

Media & Communications Policy



VERSION NO.	131105311 [v5]
APPROVAL	Council Signature: Date:
TRIM REFERENCE	13/105311
REVIEW	NOVEMBER 2029
RESPONSIBLE EXECUTIVE	General Manager Customer & Corporate Support
POLICY TYPE	Select Policy Type Council
POLICY OWNER	Manager Advocacy, Communications & Engagement

REVISION RECORD	Version	Revision Description
December 2020	131105311[v4]	Minor changes to clarify Council spokespersons and media protocols. In addition, several new sections added on areas including <i>branding</i> and logo use.
June 2025	131105311 [v5]	Information streamlined to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- reduce duplication with other existing Policies such as Election Period Policy, Model Code of Conduct, Staff Code of Conduct- reflect current practice/flexibility in KYC special editions- provide greater clarity on internal approvals- better group information under key headings- recognise importance of digital first approach and internal communications

1. Purpose

To assist Council to provide our community with communications that are clear, concise, accurate, non-political and consistent with Council *branding*, decisions and policies.

This Policy provides a clear approach to roles and responsibilities when using varying *communications channels* and external media.

2. Scope

This Policy applies to all Councillors, employees, contractors, and volunteers of Kingston City Council (**Council**).

3. Governance Principles and Council Plan alignment

3.1. Governance Principles

Principle (i) - the transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is to be ensured.

This Policy aligns with the Councillor Model Code of Conduct, Employee Code of Conduct and the Election Period Policy and has considered the overarching governance principles and supporting principles.

3.2. Council Plan alignment

Strategic Direction: Well-governed - Council will be collaborative, accountable, transparent, responsive, well-informed, and efficient.

Strategy: We strive to provide clear, accurate and transparent communications to the community in a number of formats to meet community needs.

4. Policy details

Council will use a variety of communication channels to inform, educate, engage and consult with the community on Council decisions, initiatives, policies, programs, activities and events.

Communication should enhance the reputation of Council and be accurate, timely, impartial and consistent with the Council Plan, legislation and policies.

Our communications aim to:

- facilitate transparent, open and accountable government;
- explain Council decisions and the impact of those decisions;
- increase awareness of, and participation in, Council services, events, and facilities;
- promote opportunities for participation in decision-making;
- advocate for the needs of the Kingston community; and
- promote local tourism and the local economy.

4.1. Council spokespersons

In all communications, the Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer are Council's official *spokespersons* on behalf of Council and its organisation. At times they may delegate this role to others as per the table below:

Position	Roles and responsibilities
Mayor	Official <i>spokesperson</i> on all decisions of Council
CEO	Official <i>spokesperson</i> on high-level operational matters
General Managers + CFO	CEO delegate on operational/technical matters
Deputy Mayor	May be delegated to act as <i>spokesperson</i> during Mayor's absence
Councillors	May be quoted on Council media releases regarding ward-based projects, at the discretion of the Mayor. Must not speak on behalf of Council, but rather as an individual opinion.

Manager Advocacy, Communications & Engagement	May act as <i>spokesperson</i> to provide comment on minor fact-based queries and for low-risk community media channels.
Media Advisor	Responsible for coordinating responses and providing approved information to the <i>media</i> on behalf of Council
Staff	No <i>spokesperson</i> role. Project staff may be asked to assist in researching/formulated <i>media</i> response/statements. In very low-risk issues, the Manager Advocacy Communications & Engagement may approve a staff member to take part in a <i>media</i> interview/statement. (e.g.: Kingston Arts team to promote an exhibition on community radio)

4.2. Media management

All *media* enquiries must be referred to, coordinated and managed, by the Advocacy, Communication & Engagement Department.

Council will maintain good working relationships with the *media* by providing clear, consistent and reliable information to the *media* in a timely manner via:

issuing regular *media* releases on key topics;

responding promptly to *media* questions and meeting mutually agreed deadlines; and

initiating, developing and implementing positive communications strategies that inform the community about Council activities and services and enhance the reputation and image of Kingston.

At times we may choose not to respond to media enquiries.

4.3. Branding guidelines

The Advocacy, Communications & Engagement Department is responsible for *branding* of all departments across the organisation.

All publications and promotional material (print and digital) regarding Council initiatives, policies, programs, facilities, activities and events should adhere with Council's *branding* guidelines including (but not limited to):

approved City of Kingston logos must appear on all Council communications, signage, uniforms, vehicles etc; and

no adjustments can be made to Council's logos without approval from the Manager Advocacy, Communications & Engagement (this includes Council's *sub-brands* such as Kingston Active, Kingston Libraries, Kingston Youth Services, and Kingston Arts).

External graphic designers and/or communications consultants must not be engaged without approval from the Manager Advocacy, Communications & Engagement.

This Policy is supported by Council's Brand Guidelines and *branding* guidelines established for key *sub-brands*. Examples include: Kingston Active, Kingston Libraries, Kingston Arts, and the Mardi Aquatic Centre.

Any new *communications channel* - including social *media* channels, e-newsletters, websites, apps, printed magazines - must be approved by the Manager Advocacy, Communications & Engagement prior to commencement. New channels must be supported by a business case, draft content plan and staff resourcing prior to approval. Further detail is provided via the Social Media Guidelines.

4.4. Accessibility

Council's suite of communications should reflect and celebrate our community and feature a range of people from different ages, backgrounds and abilities.

Consideration should be given to making key information/major projects accessible via a range of measures such as digital and printed formats, easy English, infographics, providing information on translation services, plus direct translations where suitable.

4.5. Digital first

Council's corporate website is the organisation's number one customer service channel with over 1 million visits per year.

While *communications campaigns* are tailored on a project-by-project basis and will consider a range of *communications channels*, all campaigns should be built on a foundation of digital-first.

This provides our customers with 24/7 information and services that is accessible, translated and simple to understand.

Content for the website is generated and updated by project teams and overseen by the Advocacy, Communications & Engagement Department.

4.6. Kingston Your City magazine

Council will produce and distribute a regular newsletter, currently *Kingston Your City* (KYC), to provide proactive and direct information to the community about Council decisions, policies, initiatives, activities, services and events.

While allowing for flexibility for special editions, KYC will generally seek to include:

- opportunities for participation in Council decision-making via consultations;
- information from ward councillors (via various formats including ward columns, breakout-quotes etc); and
- Calendar of events, with community groups invited to submit items for inclusion.

KYC will not be used to:

- promote political purposes or individual agendas;
- criticise Councillors, Council decisions, community members, members of the Government or opposition, or Council Officers; or
- promote content that is not directly related to Council or its advocacy.

The CEO, as Editor in Chief, is ultimately responsible for KYC. At all times a conservative approach will be taken to ensure the independence of KYC is preserved.

Councillors will be provided with an advance copy of KYC prior to publication.

4.7. Speeches/presentations

The Advocacy, Communications & Engagement Department will support the Mayor (and their appointed delegates) with speech notes and/or presentations for events organised via Council's Mayoral Booking requests.

4.8. Councillor communications

Individual Councillors may choose to do their own communication through their own channels, however they must make it clear that they are expressing their 'individual' views and not the 'official' view of Council.

Councillors are responsible for ensuring that information they are commenting on or providing is accurate and consistent with legislation and policies.

As set out in the Councillor Support and Reimbursement of Expenses Policy, Councillor communications (including newsletters, social media, speeches etc) are not supported by the Advocacy, Communications & Engagement Department and must be developed and/or funded by Councillors. A notable exception to this is communications activities set out in the Ward Meeting Policy.

While it is recognised that Councillors can speak directly with the *media* in their capacity as a ward councillor, they are required to alert the Manager of Advocacy, Communications & Engagement to ensure consistent statements are provided by the organisation and Councillors. To support the Mayor and Councillors, an annual *media* training session is offered by the organisation.

Councillor behaviour, including via *communications channels*, is covered by the Model Councillor Code of Conduct.

4.9. Political content

Council communications should not be used in a way that may impact local, State or Federal elections. The Election Period Policy (and associated Election Period Communications Guidelines) will take precedence over this Policy, particularly during the declared local government election period.

State or Federal politicians will only be represented through Council's *media* and external communication activities where necessary to reasonably inform the community of important news such as:

- funding announcements for Council projects;
- launching official openings of Council projects and buildings;
- promoting Council's advocacy platform and activities; and
- advising of opportunities for community participation in consultation on major state/federal projects in the Kingston municipality.

In the lead-up to state and federal elections, no promotion of any political party and/or candidate can occur via Council's social media channels once candidate nominations have closed

4.10. Privacy

Council's communications must comply with Council's Privacy Policy and legislative responsibilities. This includes:

- providing a collection notice for instances where personal information is collected, stored and used by Council;
- ensuring correct storage of contact details and personal information;
- ensuring distribution lists are only used to promote information connected to the original or legitimate secondary purposes;
- providing recipients of digital communication with Council contact details and the option to opt out at any time; and
- displaying signage at events to allow participants to opt out of having their image taken by official photographers.

4.11. Internal communications

The Advocacy, Communications & Engagement Department is responsible for coordinating broadscale internal communications provided via staff intranet and newsletter.

5. Key stakeholders

Development of this Policy has included engagement with a range of internal departments including:

- Governance, Risk & Integrity - ensuring communications during election period is covered under the Election Period Policy, that sections covering Councillor communications align with the Model Councillor Code of Conduct and the Councillor Support and Reimbursement of Expenses Policy.
- People & Culture - ensuring staff behaviour on social media is covered under the staff Code of Conduct.
- Information Services & Strategy - ensuring the policy aligns with the Information Privacy Policy.
- Legal Team - to ensure legislation referred to is correct and current.

6. Internal and external assessments

6.1. Risk assessment

This policy has been assessed by the relevant department.

6.2. Delegation and authorisation (Compliance Framework)

Refer to Council's Instruments of Delegations:

Power to make statements to the press

Power to give authority to make statements to the press

Power to authorise the issue of *media* releases

Power to authorise publications on the internet

Power to authorise publications on the intranet

Power to approve arrangements having important public relations aspects

Power to authorise expenditure on advertising and *media*

Power to give permission to publish any document or publication

6.3. Gender Impact Assessment

A Gender Impact Assessment was completed on this Policy and found that:

- 95% of community can understand simple English. Consider on a project-by-project basis the need for targeted communications to address language barriers and/or non-digital audiences.
- Communications collateral will avoid the use of gender specific language (except for targeted campaigns where appropriate) to ensure it is relatable to all sections of our community.
- Across our suite of communications, we will look for opportunities to reflect and celebrate our community. This includes using imagery that reflects our different ages, genders, heritages in proportion with the community demographics.
- Provide information on accessibility of Council facilities via our website.

6.4. Privacy Impact Assessment

A Privacy Impact Assessment is not required for this Policy.

6.5. Human Rights Charter

This Policy has been reviewed against and complies with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic). In particular this Policy promotes: Section 18: The right to participate in public affairs - by ensuring Council provides clear, accessible communication on key issues - including opportunities for participation in decision-making via consultation.

7. Related documents

7.1. Legislation & External Documents

Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)

Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)

Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)

Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2024

7.2. Internal Documents and resources

Community Engagement Policy

Councillor Support and Reimbursement of Expenses Policy

Election Period Policy

Information Privacy Policy

External Communications Strategy

Election Period Communications Guidelines

Social Media Guidelines

8. Definitions

Term	Definition
<i>Accessible communication</i>	Information presented in a way that can be understood and accessed by a wide range of community members. This can include information in simple, easy to understand words; infographics; video; providing information on translation services, providing direct translations, providing options for large format viewing.
<i>Branding</i>	Covers the approved names, logos, style of communications
<i>Communications campaign</i>	Range of activities undertaken to promote Council including its decisions, programs, services, facilities etc
<i>Communications channel</i>	The tool used to deliver messages to the community. This includes hard copy channels such as Kingston Your City magazine, flyers, letters etc and digital channels such as websites, social media, e-newsletters etc
<i>Media</i>	Journalists from various organisations at a local, state and national level covering print, radio, TV, magazine and online publications
<i>Spokesperson</i>	Authorised to speak on behalf of Council and/or the organisation

Sub-brands

Our main brand is the City of Kingston. *Sub-brands* include key projects/services of Kingston including: Kingston Arts, Kingston Libraries, Kingston Active etc