

► COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

POLICY NUMBER:	92 (O)
NAME OF POLICY:	COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	17 October 2027
DATE APPROVED:	17 October 2023
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Communications Officers
REFERENCES:	Local Government Act 2021 Councillor Code of Conduct 2021 Community Engagement Policy 2021 Employee Code of Conduct 2019 Complaints Handling Policy 2021 Guide for Mayors and Councillors – Your role in emergency management – Municipal Association of Victoria – 2021 Election Period Policy 2022 Accessibility guidelines for government communicators Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

INTRODUCTION

Hepburn Shire Council communicates with the community via a number of methods including traditional media (print, radio and television), social media (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc), websites (corporate site, tourism site and Participate Hepburn), printed and electronic materials (e-newsletters, publications, advertising), along with face-to-face and direct communication.

This policy outlines the importance of clear, meaningful and transparent communication between Council and the community (including media). This approach supports effective engagement, builds partnerships, manages expectations, delivers strong customer service and increases awareness about Council operations, process and regulatory compliance requirements.

Guiding principles

Council communication should:

- Be accurate, transparent, respectful and professional.
- Promote Hepburn Shire as a great place to live, work, visit and do business.
- Be accessible.
- Be planned, timely and proactive.
- Add to the reputation of Council.
- Be clear and consistent.
- Be written in plain English where possible.
- Align to organisational strategic objectives.

The policy supports the Council Plan 2021-2024 priority statement (5.2) Actively communicate, inform and engage with strong corporate governance that supports excellent operations.

SCOPE

This policy is applicable to Hepburn Shire Councillors, employees, volunteers, and contractors.

► COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

The policy applies to communication activities undertaken by Council except where processes are governed by legislation and regulations other than the Local Government Act 2020 (VIC), and other Council policies and procedures.

POLICY

1. Spokespeople

The Mayor is the primary spokesperson on policy, Shire-wide and intergovernmental issues and topics of community significance. The Mayor may choose to involve other Councillors and/or the Deputy Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer (CEO), particularly where topics are relevant to specific wards or interest areas.

The CEO is the primary spokesperson on operational issues such as day-to-day decisions and staffing matters. The CEO may delegate staff as spokespeople.

Comments made by staff and Councillors at public events including Council meetings are on the public record and may be reported by the media.

2. Media requests and responses

Staff are not permitted to speak to the media on behalf of Council without CEO approval. Media requests are to be forwarded to the Communications Team who will coordinate approvals and responses in a timely manner.

Any quotes attributed to individuals must be approved by the individual named.

3. Media releases, publications and formal communications

The Communications Team will liaise with staff to develop content and coordinate the approvals process for proactive and reactive communication.

Any statements attributed to staff, Councillors or stakeholders must be approved by the individual named.

The CEO or their delegate will approve media releases and formal Council communication such as the e-newsletter, advertisements and publications.

4. Social media

a. Posting

► COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Council's corporate social media platforms are managed and administered by the Communications Team. Other social media accounts including Tourism, Youth and Libraries are managed by staff in those departments who are responsible for posting content to those sites. All Council social media accounts will be administered in accordance with Council's Best practice guidelines – communication and social media.

Posts will adhere to the guiding principles listed in the policy introduction.

Council will also share information with the community via social media. This includes but is not limited to Victorian or national agencies (for example, Victorian Health Department, Bureau of Meteorology, Better Health Channel, VicEmergency), events and community activities supported by Council, reputable local services, peak bodies and industry groups.

Any errors will be corrected as soon as possible. All posts will comply with legal requirements.

b. Comments

The Communications Team monitors comments on social media platforms during office hours, subject to resourcing. The Communications Officer will liaise with officers to determine whether a response to comments is required.

Complaints and maintenance requests are not accepted via social media.

The Communications Team does not monitor and will not respond to comments made on community-managed or private social media pages (outside of Council's pages) unless the information is misleading and likely to cause harm, especially during an emergency situation.

Council reserves the right to turn off comments on posts.

c. Moderating

Inappropriate comments will be removed in line with Council's social media rules. This includes but is not limited to content that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright or is otherwise unlawful. This also extends to posts that contain confidential material about Council or individuals, or mention staff by name.

Rules of engagement outlining acceptable behaviour are listed on Council's social media platforms where practical.

► COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Council reserves the right to remove, block or ban individuals who comment inappropriately on Council's Facebook page. This will be at the discretion of Council Executive.

Council wants to ensure this is a safe workplace. Staff and Councillors negatively affected by social media content are encouraged to raise concerns with their manager / the Executive, or the Mayor in the case of Councillors, and / or access the Employee Assistance Program.

d. Councillors and Council staff

This policy is not intended to cover private use of social media by staff, which is unrelated to Council. However, Councillors and staff must abide by the Code of Conduct.

Staff may 'like' or share Council pages and posts.

When using social media Councillors, staff and contractors must ensure they:

- Do not make any comment that may lead a reasonable person to conclude they cannot serve the organisation impartially and professionally.
- Make it clear they are expressing their personal view and not purporting to represent the position of Council.
- Do not use Council platforms as a forum for political debate or make comments that impact Council's reputation.
- Ensure their personal comments do not divulge privileged, private, legal or confidential information that can only be known as a result of their role at Council.
- Do not offer derogatory views on Councillors, members of staff or community members.
- Adhere to the relevant Codes of Conduct for all online interactions.

5. Website

The corporate website and engagement platform Participate Hepburn must reflect Council's corporate image and branding, meet legislative requirements and accessibility standards. Managers are responsible for ensuring information relevant to their area is updated.

6. Communication planning

▶ COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Communication should be well planned, timely and proactive. Templates are available to support staff with this work.

7. Branding and corporate identity

Council has a consistent and uniform visual image outlined in the Brand Guidelines. This includes the correct use of Council's logo, corporate colours, consistent fonts and layouts in all publications and promotional material including but not limited to stationery, strategic documents, newsletters, posters, displays and banners.

The use of the logo by a third party must be approved by the Communications Officer.

8. Language

Council communications should be clear and written in Plain English, where possible. Jargon should be minimised. Writing style should be consistent with Council's Best practice guidelines – writing style.

9. Accessibility

Council communications are required to meet accessibility requirements, including the Victorian Government Accessibility Standards and international standards for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). This must be taken into account when developing Council communications.

10. Emergencies

During an emergency the CEO is the key media spokesperson. They may delegate this role to other staff. The Mayor may speak on behalf of Council by providing approved comments and information to the community and media. This should be done in close consultation with the Communications Team, CEO or Emergency Management representatives in line with the Emergency Management Guide for Mayor and Councillors, Council policies and procedures. The Mayor would represent the community's needs and views, not operational matters relating to the emergency.

11. Election period

During an election period, the Election Period Policy will govern public communications.

► COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

DEFINITIONS

The following terms are referred to in the policy.

Term	Definition
Council	Hepburn Shire Council
Staff	Includes permanent and temporary full-time and part-time council employees, and contractors and consultants while engaged by Council.
Social media	A general term to describe tools and forms of publishing that are based on two-way interaction online. Examples are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube.
Corporate social media account	All social media accounts and platforms that Council manages.
Publications	Online or printed Council documents including, but not limited to, corporate plans, e-newsletters, posters.
Council election period	Defined in the Local Government Act 2020 to be the period from the last day of nominations until the election day.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Any enquiries about the Communication and Social Media Policy should be directed to Council's Communications Team.

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy will be available on the intranet, corporate website and will be included in induction for all staff. Training will be rolled out to relevant staff to support understanding and compliance.

REVIEW

The Communication and Social Media Policy will be reviewed every four years or sooner if required by legislation or organisational changes.

▶ COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

The Chief Executive Officer is authorised to make minor, administrative changes to the policy that do not change the overall context of the policy direction.

The officer responsible for the review of this policy is the Communications Officer.