



Media and communications policy

Classification	Policy
Strategic reference	Goal 4: Governance and organisational culture
Relevant legislation	Local Government Act 1999
Relevant documents	Code of Conduct for Elected Members Employee conduct policy
Responsible officer	Coordinator Executive Services
Date adopted	February 2021
Next review date	February 2024

1. Purpose

This policy establishes Council's commitment to effectively communicate with and respond to inquiries from the media, wider community and stakeholders in a professional, timely and positive manner. It also nominates the official spokesperson(s) for the Southern Mallee District Council for all forms of response to media.

Council recognises that social media provides opportunities for dynamic and interactive communication which can complement traditional communication mechanisms. This policy also reflects Council's approach to social media.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all official responses provided by staff, elected members, volunteers, agents and contractors on behalf of the Southern Mallee District Council to the public (using both traditional media and social media). This also applies to public use of official Southern Mallee District Council social media platforms.

This policy does not cover forms of Community Engagement or general Council correspondence, or the use of social media in a personal capacity where no reference is made to Council related matters.

3. Policy statement

Council requires a corporate approach when liaising with the media and the community, whether it is through traditional mechanisms, or online. This will help to ensure a consistent, factual and positive image is created and targeted stakeholder communication is effective.

Council deems that issues which are of interest to the public are reviewed and the relevant facts are established before any comments are made on behalf of Council.

3.1. Roles and responsibilities

3.1.1. Editing content of Council social media platforms

Council will determine the appropriate social media platforms that will be used for official Council purposes, and will coordinate all content. Where demand exceeds the ability for Council to resource the social media platforms, individual platforms may be suspended with notification placed on Council's public website.

It is not expected that social media will be used for provision of detailed and specific advice or as a forum for decision making relating to Council projects and services, but rather redirect and provide information about official Council channels and processes.

3.1.2. Monitoring

Council will specifically monitor media issues including; press (online and in print), radio, web references (i.e. blog mentions and articles), social media and television and provide updates to the principal member, Chief Executive Officer and relevant staff members.

Responsibility rests with the Council to monitor both traditional and social media relating to Council and its services. Should any representative of Council identify issues with content or online behaviour, these should be referred to the Chief Executive Officer.

3.1.3. Response to traditional media (spokespersons)

In accordance with Section 58 of the Local Government Act 1999, the Principal Member and the Chief Executive Officer are nominated as the official spokespersons for the Council for traditional media (when speaking with journalists from print and broadcast media outlets) and have the authority to make comments to the media on behalf of Council. Only the official spokespersons, or senior officers authorised by the Chief Executive Officer for specific situations, may give any information or speak to the media on behalf of Council.

Where appropriate or expedient for a specific issue, the Principal Member may delegate their responsibility as principal spokesperson for the Council to the Deputy Principal Member or another elected member.

Media enquiries are generally received by the Chief Executive Officer who coordinates and determines the appropriate method of response. The Chief Executive Officer may utilise the services of an external media consultant for support on media items.

If the Principal Member or the Chief Executive Officer is contacted directly by the media they have the authority to respond.

Elected members should direct all media enquiries to the Chief Executive Officer. When elected members speak to the media, they speak as individual councillors and not on behalf of Council, and must make this clear to the media in their response.

Council staff shall communicate with the media only if authorised by the Chief Executive Officer and may not make any personal comment on any issue.

3.1.4. Proactive media management

Where media coverage of an event or issue is recommended, required, or anticipated the Chief Executive Officer should be notified of the opportunity in order to best

coordinate media statements and strategy. The Chief Executive Officer will determine the most appropriate method of media interaction.

3.1.5. Response to social media

Only the official spokespersons, or senior staff authorised by the Chief Executive Officer (for specific situations), may provide information via Council's official social media platforms.

3.1.6. Moderation

Moderation applies to social media only. For the purposes of social media, Council will be taking a position of post-moderation as opposed to pre-moderation of content. Council retains the right to remove content that does not adhere to the guidelines identified in this policy or other associated policies.

Where individuals are noted for breaching this policy on two occasions, they may be blocked from providing further comment via these social media mechanisms.

3.1.7. Records management

Legislation does not specifically cover content created or received in a social media context. However, it is considered that any information, images and footage distributed or received through a social media platform in the conduct of Council business may be considered a record and needs to be captured and maintained in accordance with the State Records Act 1997. Council will ensure as far as is practicable that official Council social media platforms comply with these requirements. The Freedom of Information Act 1991 gives legally enforceable right of access to members of the public (subject to certain restrictions) to corporate records held by Council.

3.2. Social media principles

Council's use of social media aims to:

- further inform, communicate and initiate community involvement and discussion about Council's services and projects;
- encourage resident and user participation and open discussion;
- provide a timely response to comments to ensure that the community is heard (with an aim to respond within two business days);
- extend the reach of communication to a wider audience, and direct the community to Council information, consultation, events and images;
- build and enhance relationships with the community and stakeholders;
- Provide a convenient, accessible and flexible form of communication about service delivery to better support the community.

The following principles should apply to all forms of social media used by Council:

3.2.1 Transparency

Transparency should be part of all social media communication. Council will not create online communications designed to mislead the community or control a conversation. Every webpage, social media account, blog or hosted page that is controlled by Council will clearly state its ownership and will be monitored as per internal protocols to track and monitor our online presence. Council also requires that spokespeople using social media in an official capacity disclose to the community their identity (name and official title) within the organisation when associating with the public online.

3.2.2. Privacy

Protection of our community's privacy as a collective and individually is very important. This means we need to be conscientious regarding any identifying information that we collect online, including how we store, use or share that information in accordance with the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988.

3.2.3. Legal rights and confidential or protected information

Use of social media platforms should comply with relevant legislation at all times. Proprietary or confidential information should not be disclosed. Intellectual property including copyrights, trademarks, brand, rights of publicity and other third party rights online, including user-generated content must be respected and not used without permission from the creator or copyright owner.

3.2.4. Responsible use of technology

Users of social media should behave with courtesy, honesty and respect. Inappropriate behaviour, including harassment and bullying, as well as language that is offensive, abusive, disparaging, disrespectful, defamatory, discriminatory, or sexual in nature will not be tolerated. This includes singling out any individual (including community members, elected members or staff members) for negative comment.

Council will not use or align Council with any organisations, website or community groups that deploy the use of excessive tracking software, adware, malware or spyware.

Any personal or individual use of social media is at the individual staff member or elected member's discretion, however it is important that individuals are aware and are responsible for the implications of participating in social media where they reference Council or their relationship with Council and its brands.

Elected members and staff must comply with their relevant codes of conduct as well as social media principles. When providing personal opinions, staff or elected members should disclose their first and last name and a statement to the effect that this is their personal opinion and may not represent the opinion of Council.

3.2.5. Best practice

New or refined social media options may be developed over time. When they are we will aim to utilise best practice to meet Council and the community's needs and to ensure our practices remain current and reflect up to date and appropriate standards of behavior. This will ensure we address timeliness and quality of content and listen to the online community.

3.3. Complaints

All personal complaints or grievances about Council and its services should be formally reported to Council by email to council@southernmallee.sa.gov.au

4. **Policy review**

The effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed every three years or as necessary.

5. **Further information**

This document is available on Council's website www.southernmallee.sa.gov.au and at the principal office of the Southern Mallee District Council at Day Street, Pinnaroo SA 5304.

A copy of this document may be purchased from Council.