



Media and Communications Policy

Department/Unit	People, Communications & Governance	First Implemented	20 August 2024	Review Date	August 2026
Origin	Coordinator Communications, Governance & Risk	Reviewed	-	Version	-
Authorising Officer	Endorsement by Council	Effective From	20 August 2024	TRIM Reference	E1533

Purpose/Objective

This policy provides a broad framework for the way Council communicates with the community to ensure a coordinated, coherent, professional, and accurate Council communication and provision of information through print and other media.

Scope

This policy applies to all Council employees, Councillors, contractors, consultants, volunteers and other authorised personnel of Mansfield Shire Council.

It includes:

- ▶ Protocols for distributing Council information to print, online and broadcast media, to ensure coordinated, accurate and reliable presentation.
- ▶ Protocols for responding to enquiries from the media and to the community on social media.
- ▶ Protocols for posting content on Council's online platforms to support staff members in their use of different mediums.
- ▶ Ways to keep the community informed about Council activities, services, and programs.
- ▶ Ways to encourage open and transparent government, increased collaboration with the community, reduced barriers to engagement and increased access to information.
- ▶ Emergency management communication protocols during response, relief, and recovery.

Policy Statement

This policy covers all communications, including verbal, printed, electronic and online that is undertaken by a representative of Council.

Spokespersons

In all communications, the Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer (or their delegates) are Council's official spokespersons on behalf of Mansfield Shire Council and its organisation.

The Mayor is the official spokesperson on decisions of the Council. If the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor/s or relevant Councillor may act as Council's official spokesperson.

Any spokesperson should advise the Communications team of any media interactions in advance.

It is recognised that Councillors may have their own communication channels. Individual Councillors must make it clear in personal communications that they are representing their own views and not the official view of Council.

Councillors and delegated spokespersons must provide information consistent with legislation and policies.

The roles and responsibilities for each spokesperson are outlined in the following table:

Role	Responsibilities
Mayor	Official spokesperson on all policy matters and decisions of the Council
Deputy Mayor	Acts as the Mayor's delegated spokesperson if the Mayor is not available
Councillors	May be delegated by the Mayor on specific issues, including when representing delegated committees
CEO	Official spokesperson on operational matters
Executive Management Team	Official spokespersons as delegated by the CEO
Managers	May be delegated as spokesperson on day-to-day operational or technical enquiries by the CEO
Communications Team	Responsible for approving communications prior to delivery. Responsibility for liaising directly with media
Media Liaison Officer	Specific responsibilities to coordinate media responses and liaise directly with media.

Promoting Council business

The Communications team is responsible for approving external communications with authorisation from the Executive Management Team.

Council media and external communications resources will only be used to promote, inform and engage the community about Council business. They must not be used to promote individual Councillor or officer views or agendas that are inconsistent with those of Council. State or Federal politicians will only be featured when necessary to reasonably inform the community of important news.

Councillors as candidates

Council's Media and External communications are not to be used for political advantage by Councillors who are candidates in a Local, State or Federal Government election, as determined by the Local Government Act and Mansfield Shire Council's Governance Rules.

Media relations

Only the Mayor, CEO, Communications team and Media Liaison Officer are permitted to handle media enquiries unless with express delegated authority from the Mayor or CEO.

Council maintains good relationships with media organisations. It does this through:

- ▶ Issuing regular media releases
- ▶ Meeting with local media regularly
- ▶ Responding promptly to media enquiries
- ▶ Providing statements on local issues

Councillors and Council officers are encouraged to participate in enhancing Council's brand by presenting ideas, information and photo opportunities related to Council's achievements, innovations, programs, services or events to the Communications team.

Social media

Council's social media

Council owns and maintains several social media platforms. These platforms are used to promote Council business. Social media content is published only by officers delegated by the CEO.

From time to time, additional social media channels may be required. These are to be created with approval from the CEO.

Councillors are encouraged to use online channels and social media to engage with the community. To provide clarity for the public between 'individual' views and the 'official' view of Council, a disclaimer should be displayed on any channel where a Councillor represents themselves as a Councillor, such as: "These are my individual comments and opinions" (or similar). Use of online and social media channels in the role of a Councillor should be consistent with the Code of Conduct and other relevant legislation and Council Policy. Development,

hosting, maintenance and monitoring is the responsibility of the individual Councillor; however, Officers can provide guidance and advice.

Council will maintain a coordinated and consistent approach in responding to media enquiries, and supporting open communication with the community.

Accurate and timely information will be provided, to ensure the community is aware of key information and opportunities for participation, such as in community consultations. Council will actively communicate with the community and offer and seek a range of views, information, feedback, and advice across a variety of mediums.

Council’s Media and Communications Policy operates according to the following principles:

- ▶ Council strives to provide accurate, fair, and thorough information.
- ▶ Media organisations and their representatives will be treated equally and without bias.
- ▶ Media enquiries will be dealt with promptly and within media deadlines where possible.
- ▶ Social media comments and queries should be dealt with in a consistent, open, and transparent manner.
- ▶ Council will openly discuss matters of interest unless disclosure of certain information is contrary to law or unable to be disclosed on the advice of Council’s lawyers.
- ▶ Councillors will adhere to the Councillor Code of Conduct when liaising with media.
- ▶ Councillors may express their personal view online or to the media on any matter relating to or routine Council business; however, this should be clearly identified as a personal view.
- ▶ Council staff members are not to make any comments to media or online relating to Council decisions, operations and/or events, or about Council staff and/or elected representatives which may bring Council into disrepute. This includes the use of social media in a private capacity.
- ▶ In the case of official investigations, accidents or enquiries into business dealings or any matters with possible legal consequences, any statements made to the media must be approved by the CEO who may request consultation with a lawyer.
- ▶ Staff must ensure that no confidential information on individuals can be gained from Council’s online digital properties or social media properties. Any personal information collected by staff will be in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles contained within the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014. Council’s statistical data on website visitors may be collected as per the website disclaimer.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Communications	The means by which information is conveyed to the community through written and electronic means.

Term	Definition
Community	Mansfield Shire residents, visitors, ratepayers, businesses, community and government organisations, neighbouring councils and other stakeholders with an interest in the Shire.
Delegate	A person or body, and the individual members of that body, to whom a function of Council is delegated.
Digital Media	Refers to Council's website and Engagement platform
Electronic Media	Refers to traditional methods of electronic journalism, ie, television and radio.
Print Media	In the broad sense, all printed matter - including newspapers, broadcast, publications, press releases, fliers, newsletters etc.
Recovery Communications	The practice of sending, gathering, managing and evaluating information in the recovery stage following an emergency.
Social Media	Online tools that allow groups to generate content and engage in conversations and exchange content. Examples include but are not limited to social networking sites (such as Facebook and Instagram).

Official Spokespersons

The Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer are the official spokespersons for the Council on all matters of Council policy, interpretation of policy or actions which may commit the Council's resources to any purpose.

In the absence of the Chief Executive Officer and Mayor, the official spokesperson can be a Departmental Manager or other officer as nominated by the Chief Executive Officer.

Print Media

Council uses many forms of print media to communicate with the community. This includes using newspaper outlets to provide information on Council's behalf via media releases, Council generated brochures, flyers, newsletters etc.

Media conferences may also be called if a topic is considered controversial, the spokesperson is a VIP, or a matter requires a full background briefing or is too complicated to be handled through a media release.

Using print media allows Council to provide more detailed information to customers, residents, ratepayers, and stakeholders. Council will also utilise paid advertising to communicate with the community. This will include utilising local, state and national newspapers or magazines for recruitment purposes, community consultation, tenders, events, promotional information, etc.

Council will provide general information to the public through its weekly article, Mansfield Matters, in the Mansfield Courier. In conjunction with the online Engagement platform, the Council column will be used for community consultation and provide updates on Council services and projects.

Social Media

Social media allows Council to improve engagement with the community and to encourage resident and user participation and open discussion. Council will endeavour to build an established audience on social media and support ongoing relationships.

Currently Council's online engagement and social media monitoring occurs only during business hours, Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 5.00pm (excluding public holidays). Council's social media accounts are managed by designated staff members representing Council.

All Council's social media platforms will follow Council's style guide and be identifiable as belonging to Council. All employees using Council's social media accounts should maintain high standards of professional behaviour as per Council's Code of Conduct and Communications Guidelines and ensure that all published material is consistent with Council's policies, standards, and other published materials.

Matters of a serious or complex nature – including complaints – should be taken offline and referred to the relevant directorate, team, and manager, alongside Customer Service to ensure tracking and reporting.

Digital Media - Website & Engagement Platform

Council is committed to utilising an online environment to communicate with the community. With Mansfield Shire having a large number of non-resident ratepayers, the online platforms are key tools that enable non-resident ratepayers to be kept informed.

Council provides updates on projects and services as a convenient information source and customer service tool for the community. This includes the provision of an active website, electronic newsletters and the sharing of online content.

Council has an electronic "kiosk" enabling the general public to access Council's website and public documents, at the municipal office accessible during business hours.

Electronic Media

Television and radio electronic media allows Council the opportunity to reach a wider audience through the medium of television and radio. Generally, journalists will approach Council for stories, interviews or comment on Council activities or Council views. Council officers may not comment to the media without prior approval from the CEO or delegate.

Photos / Images

Council regularly uses photographs for publicity purposes. Most of these images accompany Council's media releases and may be published in Council's print media or used on the website and social media.

Consent should be obtained from individuals before their image is used by Council in any public capacity. For the purpose of this Policy, photos refer to images taken by Council, or on behalf of Council, for use in media platforms.

Council is particularly mindful of child protection obligations and as such photos of children (under 18 years of age) can only be taken with the consent of a parent or caregiver. These photos must be taken in a respectful and appropriate manner and not distributed or reproduced in any manner without consent.

Photographs of groups in public places may be used in the public arena without consent of the individuals but only if people are not easily identifiable. Council's Privacy & Data Protection Policy will apply where photographs are taken for official use and stored with personal details such as names and addresses.

Public Meetings

Public meetings provide Council the opportunity to brief the community or interested parties on matters of public interest. They may also be called to order to gather facts related to proposed action or to gauge public opinion by allowing citizens the opportunity to comment on a specific topic, such as a land-use plan. They may also be used to meet members of the public to learn about their concerns.

Generally, no official action is taken during a public meeting. Approval must be sought from the Chief Executive Officer to hold a public meeting. Councillors are to be invited to attend public meetings conducted by Council. The Mayor or the CEO will be the spokesperson at all public meetings. In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor shall be Council's spokesperson.

This does not include public information sessions held for the purpose of community engagement on specific projects, which will normally be held by Council officers.

Official Functions

Council facilitates many official functions within the Shire throughout the year. Official functions may include but are not limited to:

- ▶ Australia Day celebrations
- ▶ Civic receptions
- ▶ Breakfast meetings or workshops with industry
- ▶ Official opening and citizenship ceremonies

Local Federal and State members of Parliament are normally invited to attend all official Council functions. The Chief Executive Officer shall have the discretion, in consultation with the Mayor, to invite other persons holding an office in the region to Council functions.

Where Council is invited to send a representative/delegate to participate in/or attend an official function conducted by Federal, State, local government, regional government body or organisation, Council shall be represented by the Mayor. In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor shall be Council's delegate. The Mayor may nominate an alternate Councillor or the CEO to attend in his/her absence in the absence of the Deputy Mayor.

Events

Events play an important role in community life as a means of entertainment, social interaction and sources of pride and sense of place. Council events are staged to celebrate and recognise achievements within the community and/or to promote a specific key message or interest.

Council may provide financial or in-kind support to community events to establish mutually beneficial partnerships between Council and the community and to raise the profile of Council within the community.

Councillors are to be invited to attend all events conducted or supported by Council. Local Federal and State members of Parliament shall be invited to attend all events conducted by Council of relevance to the Mansfield Local Government Area.

When Council is invited to send a representative /delegate to participate in /or attend an external event conducted by Federal, State, local government, regional government body or organisation, the Council shall be represented by the Mayor. In the absence of the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor shall be Council's delegate. The Mayor may nominate an alternate Councillor to attend in his/her absence in the absence of the Deputy Mayor.

Signage, displays and posters

Signage that carries Council branding requires executive approval before publishing or installation. This includes new signage, such as those seen at the entrance to Council buildings or on Council facilities including recreation reserves. This does not include signage required to follow a particular template under legislation, such as those required at capital works projects.

Posters and other bills requested for posting or display in Council facilities by third parties should be approved by the executive. This excludes community notices requested by community groups, which can be reviewed by the relevant Manager or Coordinator.

Responsibilities

Overall responsibility for the application of this Policy is held by the Chief Executive Officer.

Managers are responsible for ensuring their staff comply with the principles, practices, and any associated procedures of this policy. Management, employees, contract employees, and volunteers are to be familiar with, and competent in, the application of this Policy, and are accountable for the delivery of this policy within their areas of responsibility.

The Communications, Governance & Risk Department is the owner of this policy. Any reviews of this policy must be made in consultation with the Coordinator Communications, Governance & Risk and Communications & Engagement Officer.

References / Related Policies

- ▶ Mansfield Shire Council Child Safe Policy
- ▶ Mansfield Shire Council Governance Rules as per section 9 of the Local Government Act 2020
- ▶ Mansfield Shire Council Community Engagement Policy
- ▶ Mansfield Shire Council Employee Code of Conduct
- ▶ Mansfield Shire Council Councillor Code of Conduct
- ▶ Mansfield Shire Council Information Security Policy
- ▶ Mansfield Shire Caretaker Policy

- ▶ Mansfield Shire Council Records and Information Management Policy
- ▶ Mansfield Shire Council Privacy and Data Protection Policy
- ▶ Mansfield Shire Council Municipal Emergency Management Plan
- ▶ Mansfield Shire Council Relief & Recovery Sub-plan

Gender Impact Assessment

The Media and Communications Policy has considered the Gender Equality Act 2020 in its preparation but is not relevant to its content. The Media and Communications Policy has been assessed as not requiring a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA).

The Policy is purely administrative in nature and does not benefit any one gender group over any other.

Implementation

This Policy is effective from 20 August 2024.

Review Date

This Policy is to be reviewed by August 2026.

Authorisation to Implement Policy

Signed: _____ Witnessed: _____
Councillor Chief Executive Officer

Approval dated: 20 August 2024

Mansfield Shire Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this Policy at any time.