

Media Relations Strategy

1. Communication with the media

Council's Communication Officer is responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive ongoing Media Relations Program as part of Mount Alexander Shire Council's Communications Strategy. This involves monitoring and coordinating Council's relationship with the local and other media to ensure beneficial two way relationships are established and that the media becomes an effective conduit for Council's messages to the local and wider community.

The system for deciding who comments is based on the nature of the enquiry. The spokesperson guidelines are as follows:

Political, legal or strategically sensitive matters including those where the reputation and standing of Council is at issue or where a clear context is required for Council's decisions or actions in a complex matter.	Mayor or Chief Executive Officer
Operational issues limited to facts about those services provided by Council or delegated committees. This will generally be limited to a description of the service or activity and the provision of factual information.	Chief Executive Officer or with CEO direction, the relevant Director or president or chairperson of a Section 86 Committee in accordance to the relevance of the defined matter.
Special interest issues not directly relating to Council business.	Mayor or Chief Executive Officer in the context of adopted Council policies or decisions. Tourism Services Unit in relation to destination and event marketing only.

2. Handling media enquires

Enquiries from media representatives may be handled in a number of ways. Enquiries received by the Communications Officer will be dealt with in the following way:

- As much information as possible will be gained from the media outlet, including subject of the enquiry, potential political aspects, comment required, timing/deadline for comment and proposed media coverage (eg live radio segment, newspaper article, etc).
- The appropriate spokesperson (the Mayor, Chief Executive Officer or other) will be informed of the media enquiry by the Communications Officer and given the contact details for the media outlet.
- If background information is required it will be sourced from the relevant Council Officer by the Communications Officer.

All media enquiries received will be recorded by the Communications Officer. To assist with this, Councillors and Officers receiving media enquiries directly should inform the Communications Officer of the details of the enquiry.

If a media enquiry is received by a Councillor or Council Officer, it should be referred to the Communications Officer, Mayor or CEO, depending on the nature of the enquiry as indicated in communications with the media. The Mayor and Chief Executive Officer can speak on all matters as outlined above. Individual Councillors may speak to the media on various issues at times, but where the views put forward are not the adopted position of Council, this should be acknowledged. Section 86 Committees are required to refer all media enquiries beyond those outlined in the relevant Instrument of Delegation to the Chief Executive Officer.

3. Newspaper or Newsletter articles

The Mayor and/or Councillors may be asked by local newspapers and newsletter editors to contribute to their publications. (ie. Mayor's Message in the Castlemaine Mail, Tarrangower Times and Bendigo Advertiser)

In addition to newspapers, there are a number of regular community newsletters that communicate news to specific sections of the community. Key examples of these are Chewton Chat, Taradale Talk, Elfa Info and the Newstead Echo.

These opportunities offer a platform for Councillors to communicate key messages to the ratepayers in their ward. Please be aware that as a Councillor, people will perceive your words and opinions as being representative of Council and reflecting on the organisation. This is important to consider when choosing a style and topic.

Councillors are encouraged to liaise with the Communications Officer and Chief executive officer in preparing material for publication. Both officers will follow-up on any requests for information to support articles being prepared in a timely manner.

4. Approaching the media

The Communications Officer is responsible for issuing media releases and contacting journalists about potential issues. If a Councillor or Officer becomes aware of a potential media story or issue, they should first contact and fully brief the Communications Officer who will then prepare any necessary materials (such as media releases and fact sheets) for approval by the Chief Executive Officer before these are distributed.

5. Issues and/or crisis management

The Communications Officer is responsible for monitoring media activity and identifying potential issues. If a Councillor or Officer becomes aware of an issue that has the potential to develop into a media controversy this should be brought to the attention of the Communications Officer as soon as possible.

In the event of a crisis or unexpected issue, the Communications Officer, in conjunction with the Chief Executive Officer will put into place appropriate crisis communication procedures to ensure Council's communication with the media is well managed. These procedures include identifying and briefing the most appropriate designated Council spokesperson, or the spokesperson from the relevant external body. If the designated spokesperson is from Council, they will liaise with the Communications Officer and Chief Executive Officer who will provide advice and guidance about handling media enquires in crisis communication situations.

Councillors and Officers are reminded that statements made in times of emergency may have far reaching effects and can be used later in legal proceedings against the Council. It should therefore be noted that informal comment or discussion may prejudice Council's ability to manage our response to the media in the most appropriate way.

6. Proactive media relations program

The Communications Officer undertakes a proactive program to keep the local media informed of Council decisions and activities and to foster a feeling of openness between Council, the media and the local community.

When media releases are prepared general guidelines for quoting should be followed. The guideline is that the Mayor should be quoted on policy matters and the Chief Executive Officer should be quoted on operation or administration matters.

More information

Contact Council's Communications Officer on 5471 1810 for more information about Council's Media Relations Policy.

Definitions:

Not applicable

Related Policies:

This policy replaces the previously Council policies:

- Media Policy
- Making Use of the Media Policy

Related Legislation:

The Local Government Act and Best Value legislation state that Council should regularly consult with and engage with its community. Effective media relations are one way in which Council does this.

References:

Not applicable