

CP 1 Media Policy

Responsible Officer:	Manager Economic Development and Sustainability
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Policy Objective

Benalla Rural City Council recognises the important role of the media in shaping the community's perception and understanding of Council and its work. The intent of this policy is to ensure that Council's use of the media is intentional, planned and appropriate and that it is accurate, relevant and accountable.

Purpose

Council aims to ensure the community understands its work and the contribution it makes to liveability in Benalla Rural City. It does this by keeping the community informed and providing opportunities for engagement.

The media plays an important role in forming public opinion, reputation management, raising awareness and increasing understanding of Council. The media, an independent reporter and commentator, is important in the role it plays in building accountability, transparency, trust and confidence.

Scope

This policy applies to all Councillors, employees, contractors, service providers and volunteers of Benalla Rural City Council.

For the purpose of this policy, social media is dealt with separately in CP24 Social Media Policy.

Procedure

Proactive Media Coverage

All Council employees will seek to identify opportunities to proactively obtain media coverage to support the achievements of the Council's goals and objectives, as supported by their Department Manager. The Communications Department will provide advice and support to other departments to create newsworthy opportunities and target media appropriately. The Communications Department will write and seek necessary approvals for media releases and liaise directly with the media to follow up and coordinate opportunities including but not limited to photo opportunities and interviews.

Reactive Media Responses

All media enquiries will be referred to and managed by the Communications Department. This ensures the most appropriate spokesperson and accuracy of information provided to the media. No staff are authorised to speak with the media in any official or unofficial capacity unless explicitly authorised to do so by the Chief Executive Officer.

Official Spokespeople

The Mayor and Chief Executive Officer are the two (2) official spokespersons for the Council and are responsible for making statements to the media on Council decisions, policy issues and matters which affect the community at large.

In this regard, the Mayor forgoes the right to generally engage in public debate on internal issues during the Mayoral term. This protocol is designed to avoid confusion as to whether the Mayor is speaking on behalf of the Council or from a personal perspective.

Generally:

- The Mayor is the primary spokesperson on major issues and decisions made by the Council.
- At the Mayor's discretion the Chief Executive Officer may be designated as spokesperson for Council decisions or policy matters.
- Staff with specialist knowledge may be authorised by the Chief Executive Officer to speak with media on a case-by-case basis. This is generally limited to matters where comment of a technical nature or subject specialisation is required.
- The Communications Department speak to the media for the purpose of facilitating media operations.

It is the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer to ensure that any formal Council response to the media is a correct representation of the facts. All parties are reminded that under the *Local Government Act 2020*, penalties apply for disclosing information which has been designated in confidence.

Employees

When commenting in the media, employees are reminded of the commitment in the Staff Code of Conduct to uphold standards of conduct and behaviour that protect the reputation of Council both during and outside of work.

Employees are also reminded of their obligation as outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020* to, among other things, act impartially and with integrity, accept accountability for results and provide responsive service.

Volunteers

Volunteers of Council are not authorised to speak on behalf of Council and should make no comment to the media on the work, operations, decisions or role of Council. Volunteers are reminded of their commitment to the Volunteer Code of Conduct.

On a case-by-case basis, the Chief Executive Officer may authorise a volunteer to speak to the media on a specific topic relating to their volunteer role with Council.

Councillors

When commenting to the media, Councillors are reminded of their commitment to the Councillor Code of Conduct 2020, particularly the values and behaviours:

- Respecting differences of opinions during debate but respecting the Council's decision even when in disagreement.
- Where possible avoiding surprises to each other in the public.

In making comments to the media, Councillors should make it clear where their comments reflect their personal views and not the views of the Council on issues that may be contrary to a Council adopted position or on matters not yet considered by the Council.

The following content should not be published under any circumstances:

- Abusive, profane or sexual language.
- Content which is false or misleading.
- Confidential information about Council or third parties.
- Discriminatory material in relation to a person or group based on age, colour, creed, disability, family status, gender, nationality, marital status, parental status, political opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, race or social origin, religious beliefs/activity, responsibilities, sex or sexual orientation.
- Illegal material or materials designed to encourage law breaking.
- Materials that could compromise Council, employee or system safety.
- Materials which would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks).
- Material that would offend contemporary standards of taste and decency.
- Personal details or references to councillors, Council staff or third parties, which may breach privacy laws.
- Statements which may be considered to be bullying or harassment.
- Publish statements, or opinion pieces on matters relating to an activity by Council that is currently formalised through a community engagement program.

Advertising in Media

All advertising, including commercial partnerships or non-standard advertising arrangements are to be booked through the process outlined in *AP34 Advertising Policy* and Procedure by using the *Advertisement Order Form* template.

Review

This policy may be reviewed at any time by the Council to accommodate changes in legislation, regulations, policy gaps, new technology or systems, as well as remain consistent with industry best practice.

Related Documents

Staff, councillors and agents of Benalla Rural City Council are expected to demonstrate standards of conduct and behaviour that are consistent with relevant legislation, regulations and policies.

Relevant legislation includes the following:

- *Defamation Act 2005 (Vic)*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)*
- *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)*
- *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic)*
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)*
- *Protected Disclosure Act 2012*

Council policies and guideline provisions which must be adhered to in relation to dealing with the media include the following:

- *Benalla Rural City Council Councillor Code of Conduct*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Staff Code of Conduct*
- *Benalla Rural City Council employment contracts*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Prevention of Discrimination, Harassment and Victimisation Policy*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Disciplinary Guideline*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Customer Service Policy*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Information Privacy Policy*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Records Management Policy*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Community Engagement Policy*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Social Media Protocol*