

Media Policy

Policy Number:	2023/03	Directorate:	Customer and Performance
Approval by:	Council	Responsible Officer:	Manager Customer and Communications
Approval Date:	23 October 2023	Version Number:	1
Review Date:	1 June 2027		

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure information provided to media is timely, accurate and appropriately authorised. It aims to support transparency and accountability and mitigate risk of miscommunication and distribution of inaccurate or unauthorised information.

2. Context

Council is committed to communicating proactively to inform the community of council decisions, initiatives, policies, services, activities and events.

Council recognises that media plays an important role in ensuring the transparency and accountability of government and is committed to openly engaging with media to account for Council decisions and how resources are being directed to meet the needs of the community.

The policy reflects that engagement with media happens

- by the Mayor, or Deputy Mayor, on behalf of Council
- by councillors keeping their community informed of representation on their behalf and engaging in the political/democratic process
- by staff on behalf of the organisation

3. Scope

This policy applies to councillors, staff, volunteers and contractors engaging media on behalf, or in relation to the business of Knox City Council.

Media is any means of communication that reach or influence people widely. It encompasses traditional media such as community, local, metropolitan and national newspapers, magazines, industry newsletters, television, radio, online news media and new media including publicly accessible social media which does not necessarily rely on an intermediary.

4. References

- 4.1 Community & Council Plan 2021-2025

- Knox Council is a trusted and respected leader in our community, acting appropriately and ensuring all voices are heard.

4.2 Relevant Legislation

- Local Government Act
- Freedom of Information Act
- Privacy & Data Protection Act
- Health Records Act

4.3 Charter of Human Rights

- The policy is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities as it does not raise any human right issues.
- This policy has been assessed against the rights contained within the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 and is deemed to be compatible with the Charter.

4.4 Related Council Policies

- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Election Period Policy
- Privacy and Data Protection Policy
- Staff Social Media Policy
- Public Transparency Policy

4.5 Related Council Procedures

- Nil

5. Definitions

Detail any definitions within the policy.

Council	means Knox City Council, being a body corporate constituted as a municipal Council under the Local Government Act 2020
Councillors	means the individuals holding the office of a member of Knox City Council
Media	A means or channel of communication that reach people widely (including broadcast, publishing, and online/social media)
Note: media should not be interpreted as a reference to a journalist	

6. Council Policy

6.1 Authorised spokespeople

The following people are authorised to represent Council.

Mayor	The Mayor is the principal spokesperson for the Council.
Deputy Mayor	The Deputy Mayor acts as the spokesperson if the Mayor is unable or incapable of fulfilling these duties.

Chief Executive Officer	The Chief Executive Officer is an authorised spokesperson on day to day operations of the Council.
Directors	Directors are authorised spokespeople on day to day operations in the scope of their responsibilities, as delegated by the CEO.
Manager Customer and Communication	The Manager of Customer and Communications is authorised to provide matters of fact or clarification only.

6.2 Engaging with media outlets

Openness and transparency are guiding principles of Council. Media outlets are entitled to the same information that a member of the public is entitled to. Requests for information will be treated accordingly, unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure or the request creates an unreasonable workload.

Requests from media outlets to film or photograph Council staff, facilities, meetings and events must be directed to the Communications Department.

6.3 Councillor interaction with media outlets

Councillors play an important role representing the community in decision making, and may choose to engage with media outlets as part of keeping their community informed of their representation.

Councillors can initiate contact with media outlets or respond to enquiries from media outlets in their capacity as individual councillors. In doing so councillors should make it clear when their comments reflect their own views and do not represent the official position of Council.

6.4 Staff interaction with media outlets

All enquiries from media outlets are to be directed to the Communications Department in the first instance. The Communications Department is responsible for:

- initiating proactive media opportunities,
- clarifying any requests for information or comment from media outlets, coordinating the response, identifying the appropriate spokesperson and seeking approvals for written responses.

Staff and contractors are expected to assist the Communications Department in responding to media outlets by ensuring information provided is accurate and timely.

Occasionally staff with specialist or technical expertise may be requested to participate in media opportunities. This can only be authorised by the Customer and Communications Manager in consultation with the relevant Director.

6.5 Engaging in social media

Listening to the needs and concerns of people they represent is an important task for a councillor. Social media offers a cost effective and timely opportunity to connect with and hear from some parts of the community. Councillors may choose to engage in social media as part of representing their community and keeping their community informed of their representation.

Councillors may use their own social media accounts to express personal views. Councillors should identify and separate personal opinions from Council position. Councillors have personal responsibility for ensuring that any social media sites they create or contribute to can be readily edited and appropriately moderated.

When using social media councillors are expected to adhere to Knox City Council Councillor Code of Conduct and comply with relevant laws and regulations.

Council does not control any individual's use of social media, or their private social media accounts. The behavior of staff and councillors when using private social media accounts is governed by the principles in the Councillor Code of Conduct or the Staff Code of Conduct.

Staff use of social media for the purposes of conducting Council business is governed by the Staff Social Media Policy.

7. Confidential information

Staff and councillors must not misuse information gained in their official capacity. All information gained in the course of Council duties should be treated as confidential unless it is public knowledge. If there is uncertainty as to whether information is public knowledge, the matter should be treated as confidential.

Confidential information is protected by the Local Government Act 2020 and both staff and councillors may be guilty of an offence, if they disclose information intentionally or recklessly that the person knows, or should reasonably know, is confidential information. The Local Government Act 2020 also provides that making improper use of information acquired in the capacity as councillor constitutes the offence of misuse of position.

Staff and councillors must take care to maintain the security of documents and information. Personal information about an individual, whose identity could reasonably be ascertained from the information, should not be released to the media without that person's consent. There may be situations where consent is implied, particularly when an individual raises their circumstances with media in the first instance, and Council might choose to comment.

8. Administrative updates

From time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this policy. Where an update does not materially alter this policy, such a change may be made administratively. Examples of minor administrative changes include changes to names of Council departments or positions, change to names of Federal or State Government departments or a minor amendment to legislation that does not have material impact. Where any change or update may materially change the intent of this policy, it must be considered by Council.