



# Media Policy

## 1 PURPOSE

Media relations are a significant aspect of Council's operations. The media is an important source of information and analysis for citizens of Whitehorse and a significant means of communications. Council's media relations can be proactive or reactive, and can be initiated by Council or in response to media initiatives. In both cases the nature of the relationship has a strong influence on the media coverage. This document summarises the policies of Council with respect to media relations, and how they should be developed and conducted.

## 2 OBJECTIVES

- To develop effective media relations in the dissemination of Council information.
- To determine who will represent Council in speaking to the media.

## 3 SCOPE

All third party print and electronic media; local, metropolitan and national newspapers, websites, blogs, magazines; industry newsletters, podcasts, television and radio.

## 4 POLICY

Whitehorse City Council will communicate openly with the media in order to maximise the public knowledge and understanding of our policies, activities and services. Whitehorse City Council will be consistent and clear on who will represent Council and speak on behalf of Council to the media. This minimises confusion and ensures an efficient liaison service is provided.

Council will be responsive to the media in providing information to be disseminated, noting the Whitehorse community is entitled to information on topics of interest.

#### **4.1 Spokespeople**

- a) The spokesperson for matters relating to Council meetings and decisions, high profile issues, political or advocacy matters is the Mayor. The Mayor may choose to defer to the Deputy Mayor or relevant Ward Councillor, or to the CEO.
  
- b) If a media outlet approaches a Councillor directly for an interview, they will notify the Mayor immediately, and advise the media outlet that the Mayor is the usual spokesperson for Whitehorse City Council. The Mayor may also choose to defer to the CEO.
  
- c) Councillors should exercise caution in making comment on matters to be considered by Council in future, lest they create the impression that a decision has already been made, or that the matter is not being given due consideration and procedural fairness.
  
- d) The spokesperson for matters relating to council administration and operational matters is the CEO or relevant portfolio director. The Strategic Communications Manager or Coordinator will work with the CEO and relevant Director to determine who will be the spokesperson.
  
- e) Council officers must not speak with media on behalf of Council or in their capacity as a Council officer, or provide comment without explicit permission from their Director and with advice and support from the Strategic Communications team.

- f) Council officers making public comment in their personal or private capacity should be mindful that their comments do not create the perception that they cannot perform their Council duties impartially and professionally.

#### **4.2 Comments by Councillors**

If Councillors choose to provide comment as candidates for re-election or on a topic unrelated to Whitehorse City Council business, they should clearly express that "These are my own views and do not represent the position of Council." They must not disclose confidential or private information and ensure all public comments are factually correct, non-defamatory and evidence based. Councillors must not publicly criticise other Councillors, Council officers or the public. They should be mindful of the reputations of Council and their Councillor colleagues.

### **5 PROCEDURES**

The implementation of Council's policies on media relations has implications at several levels. Council has adopted the following guidelines.

#### **5.1 Media**

- a) Continue distributing media releases to local media outlets as appropriate, with a view to amplifying Council's own communications on Council decisions, services and projects
- b) Continue posting Council news and information on Council's website and social media channels, in acknowledgement that these are sources of news for mainstream media outlets.

- c) To maintain regular contact with journalists and as appropriate, briefing them on key issues.
- d) For major issues a specific media strategy will be prepared, and a spokesperson selected by the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer.
- e) Council will provide timely responses, noting the rapid news cycles and imperatives of digital newsrooms. Council will also balance responsiveness to media outlets with the importance of Council's core business and responsiveness to our customers.
- f) All media enquiries are to be directed to the Strategic Communications and Customer Service Department and an appropriate spokesperson will be nominated to respond to questions or provide attributable comments.
- g) Written media responses will be drafted by the Strategic Communications Team and approved by the relevant project officer, manager and director. Responses on sensitive issues or for high profile publications will be sent to the CEO and Mayor either for approval or information.
- h) Requests for radio, television or other interviews will be facilitated (or declined) by the Strategic Communications team, who will work with the spokesperson to provide background information in preparation for the interview. Usually, the Manager, Coordinator or other officer from the Strategic Communications team will accompany the spokesperson for media interviews.

## 5.2 Crisis management and media

- a) If a Councillor or officer becomes aware of an issue that has the potential to develop into a media issue, this should be brought to the attention of the relevant director or manager and the Strategic Communications Coordinator as soon as possible.

- b) The Strategic Communications Coordinator will manage relevant activities in conjunction with appropriate stakeholders. These activities include: immediately notifying the Mayor, CEO and relevant director, briefing frontline staff on the issue, informing the media that Council will provide comment at a suitable time, drafting public statements and monitoring media coverage.

### 5.3 **Media training**

In order represent council and undertake interviews with confidence and proficiency, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor will undertake annual media training.

### 5.4 **Publications**

Council will continue to produce or review all printed material ensuring accurate, timely information is distributed to the public including all brochures, information sheets and regular publications including via:

- Council Vision
- Council Plan
- Annual Budget
- Annual Report
- Rates Brochure
- Community Directory
- Annual Calendar
- Whitehorse News
- Whitehorse corporate social media channels.

### 5.5 **Advertising/Public Notices**

Council will continue to administer tender advertisements, Planning Scheme Amendments and the Victorian Government Gazette as required by legislation, through the Procurement team with support from the Strategic Communications team.

Digital advertising, including through Google Ads and Facebook Ads, will be administered through the Strategic Communications and Customer Service department.

## **6 RELATED DOCUMENTS**

- Social Media Policy – Employees and Volunteers
- Social Media Guide - Councillors
- Councillor Code of Conduct

The following legislation relates to this policy:

- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Copyright Act 1968*

## **7 INTERNAL USE ONLY**

Responsible: Manager Strategic Communications and Customer Service

Date Adopted: September 2022

Review Date: September 2025

This policy has been reviewed for Human Rights Charter compliance