



Media and Communications Policy

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The Golden Plains Shire Council Media and Communications Policy provides a framework for communications between Council, staff, and its stakeholders, in order to build a positive identity for Council through greater community awareness of its services, activities, achievements, and resources. Media communication provides an opportunity to keep the community informed and involved in dialogue about Council activities, services, and programs.
- 1.2 The purpose of this Policy is to provide guidance to ensure the interface between Council, media and the communications landscape is managed appropriately to maximise the benefits to Council and minimise the risk of adverse publicity and misunderstanding due to inaccurate or inappropriate sharing of information. It will provide clarity about staff and Councillors' responsibilities relating to their interaction with the media as an employee and representative of Council.
- 1.3 Consistent with the principles of good governance, it is imperative that Council has clear standards in place which outline the appropriate use of media and social media channels by Councillors. This policy ensures compliance with legislation and the Councillor Code of Conduct.
- 1.4 Media and social media are important channels to:
 - 1.4.1 Effectively promote Council's services, programs, initiatives, and opportunities for community members to engage with Council;
 - 1.4.2 Provide clear information about Council processes and decisions, in accordance with the public transparency principles under the Local Government Act 2020;
 - 1.4.3 Ensure Council speaks with a strong, honest, and authentic voice on all matters pertaining to its operations and values;
 - 1.4.4 Manage and enhance Golden Plains Shire Council's reputation; and
 - 1.4.5 Mitigate the risk of miscommunication and associated adverse consequences.



2. SCOPE

- 2.1 This policy applies to all Councillors, employees, contractors, and volunteers of Council.
- 2.2 This policy applies to all verbal, printed, electronic and online communications and to

any interactions with the media.

- 2.3 This policy is to be read together with the Council Codes of Conduct for Councillors and staff.
- 2.4 During a Council election, this policy should be read in conjunction with the Election Period Policy.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

3.1 Official commentary

- 3.1.1 The Mayor is the official spokesperson for Golden Plains Shire Council and decisions of Council and may delegate this authority if required to the Deputy Mayor in the first instance or to another Councillor.
- 3.1.2 If the Mayor is not available, the Deputy Mayor will act as the official spokesperson and will, in those circumstances, have all authority otherwise provided to the Mayor by this policy. Where there is no Deputy Mayor, the previous Mayor may be designated to speak on behalf of the Mayor, and have all authority otherwise provided to the present Mayor by this policy. If there is no previous past Mayor(s), a Councillor from the relevant portfolio will be asked by the Mayor/CEO to speak.
- 3.1.3 The Chief Executive Officer is the official spokesperson on all operational matters and may delegate this authority to Council officers to act as spokespeople on matters relating to their areas of expertise.
- 3.1.4 Without formal authorisation from the Chief Executive Officer, Council officers (other than the Coordinator Communications and Engagement) are not permitted to make comment to the media. At their discretion, the Coordinator Communications and Engagement may include comments from Council officers as the subject matter expert where appropriate in official commentary to the media.
- 3.1.5 In cases of emergency or disaster response, the Municipal Emergency Management Officer is authorised as a spokesperson on matters relating to the emergency or disaster in addition to the Mayor and CEO and may delegate this authority to Council officers as required.
- 3.1.6 Any requests for an official Council statement from media outlets to any Councillors or members of Council staff must be immediately provided to the Coordinator Communications and Engagement to arrange a response.
- 3.1.7 Official Council resources and media, including social media, will not be used to promote Councillor or staff individual, personal, business, or political interests, including interests as a candidate in any election.

3.2 Official online presence

- 3.2.1 Council will create and maintain official social media channels as required and at the discretion of the Coordinator Communications and Engagement. Posts and responses from Council's official social media channels will be made by the Communications and Engagement Business Unit.
- 3.2.2 Council reserves the right to moderate comments and posts made on its official social media platforms.

For example, if Council makes a post from an official Golden Plains Shire Council social media account and the comments made on that post are considered inappropriate (such as by using obscene, discriminatory, aggressive or defamatory language), Council may at its discretion delete those comments from the post.

3.3 Individual commentary and social media

- 3.3.1 Councillors may choose to express their personal view or opinion through the media, including on social media. Whenever a Councillor is expressing a personal view or opinion on a matter that relates to or involves Council or could reasonably be interpreted to relate to or involve Council, they must in all circumstances make it clear that this is a personal view and does not represent the official position of Council. This must be stated in each individual post published by the Councillor containing personal views or opinions and it is not sufficient that this be stated only on the overarching page or profile.

For example, a Councillor makes a post stating “The Council has made this park a danger to the children of my area and I won’t rest until it is demolished.” As this is a personal opinion that involves Council, they must identify that this is a personal opinion and does not represent the official position of Council. To comply with clause 3.3.1, a disclaimer included in the post should read, “This is my personal opinion and does not reflect the position of the Council.” It would not be sufficient that the Councillor’s social media profile states “All opinions are my own” on the front page.

As another example, a Councillor posts a picture of their dog on a public social media page with the caption “This is a great dog!” As this personal opinion does not relate to or involve Council, there is no need to identify that this is not the official position of Council.

- 3.3.2 Councillors choosing to create, hold or operate any personal social media account/s accept full responsibility for the maintenance and moderation of those accounts, including all legal responsibility for those accounts.
- 3.3.3 A Councillor choosing to make personal media commentary must ensure that any such commentary:
- Contains accurate information;
 - Is devoid of comments that could reasonably be construed as being derogatory, offensive, or insulting to any person, including any fellow Councillor or member of Council staff;
 - Does not seek to harm the reputation of Council; and
 - Complies with the Councillor Code of Conduct, including that it does not bring discredit upon the Council and does not deliberately mislead the Council or the public about any matter related to the performance of the Councillor’s public duties.

- 3.3.4 Councillors should be aware that other users of social media may see the content or posts that they like or interact with and must ensure that any content liked or interacted with complies with clause 3.3.3.

For example, a Councillor maintains a public social media page under the name 'Cr XYZ'. Using this page, Cr XYZ likes a post that is insulting towards a member of the community and makes a comment that says, "So true!". This would not comply with clause 3.3.3 or 3.3.4 and may be a breach of the Standards of Conduct.

- 3.3.5 Councillors making personal media commentary which references or relates to a Council decision must do so fairly and in the full and proper context in which the decision was made and must not misrepresent or mislead the public in relation to the decision.

For example, a Councillor calls a radio station and gives an interview about how disappointing Council's decision to demolish a local bridge was, as the bridge is the only link between two townships in the municipal area. The decision made by the Council was actually to reconstruct the bridge to allow access to larger vehicles, which would include demolishing the older smaller bridge once works were complete. The comments by the Councillor did not provide the full and proper context in which the decision was made. This would also apply if the radio station had initiated contact with the Councillor.

- 3.3.6 If a Councillor intends to provide personal commentary on Council matters to a media outlet, regardless of whether the contact was initiated by the Councillor or by a media outlet, the Councillor must advise the Mayor and the Chief Executive Officer before making any comments.

For example, a Councillor receives a call from a local podcast host, asking for her opinion on a recent decision of Council. Rather than provide her opinion, the Councillor replies, "Please send me your questions and I'll give you a call back with my response." The Councillor then contacts the Mayor and CEO to inform them that she is going to comment on the matter and provides them with a copy of the comments she intends to make. In taking these steps, she has complied with clause 3.3.6.

As another example, a Councillor is happy about a recent event held by Council. As the event was related to a topic that the Councillor is passionate about, they want to publicise how well the event had gone. Prior to calling the local newspaper to provide an interview about the event, they send an email to the Mayor and CEO letting them know about the comments they are intending to make.

3.4 Media and communications requests

- 3.4.1 Media releases will be drafted by the Communications and Engagement Business Unit and will be issued following approval from the Mayor and Chief

Executive Officer.

- 3.4.2 All requests for comment on organisational policies, business and operations must be referred to the Communications and Engagement business unit immediately to enable a prompt response.
- 3.4.3 The Communications and Engagement business unit is responsible for monitoring all media activity for Golden Plains Shire Council. Councillors wishing to obtain a particular news item about Council can contact the Coordinator Communications and Engagement for assistance.
- 3.4.4 Council resources, in the form of assistance from Council officers, will support the preparation of speeches for official Council spokesperson/s only.

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1 The following table provides a summary of the roles and responsibilities described in this policy.

Position	Roles and responsibilities
Mayor	Official spokesperson for Golden Plains Shire Council and decisions of Council Approval of media releases
Deputy Mayor	Acts as the Mayor's delegated spokesperson if the Mayor is not available
Councillors	May choose to express their personal view or opinion through the media, subject to the conditions described in section 3.3.
CEO	Official spokesperson on all operational matters Approval of media releases
Council officers	No media role unless delegated by the CEO May provide comments as subject matter expert, at discretion of Coordinator Communications and Engagement
Municipal Emergency Management Officer	Emergency and disaster response communications
Coordinator Communications and Engagement	Coordinating official media relations and social media engagement
Communications and	Supporting official media relations and social media

Engagement business unit	engagement
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4.2 Compliance, monitoring and review

4.2.1 The policy owner is responsible for ensuring the policy:

- a. aligns with relevant legislation, government policy and Council's requirements/strategies/values;
- b. is implemented and monitored (i.e. the policy is followed, reflects the changing policy environment, and emerging issues are identified); and
- c. is reviewed to evaluate its continuing effectiveness (e.g. achieving its purpose, remains relevant/current).

4.3 Reporting:

4.3.1 A weekly report of Golden Plains Shire Council media activity will be provided for all Councillors and staff.

4.4 Records Management:

4.4.1 Council must maintain all records relevant to administering this policy in accordance with the Public Records Act 1973.

5. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS OR ABBREVIATIONS USED

Term	Definition
Council	Golden Plains Shire Council
Media	Any communication on a public platform regardless of the form or medium. Examples include but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print and digital outlets • Social media platform posts and comments (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) • Online websites, groups, and forums • Radio broadcasts • Council's publications (e.g., the Gazette) • TV news and other broadcast programs • Podcasts and interviews

Standards of Conduct	Means the Standards of Conduct provided by the Councillor Code of Conduct and the Local Government (Governance and Integrity) Regulations 2020
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6. RELATED LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

Legislation

- 6.1 Local Government Act 2020
- 6.2 Local Government (Governance and Integrity) Regulations 2020
- 6.3 Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014
- 6.4 Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Policy

- 6.5 Councillor Code of Conduct
- 6.6 Election Period Policy
- 6.7 Governance Rules
- 6.8 Interaction between Councillors and Council Staff Protocol

7. HUMAN RIGHTS STATEMENT OF COMPATIBILITY

- 7.1 It is considered that this policy does not impact negatively on any rights identified in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic).

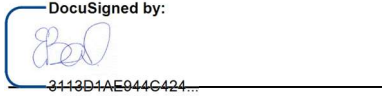
8. POLICY OWNER

- 8.1 The policy owner is the Coordinator Communications and Engagement
- 8.2 The policy owner is the individual who is given the responsibility to review, edit and maintain this policy and associated procedure. The policy owner is also the point of contact for any questions regarding this policy.

9. DOCUMENT INFORMATION

DOCUMENT TYPE:	Council Policy
DOCUMENT STATUS:	Approved
DOCUMENT OWNER POSITION:	Coordinator Communications and Engagement
APPROVED BY:	Council
DATE ADOPTED:	24/10/2023

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

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NOTES:	<p>Policy documents are amended from time to time; therefore, you should not rely on a printed copy being the current version. Please consult Council's Policy page on the Golden Plains Shire Council website to ensure that the version you are using is up to date.</p> <p>Available at:</p> <p>https://www.goldenplains.vic.gov.au/residents/my-council/about-council/council-policies</p>