



# Media Policy

Version 1

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## DOCUMENT CONTROL

Responsible GM	Tim Ellis	
Division	Regional City Strategy and Transition	
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## 1. Background

The Latrobe City Council Media Policy 2022-2025 provides a clear framework for engaging with all media organisations, including metropolitan and local print, radio, television and digital media, to ensure that Council meets the community's expectations relating to accuracy, relevance and accountability.

The policy will enhance and protect the good reputation of Latrobe City Council, meeting Council's commitment to communicate its many and varied decisions, activities, services, major projects, and policy initiatives to the community.

## 2. Objectives

The purpose of the policy is to ensure a consistent approach when working with the media. The Media Policy 2022-2025 is an important document that helps to protect Council's reputation by ensuring consistency and accuracy in the information Council places in the public realm. The policy provides a framework to ensure that all official Council communication will be a positive reflection of Council's commitment to informing the community in a manner that is timely, accessible clear, concise, accurate, non-political and consistent with Council decisions and policies.

## 3. Scope

The policy is implemented throughout the entirety of the current Council term and includes Council's dedicated spokesperson for both policy and operational matters, target response times for media enquiries, and guidelines for Councillors and staff when responding to the media.

This policy relates to all verbal, printed, electronic and online communications, and applies to all internal and external engagement with media involving elected Councillors, the Executive Leadership Team and staff including full-time, part-time, contract, casual, work experience and trainees, contractors, and volunteers of Latrobe City Council.

The responsibilities of Councillors, the Executive Leadership Team and staff including full-time, part-time, contract, casual, work experience and trainees, contractors, and volunteers of Latrobe City Council regarding the use of social media is outlined in the organisational policy Social Media Policy 2021 and Social Policy Media Guidelines 2022. During a Council election this policy must be read in conjunction with the Election Period Policy.

## 4. Principles of Management

### Media Relations

Media relations are a key part of Council's operations, an important source of information for our community, and a significant part of Council's role as a community leader and advocate within the region. Council recognises that traditional

media (print, television, magazine, radio) and social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) provide opportunities for Latrobe City Council to communicate and engage with its community and stakeholders.

It is the policy of Latrobe City Council to communicate openly and honestly with the media in order to maintain our commitment as a transparent and accountable organisation and to maximise public knowledge of our activities.

Communication should reinforce the reputation and values of Council and its organisation, and be accurate, timely, impartial and consistent with legislation and policies.

Council will maintain good working relationships with all media organisations including local and metropolitan print, radio, television and digital media. To maintain these relationships, there will be no exclusive stories provided to individual media outlets. Doing so has the potential to damage relationships with other media outlets and restricts our ability to achieve the best coverage possible for stories that promote the work of Latrobe City.

Latrobe City Council will use this policy, in conjunction with the Social Media Policy, to assist the Mayor, Councillors, Chief Executive Officer and staff in understanding Council's communication processes when handling media enquiries, identifying spokespersons for media interviews, preparing media statements and making comments to the media.

## Response Times

The Latrobe City community is entitled to receive all public information, as is the media cohort. Journalists are entitled to expect that Council will provide them with all public information relevant to their enquiries.

Council will strive to respond to enquiries as quickly as possible. We will aim to reply to enquiries within 48 hours of being received. In the event that a response time cannot be met due to the complexity of the request or the need to seek information from a cross-section of departments, a member of the Communications and Engagement Team will contact the journalist and advise of an alternative timeframe. All enquiries will be acknowledged by the Communications and Engagement Team once received.

In order to meet these response times, Council officers shall place priority on responding to enquiries allocated to them by Council's Communication and Engagement Team.

## Enquiries

To ensure Council meets its response times, we request that the media direct enquiries through to the Communications Team. The Communications Team will be responsible for organising the appropriate spokesperson and coordinating Council's response.

Enquiries are to be directed to the Communications and Engagement Team via the following methods:

- Submitting an online request form through Council’s website – [www.latrobe.vic.gov.au/media-enquiry](http://www.latrobe.vic.gov.au/media-enquiry)
- Sending an email request, clearly outlining the enquiry and associated questions to [communications@latrobe.vic.gov.au](mailto:communications@latrobe.vic.gov.au)
- Telephoning a member of the Communications and Engagement Team

Council officers who are contacted by a journalist are to refer the media enquiry to the Communications and Engagement Team immediately. The Communications and Engagement Team will then take responsibility in the coordination, preparation of the response.

## Spokesperson

The Mayor is spokesperson on decisions of the Council and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the spokesperson on all operational matters, including a declared municipal emergency and activated Business Continuity Plan. In circumstances in which the enquiry has a particular focus or calls for the spokesperson to have specific knowledge, the CEO may defer to a General Manager, who may in turn delegate to a Manager.

In the event that a General Manager is out of the office or not contactable for a period of time that would push the enquiry response past the 48-hour turn-around time, a Manager may be asked to comment in their place.

If the enquiry is minor and/or regarding something that is a matter of public record, the enquiry can be answered immediately by a member of the Communications and Engagement Team, or a referral made to the journalist to visit Council’s website for the relevant information.

The roles and responsibilities for each spokesperson have been outlined in Attachment 1 included at the end of this document.

## Role of the Communications and Engagement Team

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

The Communication and Engagement Team will provide advice and support to all Council departments to create newsworthy opportunities and target media appropriately. Council-initiated news stories must be coordinated and managed by the Communication and Engagement Team.

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The Communication and Engagement Team 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.

See Attachment 2 – Media Relations Protocol for further information.

## Media Training

While the Mayor and CEO handle the majority of media enquiries, there may be a need for other staff to act as Council spokesperson from time-to-time. These staff must undergo working with the media training.

## Media Briefings

Council will schedule media briefings on topics of interest to the community. All media outlets will be invited to attend. In the event that a journalist wishes to propose additional questions for discussion at the media briefing, to ensure Council is able to provide timely information, we invite the media to send questions in writing to the Communications and Engagement Team 24 hours prior to the briefing taking place; otherwise questions may be taken on notice and responded to after the event in accordance with Council's standard response timeframes.

## Community Engagement | Public Meetings / Meetings of Residents / Special Interest Groups

The Mayor is the only one authorised to call or endorse a public meeting, or a meeting of residents on behalf of Council. Unless otherwise determined by the Mayor, the Mayor shall chair all public meetings, meetings of residents and special interest groups called or arranged by Council. This does not preclude Councillors from attending community meetings on local issues.

This reflects the objectives of the Latrobe City Council Community Engagement Policy 2021.

## Councillors and the Media

Councillors must abide by the Councillor Code of Conduct when engaging with the media. In recognising that an individual Councillor may have a view that differs from the official Council position, Councillors who express personal views should qualify their remarks to indicate this is a personal view.

When approached by the media, Councillors have the following options available to them:

- Make comment (not as the official spokesperson).
- Decline to make City comment and refer the journalist to the Mayor to make official comments.
- Defer the enquiry to the Communications and Engagement Team for an official response to be prepared.

Councillors need to be careful when speaking to a journalist prior to a matter coming before Council that they do not exhibit apprehended bias. This does not mean that Councillors cannot publicly make comment on a forthcoming issue, but Councillors should carefully consider the meaning and potential interpretation of their comments.

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 that they are commenting on, or providing is accurate and consistent with legislation and policies.

### **Involvement of other Councillors at media engagement events**

The Mayor can invite other Councillors to participate in any media engagement opportunity, especially if it relates to that Councillors' Ward, Portfolio or Committee appointment.

Such media engagement may be conducted jointly with the Mayor and other eligible Councillors, and could typically involve:

- A public, media or event spokesperson role (as an MC, or to deliver a speech);
- Participation in a staged media opportunity or event (a photo shoot, radio or TV interview);
- Being quoted in a proactive Latrobe City media release or media response (approved by the Mayor);
- And being included in any other relevant proactive Latrobe City media engagement – including all social media, print and online.

### **Assigning order of representation for Councillors**

If the Mayor invites a Councillor (or Councillors) to participate in a Latrobe City organised media engagement, the Mayor will generally:

- Speak first on behalf of Council;
- Be the focus of any Latrobe City organised media engagement;
- And be first quoted in any City media release or other content (the City's social media, if appropriate).

If several Councillors attend a Media Engagement event then the Mayor will determine which order these Councillors might speak and/or appear, if at all (including on Council's social media).

### **Communication Methods**

Latrobe City Council utilises a variety of communication tools to provide the media and community with timely information.



## Media Releases

A media release is the starting point for gaining editorial on an issue or event. Journalists and editors receive the media release and decide if they want to write a story based on the information provided. The story angle taken by a journalist may differ from the one presented in the media release. Council has no influence on editorial decisions.

All media releases are written by the Communications and Engagement Team. The Communications and Engagement Team will garner appropriate approvals prior to posting on the Council website and distributing to the media. All Councillors, the Executive Leadership Team, and Community Information Officers receive a copy of media releases.

Latrobe City Council treats all media outlets equally and avoids giving one outlet preferential treatment. As such, media releases are distributed to all media outlets at the same time.

Protocol for quoting in media releases:

- City-wide, policy-oriented or highly political stories are to quote the Mayor.
- Stories connected to a specific ward or geographic location can be quoted on by a ward Councillor and/or the Mayor. This is at the discretion of the Mayor.
- Stories arising from the work of a committee can be quoted on by a Councillor who serves on that committee and/or the Mayor.
- Operational issues are quoted on by the CEO.
- Staff with specialist knowledge may be quoted in media releases with the permission of the relevant delegated authority.

All Councillors will receive a copy of the media release when it is distributed.

## Social media

The Communications and Engagement Team oversees the management of all City-managed social media accounts and holds all passwords.

Latrobe City will not solicit or pay for any followers (or similar) on any City-managed social media accounts.

The Mayor and Councillors are wholly responsible for maintaining any private social media accounts they might hold, create or operate under their own name, and accept all legal responsibilities for such accounts.

Council officers shall not assist any Councillor with the creation or operation of any private social media account – unless approved by the CEO.

When operating any private social media accounts Councillors are encouraged to be mindful of Council's Social Media Policy, and the Councillor Code of Conduct.



## 5. Accountability and Responsibility

Accountability and responsibility for this policy is outlined below.

### 5.1. Council

- Responsibility to ensure this Policy is consistent with Latrobe City Council Strategic Direction and other Latrobe City Council Policy
- Responsibility for the decision to approve this Policy by Council Resolution

### 5.2. Chief Executive Officer

- Overall responsibility for compliance with this policy
- Overall responsibility for enforcing accountability
- Overall responsibility for providing resources
- Overall responsibility for performance monitoring

### 5.3. General Manager

- Responsibility for compliance with this policy
- Responsibility for enforcing accountability
- Responsibility for providing resources
- Responsibility for performance monitoring

### 5.4. Manager

- Develop frameworks and procedures in compliance with this policy
- Enforce responsibilities to achieve compliance with frameworks and procedures
- Provide appropriate resources for the execution of the frameworks and procedures

### 5.5. Employees, Contractors and Volunteers

- Participate where required in the development of frameworks and procedures in compliance with this policy.
- Comply with frameworks and procedures developed to achieve compliance with this policy.

## 6. Evaluation and Review

This policy will be reviewed on request of Council, in the event of significant change in the Executive team, significant changes to legislation applicable to the subject matter of the policy or, in any other case, during each Council term (generally four years).

## 7. Related Documents

Public Transparency Policy  
Social Media Policy

## 8. Reference Resources

- *Public Records Act 1973*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Copyright Act 1968*
- *Local Government Act 2020*

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