



# Media Policy

<b>Version No.</b>	V3.0
<b>Endorsement</b>	Executive, Policy Review Panel, 30 November 2021
<b>Authorisation</b>	Council, 13 December 2021
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<b>Responsible officer</b>	Engagement and Advocacy Manager
<b>Policy owner</b>	Communications Coordinator

## 1. Purpose

This document sets out Melton City Council's policy on protocols for councillors and staff when dealing with the media.

Effective communication with the media is an important component of Melton City Council's ability to meet its strategic objectives, to promote effective engagement with residents and stakeholders and to advocate for and on behalf of the community.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all Melton City Council councillors, staff, contractors, sub-contractors and volunteers.

This policy applies to all interaction with external news media.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Councillors Code of Conduct and the Employee Code of Conduct.

Please refer to the Online Engagement Policy regarding social media.

Please refer to the Melton Municipal Emergency Management Plan regarding media relations during an emergency.

## 3. Definitions

Word/Term	Definition
Media	<p>For the purposes of this policy, the term media refers to all external news channels, including television, radio, newspapers, magazine, online news services, and industry news services. It also includes journalism students.</p> <p>It does not refer to social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, SnapChat, TikTok, YouTube or online blogs.</p> <p>(Refer to the Online Engagement Policy).</p>

## **4. Policy**

This policy provides guidance to ensure councillors and staff understand and respect the role of the media, and to ensure that timely, accurate and newsworthy information is provided to the media.

To communicate clear and consistent messages through the media, it is important to have a coordinated approach. The impacts of information repeated through the media are far reaching and it is necessary that we have a policy in place to effectively manage the information and comments provided to media sources.

This policy provides clearly defined processes for Melton City Council to manage, monitor and coordinate dealings with the media.

This policy aligns with the overarching governance principles and five supporting principles in the Local Government Act 2020, in particular, the following public transparency principles:

- (b) Council information must be publicly available unless:
  - (i) the information is confidential by virtue of this Act or any other Act; or
  - (ii) public availability of the information would be contrary to the public interest;
- (c) Council information must be understandable and accessible to all;
- (d) public awareness of the availability of Council information must be facilitated.

### **4.1 Official spokespersons**

The Mayor is Melton City Council's official spokesperson on community and political issues including Council and Wellbeing Plan, Budget and decisions of Council.

The Chief Executive Officer is the official spokesperson on operational issues and staffing matters. The CEO can delegate to the relevant General Manager or Manager.

Liaison between the Communications unit and the relevant manager may determine if an officer is to be quoted for a specific program or event.

### **4.2 Media enquiries**

The Communications unit is the primary liaison point between the media and the organisation.

#### **4.2.1 Councillors**

As elected community representatives it is expected that the media will contact councillors directly at times to provide comment on issues and councillors as elected representatives are free to provide comment.

If comments to the media are contrary to a Council adopted position, on matters yet to be considered by Council or of a personal nature, it should be clearly stated as the personal views of that Councillor.

Councillors can seek assistance from Council's Communications team in preparing a response to any media enquiry

If a councillor is contacted about an issue that is the subject of a pending Council decision or pending policy, the councillor must be careful not to state a definitive position prior to the Council meeting.

If a councillor or officer becomes aware of an issue that has the potential to develop into a media issue or when directly contacted by a journalist, it must be brought to the attention of the Mayor, Chief Executive Officer, relevant General Manager or Communications unit and that advice is sought on factual information and key messages prior to responding to media enquiries. This will ensure accurate information is provided, and that it is communicated in a way that minimises any risk to Council's reputation.

If a councillor is approached by the media for a photo opportunity or an interview request on behalf of Council, they must notify the Mayor immediately.

#### **4.2.2 Staff**

All media enquiries and requests for interviews must be referred to the Communications unit. If officers are contacted directly by a journalist, they must notify Communications immediately and politely direct the journalist to a Communications representative.

A response will be provided to the journalist in one of two formats:

- A written response attributed to the appropriate spokesperson; or,
- A verbal response by the appropriate spokesperson

For written responses, Communications will research the enquiry and a draft response will be formulated by the relevant Manager or General Manager in conjunction with Communications. This will then be discussed with the spokesperson for approval.

In the case of interview requests for operational matters, Communications will liaise with the CEO or relevant General Manager to determine the most appropriate spokesperson and will brief the spokesperson prior to the interview.

Communications will at times provide journalists with background information but are not spokespersons in the first instance.

However, if the very rare situation arises that an appropriate Council officer cannot be contacted before deadline, but the correct information is available, the Media and Communications Officer or Communications Coordinator will respond on behalf of the organisation. (Note: this does not apply to policy or political issues, only operational).

### **4.3 Approaching the media**

The Communications unit is responsible for issuing media releases, organising photo opportunities, media briefings, pitching news and human-interest stories, letters to the editor and contacting journalists about potential issues.

The Communications unit liaises with council staff on identifying media stories. Likewise, staff are encouraged to contact Communications to advise of any potential media stories.

#### 4.4 Media monitoring

The Communications unit is responsible for monitoring media activity and identifying potential issues. Council undertakes a strategic approach to issues management and it is important that issues are brought to the attention of Communications.

If a Councillor becomes aware of an issue, incident or opportunity that is likely to attract media attention, the Mayor, the Chief Executive Officer, relevant General Manager or Manager and the Communications unit must be notified immediately. This includes issues, incidents or opportunities that occur outside normal business hours (i.e. weekends, public holidays etc...)

If an officer becomes aware of an issue, incident or opportunity that is likely to attract media attention, the Chief Executive Officer, relevant General Manager or Manager and the Communications unit must be notified immediately. This includes issues, incidents or opportunities that occur outside normal business hours (i.e. weekends, public holidays etc)

Communications provides a weekly media monitoring report to Councillors and Executive. If the Communications unit becomes aware of a possible media issue, it will alert Councillors and Executive as required.

#### 4.5 Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

This policy has been assessed against the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 as being consistent with that Act and, in particular, as promoting the rights of members of the community to have access to Council and Council information.

### 5. Responsibility /Accountability

<b>5.1</b>	<p><b>Councillors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand and comply with the provisions in this policy</li> <li>• Seek advice from the Communications unit on media relations</li> <li>• Seek training and development for media relations</li> <li>• Seek advice from the CEO or the Communications unit if unsure about applying the provisions of this policy</li> </ul>
<b>5.2</b>	<p><b>Executive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand and comply with the provisions in this policy</li> <li>• Promotion of adherence of this policy to Management team and staff</li> <li>• Seek advice from the Communications unit on media relations</li> <li>• Seek training and development for media relations</li> </ul>
<b>5.3</b>	<p><b>Staff, contractors, sub-contractors and volunteers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand and comply with the provisions of this policy</li> </ul>
<b>5.4</b>	<p><b>Business unit Managers</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure contractors and staff are aware of this policy and comply with its requirements</li> <li>• Approve media releases</li> <li>• Provide draft media responses in a timely manner in liaison with Communications</li> </ul>
<b>5.5</b>	<p><b>Communications unit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect the reputation and image of Council</li> <li>• Provide advice on media relations and media training</li> <li>• Educate Councillors, staff, volunteers and contractors about this policy and their responsibilities in undertaking media relations</li> <li>• Undertake media monitoring</li> <li>• Establish and maintain effective relationships with the media</li> <li>• Seek legal advice as appropriate where an issue is likely to be contentious or may create legal risk for Council</li> </ul>

## 6. References and links to legislation and other documents

Name	Location
Council and Wellbeing Plan 2021-25	<a href="http://www.melton.vic.gov.au">www.melton.vic.gov.au</a>
Code of Conduct (Councillors)	Policy and Procedures Intranet <a href="http://www.melton.vic.gov.au">www.melton.vic.gov.au</a>
Code of Conduct (Employee)	Policy and Procedures Intranet
Council Employment Contracts	
Council Online Engagement Policy	Policy and Procedures Intranet
Council Corporate Style Guide	Policy and Procedures Intranet
Enterprise Risk Management Policy	Policy and Procedures Intranet
Photography Policy	Policy and Procedures Intranet
Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP)	<a href="http://www.melton.vic.gov.au">www.melton.vic.gov.au</a>
<i>Defamation Act 2005 (Vic)</i>	<a href="http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au">www.legislation.vic.gov.au</a>
<i>Evidence Act 2008 (Vic)</i>	<a href="http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au">www.legislation.vic.gov.au</a>
<i>Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)</i>	<a href="http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au">www.legislation.vic.gov.au</a>
<i>Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic)</i>	<a href="http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au">www.legislation.vic.gov.au</a>
<i>Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)</i>	<a href="http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au">www.legislation.vic.gov.au</a>
<i>Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)</i>	<a href="http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au">www.legislation.vic.gov.au</a>
<i>Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)</i>	<a href="http://www.austlii.edu.au">www.austlii.edu.au</a>
Protected Disclosure Act 2012 (Vic)	<a href="http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au">www.legislation.vic.gov.au</a>
<i>Public Records Act 1973 (Vic)</i>	<a href="http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au">www.legislation.vic.gov.au</a>