

# Councillor Communications and Media Protocol

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## 1. TITLE

Councillor Communications and Media Protocol

## 2. OBJECTIVE

To promote and guide Councillors on appropriate written communication with the community, engagement with the media and/or use of social media by:

- outlining roles and responsibilities in relation to the Mayor and Councillors; and
- minimising miscommunication and manage risks to Council associated with written communications, use of social media and engagement with the media.

## 3. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Term	Meaning
Written communications	For the purposes of this protocol, the term written communications refers to responses to emails or letters from the community to Councillors seeking advice, support or intervention in a matter relating to Council business.
The media	For the purposes of this protocol, 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	<p>A group of online applications and internet-based tools used to create, share and discuss information opinion and content or to participate in social networking including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• blogs, including corporate blogs, personal blogs or blogs hosted by traditional media publications;</li><li>• bulletin boards;</li><li>• citizen journalism and news sites;</li><li>• forums and discussion boards;</li><li>• instant messaging (IM) facilities;</li><li>• micro-blogging sites (eg. Twitter);</li><li>• online encyclopedias (eg. Wikipedia);</li><li>• podcasts;</li><li>• social networking sites (eg. Facebook, Instagram, MySpace, Bebo, Friendster);</li><li>• video and photo sharing sites (eg. Tik Tok, Flickr, YouTube, Vimeo);</li><li>• video podcasts;</li><li>• wikis; and</li><li>• any other websites that allow individual users of companies to use simple publishing tools or new technologies emerging from the digital environment.</li></ul>

## 4. SCOPE

This protocol applies to Councillor interaction with community members via written communication, external news media and engagement with any public facing social media platform.

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

## 5. BACKGROUND

Communicating with residents or via the media (including social media) plays a large role in Council's interaction with the community. All written communication, media and social media interaction are undertaken broadly to enhance or protect the Glen Eira City Council'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. All written communication is symbol of the professionalism and brand of the Council.

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

This protocol also ensures compliance with legislation and the Councillor Code of Conduct.

## 6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES — INTERACTION WITH THE MEDIA

### 6.1 The Mayor:

- a) The Mayor is the official spokesperson for Glen Eira City Council for all Council issues and the decisions of Council, unless otherwise delegated by them.
- b) The role of the Mayor as spokesperson for Glen Eira City Council in relation to Council issues 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; and
  - protect the City's reputation from harm caused by negative events or negative or incorrect media coverage.
- c) It is not the role of the Mayor to discuss operational matters or organisational issues. These issues include, amongst other matters, staff employment, relations between officers and Councillors, and breaches of the staff code of conduct.
- d) Responsive and timely provision of information is central to successful issues management and therefore, the Mayor and Manager, Customer and Communications will respond on behalf of Council without consultation where required.

### 6.2 Councillors:

- a) Councillors are entitled to express independent views however they should make it clear that any unofficial comment is their personal view and does not represent a position adopted by Council as a whole.
- b) It is the role of both the Mayor and Councillors to endeavour to ensure that the messages communicated through the media are clear and consistent, accurate and factual, and do not seek to deliberately harm the reputation of Council.
- c) 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 Manager, Customer and Communications and/or the CEO as soon as possible.
- d) If speaking with the media, Councillors should take care to ensure that they respect the confidentiality provisions of the Local Government Act, and also do not inadvertently or intentionally release to the media any information that is not already within the public realm.
- e) If a Councillor has responded to a media query or proactively provided media comment on Council matters, Councillors should promptly advise the Mayor and Manager, Customer and Communications.

## 7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES — SOCIAL MEDIA

7.1 It is Councillors' responsibility to manage their social media accounts including creating and sharing content, gaining permissions for the use of images and other materials if required, and monitoring comments.

### 7.2 Councillors should:

- a) be aware of the need to have appropriate privacy settings on all social media sites moderated, managed or operated by them, bearing in mind that all social media posts are public to some degree.
- b) exercise their responsibilities and obligations as outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020* and the Councillor Code of Conduct, including acting with integrity and impartially discharging their own

responsibilities in the interests of the local community.

- c) not post, like or support, abusive or inappropriate content, or materials that would breach applicable laws.
- d) seek approval from the Media and Communications department when using Council branding on social media content they have created.
- e) include a prominent disclaimer on personal and Councillor social media account stating that the views are their own and do not represent the position of Council. When contributing to public comment on social media, Councillors should act in accordance with the principles of the Councillor Code of Conduct when discussing Council matters. Councillors should be aware that a disclaimer on personal social media accounts or posts will not, in itself, mean all content will necessarily be interpreted as personal use unrelated to their Councillor role.
- f) not commit Council or Council officers to actions, or undertakings, and not reproduce internal communications without prior consent of the relevant Manager.

## **8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES — GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE GUIDELINES**

- 8.1 Correspondence from members of the public is monitored by the Corporate Secretariat on Councillors' behalf and logged for action and preparation of a response by Council officers.
- 8.2 Correspondence requiring action is classified as either operational or non-operational. Operational correspondence (straightforward service requests, legal or infringement matters) is directed to Council officers for resolution and its status will be reported to Councillors via the weekly Councillor Request Report or via a Councillor portal.
- 8.3 Non-operational correspondence (matters relating to policy / strategy, complaints, escalations, or matters requiring the exercise of judgement) is directed to Council officers for preparation of a response but will be authorised by the Mayor or Councillor prior to sending. The status of non-operational correspondence will also be reported to Councillors via the weekly Councillor Request Report.
  - a) Responses not requiring significant investigation will be provided for authorisation to the Mayor or Councillor within 5 business days. Where significant or cross departmental investigation is required an interim acknowledgement will be provided together with an anticipated timeline for a final response, to be no greater than 15 business days.
  - b) Councillors undertake to give prompt attention to clearing responses for sending, or seek further clarification from officers after receiving a draft response.
  - c) The status of non-operational correspondence will also be reported to Councillors via the weekly Councillor Request Report or via a Councillor portal.
- 8.4 When an enquiry is received by multiple Councillors, including the Mayor, the Councillor Business Support Officer will advise all relevant Councillors. A single response will be prepared for the signature of the Mayor (who takes precedence if contacted). All relevant Councillors will be copied into the final response.
- 8.5 Where the Mayor is not included in the email, the Councillor Business Support Officer will advise all Councillors who received the email that it was also sent to other Councillors. The Councillor who was the first point of contact will receive the draft response to review and issue on behalf of Council.
- 8.6 While all Councillors contacted may wish to send an acknowledgement indicating receipt of the email, only one response will be prepared and sent from the Mayor or first named Councillor, to prevent duplication and confusion for the resident. Where Councillors intend to send an acknowledgement, but more than 2 days has lapsed since the email was received, they should check first to see if a response has been sent in order to avoid confusion and mixed messages to residents.
- 8.7 With the exception of such an acknowledgement, or where a Councillor's own personal opinion on a matter is being sought, Councillors should refrain from responding directly to residents in any detail on an issue until advice has been received from officers and all of the context is understood.
- 8.8 Correspondence from Councillors to residents should in all circumstances be sent from a Council email address (@gleneira.vic.gov.au) using the proforma Glen Eira City Council signature block.

## **9. HUMAN RIGHTS CHARTER COMPATIBILITY**

This protocol has been assessed as being compatible with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic).

## **10. ASSOCIATED INTERNAL DOCUMENTS**

- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Privacy Policy

## **11. EXTERNAL REFERENCES/RESOURCES**

- *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*