Councillor Communications Policy

Approval Body:	Council
Endorsement Date of Current Version:	20 August 2024
Current Version:	1.0
Compulsory Review Cycle:	4 years
Review Date:	*20 August 2028*
Responsible Department:	Communications and Corporate Governance
Responsible Team:	Communications
Relevant Legislation:	*Local Government Act 2020* *Child Wellbeing and Safety (Child Safe Standards Compliance and Enforcement) Amendment Bill 2021* *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2004* *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
Relevant Council Documents:	Councillor Code of Conduct Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy Election Period Policy – Governance Rules chapter 8
ECM ID:	18622420

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1. Purpose and Intent

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to the Mayor and Councillors regarding the use of communication channels at the City of Casey.

This policy is aimed at protecting Council's reputation by ensuring consistency and accuracy in the information Council places in the public realm and promotes open and effective communication with the community.

The Councillor Communications Policy:

- Provides a framework for the Mayor and Councillors to effectively use communications to support the delivery of clear, timely, transparent, responsive, and accurate information to the community.
- Outlines appropriate communication activities for the Mayor and Councillors aligned to the Councillor Code of Conduct.
- Facilitates adherence to the Councillor Code of Conduct, in particular the standards of conduct required of a Councillor.
- Outlines the role of the CEO, Executive, the Communications Team, and other Council employees in relation to spokesperson roles.

During a Federal, State or Council election period this policy must be read in conjunction with any relevant policies or protocols related to that election period (e.g. Council's Election Period Policy – Governance Rules chapter 8).

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Councillors of the City of Casey. It is relevant to, and applies in, all instances that a Councillor makes a comment that expresses, or may be perceived to express, a view on the City of Casey, its decisions, its officers or its Councillors in the public realm.

This policy applies to all social media platforms and channels where users may comment, create, forward, link, tag, post, upload and share content, whether or not a particular social media platform or channel is mentioned in this policy.

Examples of the social media platforms and channels that this policy applies to include:

- Social media networking and micro-blogging sites such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, Tumblr and Pinterest.
- Video and photo sharing sites such as YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok and WhatsApp.
- Online forums and discussion blogs, including any website or services identified as providing social networking services and/or functionality.

This policy does not apply to private or personal use of social media by a Councillor, where no reference is made to the City of Casey, its Councillors or employees, or its policies, practices, services or other stakeholders.

The principles outlined in this policy do not apply to the Chief Executive Officer and employees of the City of Casey. Employees are bound to the Employee Communications Policy and Employee Social Media Policy.

This policy does not preclude:

- Private or personal use of social media where reference is made, or could be perceived to have been made, to the City of Casey, its Councillors, or employees. It is important to note that all private posts can be discoverable once published online.
- Online behaviour that may be considered misconduct under the Councillor Code of Conduct.

For the avoidance of doubt, any use of a social media account which identifies the user as a Councillor of the City of Casey, or otherwise refers to their position as a Councillor, will not be considered private or personal use.

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3. Definitions

Key term	Definition
Council	means Casey City Council, being a body corporate constituted as a municipal Council under the Local Government Act 2020.
Councillors	means the individuals holding the office of a member of Casey City Council.
Council officer	means the Chief Executive Officer and employees of Council appointed by the Chief Executive Officer.
Media	includes but is not limited to print, electronic and broadcast news/information outlets.
Online and social media	includes any digital space where people are able to share information, comment, contribute comments, create, forward, link, tag, post, upload. Including but not limited to websites, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and podcasts.

4. Policy

It is the policy of the City of Casey to communicate openly, honestly and transparently to maximise public knowledge and understanding of the services that Council delivers to the Casey community.

The Mayor and Councillors play an important role in supporting Council's communication to the community about Council's key priorities, programs, services and initiatives.

This policy ensures roles are clear and Councillors are empowered to deliver excellent communication to the City of Casey in line with their roles, responsibilities and obligations.

4.1. Media and spokespeople

The media is a key source of information for residents and community members in the City of Casey. Council will strive to maintain a positive and respectful relationship with media.

The Communications Team is responsible for proactive and reactive media management. This includes issuing media releases, managing responses to media enquiries, and liaising with journalists.

Councillors must refer journalists to the Communications Team to seek an official Council response to ensure messaging is consistent.

Councillors must take all reasonable steps to ensure any public comment they provide as an individual is portrayed as being made in their own personal capacity and not as a representative of Council.

All media responses on behalf of the City of Casey will be prepared by the Communications Team in collaboration with the relevant officers and approved by the relevant spokesperson.

Responses are to be in the best interests of Council and not for the personal advantage of any individual Councillor, ward or political party.

Councillors will be provided with access to media training to support them in their role.

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4.1.1. Spokesperson

The Mayor is the official spokesperson of Council and the only Councillor who is permitted to make public comment on behalf of Council, except where the Deputy Mayor or another Councillor has been expressly authorised by the Mayor or Council in a particular case. This aligns with the *Local Government Act 2020*, which states that part of the role of the Mayor is to 'be the principal spokesperson for the Council'.

The CEO is the official spokesperson on operational matters.

Individual Councillors wishing to initiate their own communication, through any channel including media, must make it clear 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 and policies.

The roles and responsibilities for each spokesperson are outlined in the following table. If there is any uncertainty about these roles and responsibilities, it will be resolved by the CEO, who may also expand or limit any of these roles and responsibilities generally or in a particular case.

Role	Responsibilities
Mayor	The official spokesperson on all policy matters and decisions of Council.
Deputy Mayor	May be authorised by the Mayor or Council to act as spokesperson on behalf of Council on policy matters and decisions.
Councillors	May make public statements provided that they make it clear they are expressing their 'individual' view and not the 'official' view of Council. May be authorised by the Mayor or Council to act as spokesperson in relation to specific matters generally or in a particular case. Must refer journalists to the Communications Team at first instance to seek an official Council response to ensure messaging is consistent. Must notify the Communications Team immediately after making any media comment. Must ensure that public comments are accurate and consistent with legislation and policies.
CEO	Official spokesperson on operational matters or may delegate to a member of Council staff.

4.2. Social media

Council maintains a corporate social media presence. The posting of content and moderating posts on Council's official social media channels is the responsibility of the Communications Team.

Councillors may utilise their own personal online channels and social media networks to engage with the community. The Communications Team does not run, moderate or produce content for individual Councillor social media pages, this is the responsibility of the Councillor. Councillors will be provided with access to training in social media as part of the Councillor Induction Program.

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To provide clarity for the public between 'individual' views of Councillors and the 'official' views of Council, the following disclaimer must be displayed on any private channel where a Councillor represents themselves as a Councillor to distinguish that it is not an official channel:

"These are my individual comments and opinions and not those of Council" (or similar)."

4.2.1. Use of Social Media by Councillors

Councillors are responsible for maintaining and monitoring their own individual social media accounts and accept all legal responsibilities that go along with that. This includes moderating and monitoring comments made on their page by members of the public and hiding or deleting comments as necessary.

When using social media, all Councillors must observe rules set out in relevant legislation and policies governing their conduct, including the Councillor Code of Conduct. Councillors must understand that social media can provide a permanent record of their comments.

When establishing a public social media page/profile under the banner of their role as a Councillor, all Councillors must display prominently and clearly to the public that their page is not an official Council page and that their views are their own and not that of Council (see the statement for inclusion on all Councillor social media pages above).

In particular, Councillors must ensure their social media activity does not:

- Cause detriment or reputational harm to the City of Casey, other Councillors, employees or any other person.
- Disclose information that is sourced from a confidential document or closed (confidential) Council process.
- Contravene the Councillor Code of Conduct or any other related Council policy.
- Undermine the role of Council in managing Council-related issues.
- Use their Council email address to open and manage personal social media accounts.
- Post, re-post or link to anything that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, derogatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright or is otherwise unlawful.

  The above applies and is limited to the Mayor and Councillors and is applicable in tandem with the Councillor Code of Conduct.

City of Casey LinkedIn

LinkedIn is an effective tool to connect with professionals and leaders in the government sector and similar industries. It enables Council to reach potential employees and expand partnership opportunities with other local Councils, agencies and community organisations.

LinkedIn's algorithm prioritises posts from 'people' rather than a company/organisation, so Council encourages Councillors and employees to post on their profiles using the #CityofCasey hashtag in their posts. This means that anyone who searches 'City of Casey' will be shown all the posts relating to the organisation.

It is recommended that Councillors share or post to their LinkedIn profiles about news and updates about Council achievements, projects, new partnerships and facility openings, taking into consideration the protocols within this policy when developing content.

4.2.2. Branding

Any online or personal social media channels used by a Councillor are not considered an official Council channel. Council's logo must not be used on any social media sites established by a Councillor.

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4.3. Breaches

Any breach of this policy by a Councillor will be managed in accordance with the Councillor Code of Conduct.

Councillors are encouraged to notify the Mayor and the CEO if any person does not adhere to the requirements set out in this policy. Should a Councillor wish to make an anonymous report, they can use Council's anonymous reporting line, Your Call, to report such matters.

5. Relevant Forms

NA

6. Document History

Date approved	Change Type	Version	Next Review Date
20 August 2024	Document initiation	1.0	20 August 2028

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