's reputation with stakeholders and the community and to ensure that Council key messages are clear and consistent at all times, consultation with the Mayor, Chief Executive or Communications and Engagement Department is recommended before responding to enquiries from the media.
2. If delegated, Councillors approached to comment on General Business items that have been raised, or are intended to be raised in the Chamber must make it clear that Council has made no decision in relation to the item raised and will consider the matter in due course. This guards against the potential perception that a pre-emptive decision has been made before a report is considered.

Communications and Engagement Team

1. The role of the Communications Team is to help promote the programs, initiatives, services and strategic policy decisions of Darebin City Council and to support the Mayor as spokesperson for the Council. It is not the Department's role to promote and build the profile of individual Councillors.
2. Council's Corporate Affairs team is responsible for issuing media releases and contacting journalists about potential stories in accordance with the provisions of this policy.
3. Proactive media coverage and social media is the responsibility of Council's Communications and Engagement Department, or under CEO delegation to another Business Unit.
4. The Corporate Affairs team will contact the media to seek coverage of a story where a news story is identified and/or it is decided that Council should release details of an event or issue.
5. Council's Communications and Engagement Department is responsible for the development of social media materials.
6. The Communications and Engagement Department works collaboratively across Darebin City Council to carry out its responsibilities.

7 Code of Conduct

Clause 12 of the Councillor Code of Conduct states;

12.1 As elected representatives and members of the Council we have important responsibilities

to communicate the:

12.1.1 concerns of our constituents to the Council; and

12.1.2 policies and decisions of the Council to the community.

12.2 While respecting the rights of each Councillor to hold and express opinions that differ from agreed Council policy, we undertake:

12.3 Not to make any false statements about the Council, Councillors, Council staff or members of the public;

12.4 Not to make any defamatory statements about, Councillors, Council staff or members of the public;

12.5 Avoid misrepresenting the position of the Council and ensure that any expression of private views is not perceived to be the view of the Council;

12.1.1 to recognise the role of the Mayor as the primary spokesperson for the Council; and

12.1.2 to acknowledge and comply with all internal procedures for dealing with media enquiries, including by referring them to the appropriate Manager for a response.”

8 Official Spokesperson

1. All posts and interactions on Darebin City Council Social Media channels and platforms will be made from an official account (eg Darebin City Council, Darebin Arts Centre, Northcote Town Hall etc), managed by a staff member who is an authorised social media publisher: “Official Spokesperson”.
2. Posts and comments will not be made from personal accounts.

9 Operational and Organisational Matters

1. Only the Chief Executive Officer or staff authorised by them can provide official comment to the media about operational matters on behalf of Darebin City Council.
2. All/any requests for comment on organisational policies, business and operations must be immediately referred to the Manager Communications and Engagement.
3. Council does not use social media to address operational issues except to echo a media statement. These comments would be made from a corporate account. Information about individual staff or residents is protected under the Privacy Act. Councillors must immediately refer all such enquiries to the General Manager Governance and Engagement for consideration and response.
4. Councillors must not respond directly to requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act. All requests for information under the Act must be referred to the Records Management Coordinator for consideration and response.

10 Key Accountabilities – Media

Managing the media in both proactive and reactive settings requires the cooperation of many parties as outlined in the table below.

Mayor	Primary spokesperson for the City of Darebin on policy issues, citywide issues and intergovernmental issues, as well as major issues of community significance. The Mayor may also choose to delegate matters or enquiries to other councillors.
Councillors	Act as the primary spokesperson when delegated by the Mayor.
CEO	Provides guidance on the development of media responses and has ultimate accountability for media responses. Where media issues relate to administrative or staff performance issues, the CEO or delegated Officers will respond.
General Managers	Provide guidance on the development of media responses and act as spokespeople for operational issues.
Council Media Advisor (within Communications and Engagement Department)	Primary point of contact for all media interaction. Develops media responses in collaboration with subject matter experts, Manager of Communications and Engagement and relevant General Manager for approval by the CEO and Mayor as appropriate. Oversees all interactions with the news media.
Managers	Develop proactive media releases related to project or portfolio responsibilities. Support coordination of media responses.
All other staff	Provide subject matter input in a timely manner to enable deadlines to be met on all media responses. Act as subject matter experts in the development of proactive media releases.
	Refer any direct media enquiries immediately to the Communications and Engagement Department or delegated media advisor. Under no circumstances may a staff member speak directly to the media.

11 Key Accountabilities – Social media

Managing our social media platforms in both proactive and reactive settings requires the cooperation of many parties as outlined in the table below.

Mayor	In collaboration with the Communications and Engagement Department, manages a dedicated corporate account. May post and comment to that account.
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CEO	Provides guidance on the development of social media plans and has ultimate accountability for social media.
General Managers	Provide guidance on the development of social media plans. GMs sign off on sensitive content.
Council Digital Advisor (within Communications and Engagement Department)	Primary point of contact for all social media engagement. Develops social media plans in collaboration with subject matter experts, Manager and Communications and Engagement and relevant General Manager for approval by the CEO and Mayor as appropriate. Oversees the budget to promote Council's policies and programs via social media. Operates the Mayor's corporate social media accounts in collaboration with the Mayor.
Authorised Social Media Publishers	Have authority to post and comment on social media using a corporate account on behalf of Darebin City Council. Develop social media plans in collaboration with their business units and the Communications and Engagement Department. Refer issues outside of their remit to the Digital Advisor
Managers	Provide subject matter input in a timely manner to enable deadlines to be met on all media responses. Act as subject matter experts in the development of proactive media releases. Managers sign off on content through a communications or social media strategy.
Customer Service staff	Respond to routine requests that come through social media.

12 Contacting the Communications and Engagement Department

The Communications and Engagement Department is available at all times to assist with media enquiries.

If contacted by the media directly, Councillors should immediately contact the media advisor by phone or email, or in their absence the Manager Communications and Engagement.

If contacted by the media directly after hours, Councillors should immediately contact the Manager Communications and Engagement or the Chief Executive Officer.

13 Media monitoring

The Communications and Engagement Department monitors all media activity for the City of Darebin. Councillors wishing to obtain a particular news item about Council, can contact the Communications and Engagement Department for assistance.

14 Social media monitoring

The Communications and Engagement Department monitors all social media engagement for the City of Darebin. Councillors wishing to obtain a particular item about Council are welcome to contact the Department for assistance.

15 Media and social media contact in emergency situations

In all circumstances, the Communications and Engagement Department, in consultation with the Chief Executive and the Darebin Emergency Management Group (DEMG), is responsible for releasing any information to the media, and publishing to social media, about an emergency situation.

16 Election Protocols - Councillors pre-selected or nominated as candidates in Federal or State elections

Councillors who gain pre-selection, or otherwise nominate, as a candidate in a Federal or State election should ensure that any comment made to the media and posts and comments made on social media in their capacity as a Councillor is limited to matters concerning Council and is not used in a manner that furthers their platform as a candidate in, or is connected with, the relevant election.

A Councillor who gains pre-selection, or otherwise nominates, as a candidate in a Federal or State election should ensure that they do not use a Council media opportunity to further their platform as a candidate in, or in any manner connected with, the relevant election.

**See also Councillor Guidelines: pre-selection or nomination as candidate in Federal or State election for more information.*

17 Election Protocols - Local Government Elections

Any requests for media advice or assistance from Councillors during the election period must be channelled through the Chief Executive Officer or the Manager Communications Engagement.

In any event, no media advice and/or assistance or media releases will be provided in relation to election campaign matters, or in regard to publicity that involves specific Councillors.

Councillors will not use their position as an elected representative or their access to Council staff and other Council resources to gain media attention in support of matters that could be construed as relating to an election campaign.

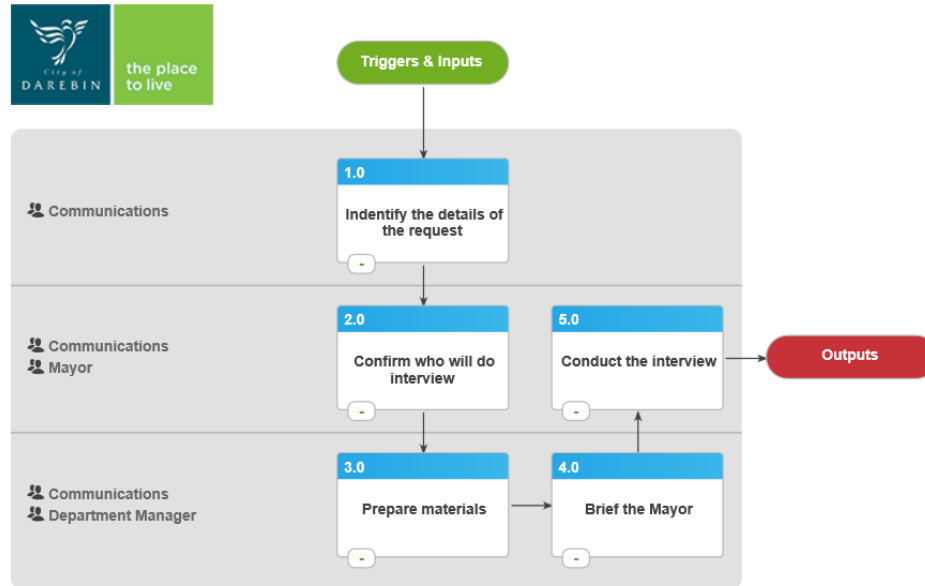
**See also Election Period Policy 2020*

18 Dispute Resolution Process

Any disputes arising from the policy will be managed in accordance with the provisions set out in the Councillor Code of Conduct, Sections 13 and 14.

19 Process mapping of media statement and media interview processes

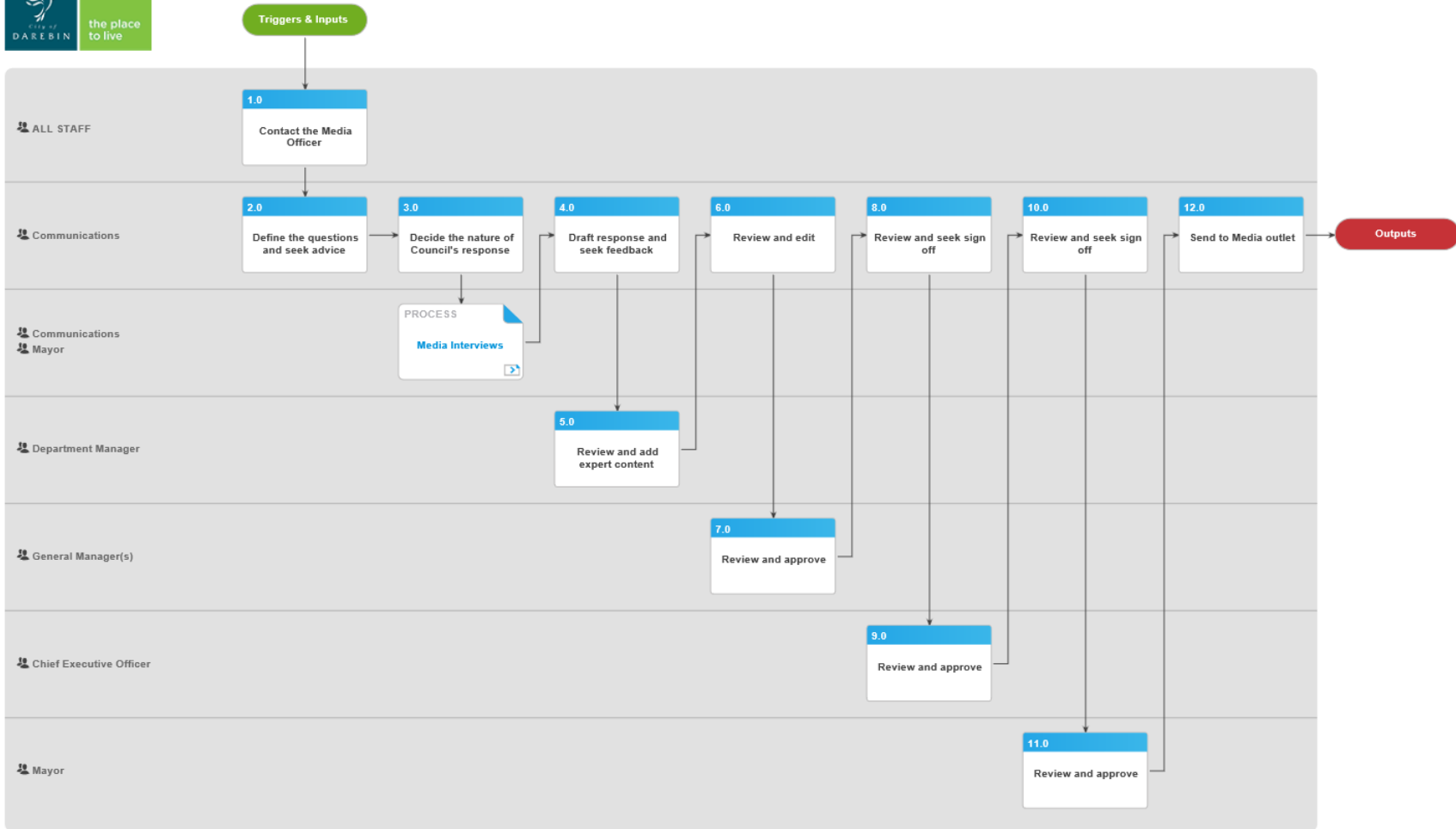
Media interviews



See

<https://au.promapp.com/darebin/Process/Minimode/Permalink/HbS5TeH71Oj2LzI5Lpc3At> for a more detailed view of the process

Media Statements



See <https://au.promapp.com/darebin/Process/Minimode/Permalink/E4VrShoICHuKqx1LrMsbXx> for a more detailed view at the process