

Strathbogie Shire Council

Media Policy

September 2023



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Media Policy

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1. PURPOSE

The media policy provides clear direction for Councillors and the organisation regarding communication and media procedures and processes when addressing issues relevant to Strathbogie Shire Council.

It will ensure responses given to the media are presented in a consistent, accurate, clear and timely manner to provide opportunity for fair representation in the media.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Strathbogie Shire 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 must 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. The media plays an important role in Council's communication. 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 community
- encourage and support behaviour change for social and environmental benefit
- promote local tourism and the local economy.

3. APPLICATION OF THIS POLICY

The policies and protocols in this document apply to Councillors and Council staff and reinforce and supplement the guidelines in the Councillor Code of Conduct and the Staff Code of Conduct

For the purposes of this document, the term 'media' refers to all forms of media including traditional media such as print, radio and television and social media forums such as Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook or any other on-line forum which is accessible to the public such as third party or personal blogs.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In all communications, the Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer (or their delegates) are Council's official spokespersons on behalf of Strathbogie Shire Council.

The table below outlines the relevant Council spokesperson for different scenarios.

Scenario	Spokesperson
Major decisions made by Council and associated issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor
Major decisions made by Council and associated issues when the Mayor is unable to perform their duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Mayor
Other Council decisions and associated issues as delegated by the Mayor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor
Organisational, operational or administrative matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executive Officer
Declared municipal emergency (as defined in the Municipal Emergency Management Plan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor • Chief Executive Officer • Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement • Incident Controller
High-level administrative, operational, sensitive and management issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executive Officer
Organisational, operational, or administrative matters specific to a department or service area (delegated by the Chief Executive Officer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Leadership Team
Promotion of specific Council services, events or facilities, when delegated by the Executive Manager Communications and Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees with specialist or technical knowledge
Matters of fact or clarification only, in response to approved media statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications and Engagement Officer

4.1 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 or Councillors if delegated as spokesperson by the Mayor) must comply with the Councillor Code of Conduct principles, values and behaviours. As spokespersons, the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor or Councillors if delegated as spokesperson by the Mayor) must represent and respect Council decisions, regardless of their personal views.

4.2 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. This excludes when a conflict has been declared by a Councillor to attend training or conferences.

4.3 Personal Statements

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, policies and Council decisions.

No Councillor may make a media statement which is critical of Council, other Councillors or Council staff.

Councillors must advise the Chief Executive Officer and/or Executive Manager Communications and Engagement of any contact with the media, 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.

4.4 Training and Support

Information on Councillors' responsibilities under this Policy will be included in the Councillor Induction program. Media training will be provided to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor as required. 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.

4.5 Role of the Communications and Engagement Department

All media enquiries must be referred to, coordinated and managed, by the Communications and Engagement Team. The team will write, and seek necessary approvals, for media releases and statements. The Communications and Engagement Department will liaise directly with the media to follow up and coordinate enquiries.

The Communication and Engagement 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 Communication and Engagement Team.

The Communication and Engagement 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.

4.6 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 Strathbogie Shire Council.

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

4.7 Promoting Council Business

The Communication and Engagement 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.

5. MEDIA COMMENT

5.1 Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillors

The Mayor is the primary spokesperson to the media on behalf of Council where the issue relates to Council policy and/or is of a political, controversial or sensitive nature.

Where the Mayor is not available or at their discretion, the Mayor may, in the first instance, delegate authority for media comment to the Deputy Mayor or the relevant Ward Councillor/s where the issue is of a specific geographic nature or is of specific interest to a particular Councillor, or as per delegation endorsed at Statutory Meeting.

In the event the Mayor may wish to delegate authority to the Deputy Mayor or another Councillor on a particular issue, this shall be undertaken in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer or the Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement to ensure they are adequately briefed.

In the first instance, all requests from the media for comment are directed to the Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement who will liaise with the Mayor, to provide the necessary response from the relevant spokesperson.

When the Mayor, Deputy Mayor or a Councillor is contacted by the media directly, they must, in the first instance and prior to making comment, contact Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement to confirm the relevant media spokesperson for the issue and to obtain the necessary information to provide an accurate and timely response.

Where the Mayor, Deputy Mayor or Councillor chooses to make comment to the media on issues that may be contrary to Council policy, or on matters not yet formally considered by Council, they must specify the comment is a personal view.

Where the Mayor, Deputy Mayor or Councillor is attending an event as a Council representative and is asked for comment by the media they must direct this to Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement who will liaise with the Mayor to provide the necessary response from the relevant spokesperson.

5.2 Chief Executive Officer and Council Staff

The Chief Executive Officer is the official media spokesperson for all administrative, operational and management matters pertaining to Strathbogie Shire Council as an organisation including:

- Staffing and structure of the organisation
- Corporate issues relating to service provision or the day-to-day business or operations of the Council.

The Chief Executive Office may delegate authority for media comment to the Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement or another Council Officer at his/her discretion on a case-by-case basis.

Under no circumstances should any Council Officer make any comment or express a view to the media about any matters pertaining to the Strathbogie Shire Council without the formal approval of the Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement.

Where a Council Officer (other than the Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement) is delegated authority by either the Chief Executive Officer or the Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement to make media comment, it shall generally be limited to commentary on matters of a technical nature.

All requests from the media for comment on administrative, operational and management matters must be directed to the Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement who will liaise to provide the necessary response from the relevant spokesperson.

All media inquiries or requests for comment on all local emergencies and natural disasters (such as fire and flood) must be directed to the Chief Executive Officer or the Executive Manager Communications and Engagement.

6. FILMING AND/OR RECORDING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

In the first instance, any media outlet and/or community representative must submit a request in writing to the Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement if they wish to film or record any proceedings of a Council or Council-run meeting.

The Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement will forward the request to the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, all Councillors, and the Chief Executive Officer for noting.

Unless otherwise advised by the Chief Executive Officer (in consultation with the Mayor), permission **may** be granted.

Permission **may** only granted for filming on the basis the camera/camera crew adopts a fixed position and is not moving around the meeting room. Any exception to this provision must be approved in writing by the Executive Manager of Communications and Engagement.

Journalists may use laptop computers to make notes for Council meetings.

7. DEFINITIONS

Term	Meaning
Media	A means or channel of mass communication (including broadcast, publishing, and online/social media)
Spokesperson	The person with approval to speak to a media outlet on behalf of Council
Electronic and online communication	Any communication channel that is transmitted electronically, for example emails and e-newsletters or a channel that uses the internet, for example social media and website
Council	means the Strathbogie Shire Council

8. RELATED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

The following Council, State, regional and national plans and policies are relevant to this policy under each subtitle.

8.1 Legislation

- *Defamation Act 2005 (Victoria)*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Victoria)*
- *Local Government Act 2020 (Victoria)*
- *Information Privacy Act 2000 (Victoria)*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Victoria)*
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Victoria)*
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Victoria)*
- *Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth)*
- 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)*

8.2 Council Plans and Policies

- Staff Code of Conduct CEO Directive
- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Social Media Policy

9. POLICY REVIEW

Council may review this policy at any time and at least two years from the date of adoption. Minor amendments to the policy may be authorised by the CEO at any time where such changes do not alter the substance of the policy (eg a change to the name of a related document, or a change in legislation).

10. CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ACT 2006 AND THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ACT 2010

The Council acknowledges the legal responsibility to comply with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 is designed to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. The Charter gives legal protection to 20 fundamental human rights under four key values that include freedom, respect, equality and dignity.