



Media and External Communications Policy

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1 Document Information

The electronic version of this document is the controlled version. Printed copies are considered uncontrolled. Before using a printed copy, verify that it is the current version.

RESPONSIBLE GENERAL MANAGER	General Manager Corporate Services
RESPONSIBLE MANAGER (Policy Owner)	Manager, Communications and Community Relations
APPROVED/ADOPTED BY	Council
APPROVAL DATE	14 December 2020
EFFECTIVE DATE (If different from approval date)	14 December 2020
REVIEW DATE	1 November 2025
CM REF AND VERSION	13/105311[v4]

2 Purpose

The *purpose* of this policy is to provide understanding and guidance for the appropriate use of communications tools, including verbal, printed, electronic and online, to enhance and protect the good reputation of Council, and facilitate its effective voice within, and on behalf of, the community.

The *intent* of this policy is that all official Council communication will be a positive reflection of Council's commitment to informing the community in a manner that is clear, concise, accurate, non-political and consistent with Council decisions and policies.

3 Definitions

- Caretaker period:** (defined in the Local Government Act 1989 as 'Election Period'): the period that:
- starts on the last day on which nominations for that election can be received; and
 - ends at 6pm on election day.
- Council:** means Kingston City Council, being a body corporate constituted as a municipal Council under the Local Government Act 1989.
- Councillor:** individuals holding the office of a member of Kingston City Council
- Council Officer:** means the Chief Executive Officer and employees of Council appointed by the Chief Executive Officer.
- Electronic communication:** Any communication channel that is transmitted electronically, for example emails and e-newsletters
- Hashtag:** A hashtag is a tag used on social networks such as Twitter, as a way to annotate a message. A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by a #. Example: #yourhashtag.

Online communication:	Any communication channel that uses the internet, for examplesocial media and websites.
Posts:	Words, videos, pictures and/or audio items on a website, forum or social networking site – e.g. posting content on Facebook.
Social Media:	Tools and platforms people use to publish, converse and share content online,includes; blogs, wikis, podcasts, and sites e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

4 Scope

This policy applies to Councillors, all Kingston employees, Contractors and Volunteersand relates to verbal, printed, electronic and online communications. It is aligned with the Councillor Code of Conduct, Employee Code of Conduct and Employee Social Media Policy.

During a Council election it should be read in conjunction with the Kingston City Council Caretaker Policy.

5 Policy Statement

5.1 Spokespersons

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

While it is recognised that Councillors can speak to the media in their capacity as individual Councillors, it is also recommended that they advise the Communications Department of any media interactions so that a Council-wide perspective can be obtained, and the Mayor may be informed.

Individual Councillors wishing to initiate their own communication, through any channel, must make it clear that they are expressing their 'individual' view 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.

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

Authorised Officer	Roles and 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	Able to speak to the media in their capacity as individual Councillors.
CEO	Official spokesperson on high-level operational matters.
General Managers	Official spokesperson as delegated by the CEO.
Managers	Delegated spokesperson on day-to-day operational or technical enquiries.
Manager Communications and Community Relations	Able to delegate enquiries to employees outside of these roles where necessary.
Communications and Community Relations Department	Responsible for coordinating responses and providing information to the media on behalf of Council.
Staff	No media role unless requested to provide information or comment in the formulation of a media enquiry. From time to time staff may be chosen by the Communications Department to feature in communications material as the subject matter expert.

5.2 Promoting Council business

The Communications and Community Relations Department (CCR Department) is responsible for developing, approving and implementing Council's media and external communications strategies with the relevant Senior Officer authorisation.

Council media and external communication strategies and resources will be used only to promote and disseminate the decisions, intentions, activities and actions of Council, and will not be used to promote individual Councillor or Officer views or agendas that are inconsistent with or contrary to those of Council.

State or Federal politicians will only be represented through Council's media and external communication strategies where necessary to reasonably inform the community of important news.

5.3 Councillors as candidates

Council's Media and External communications are not to be used for political advantage by Councillors who candidates in a Local, State or Federal Government election are.

6. Procedures

6.1 Media Relations

The CCR Department handles all media enquiries. Council staff are not permitted to be interviewed or provide a response to the media and must direct any enquiries to the CCR Department.

Council will maintain good working relationships with all media organisations including metropolitan and local print, radio, television and digital media. It will achieve this by providing clear, consistent and reliable information to the media in a timely manner;

- issuing regular media releases and holding media briefings with the Mayor and CEO;
- responding promptly to media questions and meeting mutually agreed deadlines;
- initiating, developing and implementing positive media strategies that inform the community
- about Council activities and services and enhance their reputation and image of the City of Kingston.

Councillors can participate in official media relations activities by suggesting ideas for stories and/or photo opportunities about Council achievements, innovations, programs, services or events to the CCR department.

All media responses will be prepared by the CCR department in collaboration with the relevant Officers and approved by the relevant spokesperson e.g. General Manager, CEO and/or Mayor.

Responses are to be in the best interest of the Council organisation and not for the personal advantage of any Individual Councillor, or Officer.

No part of an official Council media release/response can be altered or removed without the permission of the spokesperson who approved the release/response.

If there are factual inaccuracies the CEO, in consultation with the relevant Officer/Councillor will rectify the inaccuracy.

Regular summaries of media coverage will be provided to Councillors and staff, including transcripts and videos as required

6.2 Publications

All publications and promotional material (print and online) regarding Council initiatives, policies, programs, facilities, activities and events should adhere with Council's branding guidelines.

All publications and promotional material should be accurate, informative and written, produced and distributed in an accessible manner.

All major documents, fact sheets and brochures should, at a minimum, include information about where people can access further information in a language other than English and how people can access a large print version. The content should be reflective of Kingston's diverse and inclusive community.

All official Council endorsed strategy documents, policies and strategic planning documents must include an introductory message from the Mayor. This message should be checked by the CCR Department and approved by the CEO and Mayor.

6.2.1 Kingston Your City

Kingston City 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.

KYC will also provide some space for community news items initiated by Kingston- based groups. With the exception of community news, KYC will be used to promote only the business of Council, including the following features:

- Council news, information and consultations;
- Councillor ward columns; and
- Calendar of events.

KYC is an independent publication of the organisation and will seek to provide equal representation to all Councillors through photographs and articles. It will not be used for political purposes, to promote individual agendas, or criticise Councillors, Council decisions, community members, members of the Government or opposition, or Council Officers.

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.

6.2.2 Newsletters and e-newsletters

Distribution of newsletters, either electronic or hard copy, should comply with Council's Privacy Policy, particularly:

- The contact details provided remain confidential at all times;
- The newsletter and database are not used to promote anything outside the original purpose to which recipients agreed, unless they consent; and
- Recipients are provided with a mechanism to opt out at any time.

Consideration should be given to the appropriate frequency of newsletters and e- newsletters.

6.3 **Speeches at Events**

The Mayor and/or Chief Executive Officer (or their delegates) are the official spokespersons for Council at events. Council resources will support the preparation of speeches for the official spokesperson/s only.

Speeches will include the Statement of Acknowledgment in accordance with Council's Aboriginal Policy.

All speeches must be approved by the CCR Department.

6.4 **Advertising**

All advertisements should adhere with Council's branding guidelines. Where the purpose or activity of an advertisement focuses on a particular part of the municipality and correlates with the circulation of a particular newspaper, the advertisement should be placed in that respective newspaper.

All print and social media advertisements must be approved by the CCR Department except for:

- Public notices
- Tenders
- Recruitment advertising

Any broadcast advertisements, radio or television, must be approved by the CCR Department.

6.5 Email Signature Banners

Email signature banners may be used to promote Council initiatives, events and/or advocacy priorities.

The use of email signature banners is at the discretion of the CCR Department and will be determined in line with the associated guidelines. All banners must be professionally designed in accordance with the City of Kingston Branding Guidelines.

6.6 Branding Requirements

The CCR Department is the custodian of the City of Kingston brand and all representations of the brand must be approved by the CCR Department prior to being distributed.

Third parties wishing to use the City of Kingston branding in any form of promotional or advertising material must seek the relevant approvals from the CCR Department prior to printing.

6.6.1 Logo Usage

City of Kingston logos are to appear on all Council communications including correspondence, publications, forms, advertisements, displays, signage, employee uniforms, fleet vehicles and other plant, electronic communications and any other relevant communication medium.

Where appropriate and in-line with contractual obligations, Council contractors are to display the City of Kingston logo on their vehicles/plant/publications, with the approval of the CCR Department.

All City of Kingston logos are to be used in line with the respective Branding Guidelines. Approval must be sought by the CCR Department prior to using a logo. Failure to use a Council logo without permission is in breach of Council's copyright and intellectual property.

Council's logos include (but are not limited to):

- City of Kingston
- Kingston Active
- Kingston Libraries
- Kingston Arts

6.6.2 Signage

All City of Kingston signs (including digital signs) are to adhere to the standards outlined in the respective Branding Guidelines and must be approved by the CCR Department.

6.7 Letters

Kingston City Council letterhead should only be used for the official business of Council and not to promote individual Councillor or Officer views or agendas that are inconsistent with or contrary to those of Council.

6.8 Websites and Social Media

Council's websites are a key communication tool. Whilst hosting a range of content specific to the services, events and programs offered by the City of Kingston, they also provide an avenue to distribute information to the community.

Council will maintain and periodically upgrade its websites to ensure compliance with accessibility standards, and to ensure the website offers a user-friendly experience.

Council's online communication will seek to utilise dynamic content, in multiple formats (video, audio, pictorial) to enhance the accessibility of information and improve the understanding of important and complex information in the community.

6.8.1 Council's corporate website

Council's corporate website, required under the Local Government Act, is www.kingston.vic.gov.au. Council may also maintain additional websites that focus on particular community information need, such as Kingston Active or Kingston Arts.

All content for Council's corporate website must be approved by the CCR Department, through a work-flow process prior to it being published online.

The development of sub-sites, including social media accounts, pages or groups must be approved by the Manager CCR, in accordance with the Social Media Policy.

Councillors will each have a profile on Council's corporate website that features their contact information, a photograph, Council committee memberships and a short biography.

6.8.2 Council's corporate social media

Council will maintain a corporate social media presence, currently but not limited to:

- Facebook – facebook.com/CityofKingston
- Instagram - Instagram.com/kingstoncouncil
- Twitter – twitter.com/kingstoncc
- YouTube – youtube.com/kingstoncitycouncil.

Council may also maintain additional social media platforms that focus on particular community information need, such as Economic Development, Maternal and Child Health, Kingston Active and Kingston Arts.

All Council social media channels should be used in accordance with Council's Employee Social Media Policy.

6.8.3 Individual Councillor websites and social media

Councillors are encouraged to utilise 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, the following disclaimer should be displayed on any channel where a Councillor represents themselves as a Councillor:

"These are my individual comments and opinions" (or similar).

Individual Councillors can have online and social media channels included in their Councillor contact details (on Council's corporate website, Kingston Your City and individual Councillor stationery) if these channels are used only in their role as a Councillor and not for private or business purposes. On that basis Council's logo may be used with the above disclaimer displayed prominently.

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.

6.9 Radio Hour

Council will host a regular radio segment on community radio station 88.3 Southern FM. The segment will be used to inform the community about Council decisions, policies, initiatives, activities, services and events and will be coordinated by the CCR Department.

7 Transition/Translation arrangements

The Policy will commence from 14 December 2020.

8 Review

The Policy will be reviewed within the first 12 months of each new term of Council or earlier as required.

9 Attachments

Attachment 1 – Kingston Your City Protocols

10. Related Documents

- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Local Government Act 1989
- Councillor Support & Reimbursement of Expenses Policy
- Information Privacy Act 2000
- Public Records Act 1973
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Employee Social Media Policy
- Aboriginal Policy
- Multicultural Action Plan
- Kingston Caretaker Policy

Attachment 1 – Kingston Your City Protocols

This document seeks to provide guidance to Councillors and Officers as to the application of the Media and External Communications Policy 2013 and should be read in conjunction with the Policy.

1. Protocols

The CEO, as Editor in Chief, has delegated management of Kingston Your City (KYC) to the Manager Communications and Public Affairs; however, if a dispute arises about the application of this Policy the final decision rests with the CEO.

1.1. Content

Content for KYC will be selected and prioritised on the following basis:

- Critical information needs of the community (i.e. legislative requirements, health and safety matters, major works affecting the community, changes to services, important time-specific information);
- Explanation of major advocacy campaigns, significant community issues and Council decisions;
- Information about Council policies, strategies, services, facilities and consultations;
- Information about Council events, projects and programs (ie leisure, arts and library programs); and
- Community news items (initiated by groups in Kingston).

In satisfying the above, officers will endeavor to achieve a balance of content relating to each ward over multiple editions.

Councillors can suggest story and photo ideas for KYC by contacting the Manager Communications and Public Affairs.

Any individual State or Federal politician should not appear more than once per edition (this includes a photograph and/or written mention) unless deemed necessary by the Editor in Chief to reasonably inform the community of important news, such as:

- Multiple funding announcements of significance;
- Premier, Prime Minister and Ministerial visits;
- Events of Local, State or National significance;
- To achieve equitable representation of Councillors in KYC (ie, where the photo features a Councillor/s and no other photos of them are available); or
- Large group shots (in excess of 15 people).

Officers will endeavor to provide equitable representation of Councillors in KYC across multiple editions. As a general rule, a Councillor will not appear in more than one general photo or article per issue, with the exception of:

- A significant advocacy campaign or community issue in which all Councillors have been invited to attend the photograph;
- A regular feature in KYC in which all Councillors will have an equitable opportunity to be featured over a defined period of time; and/or
- Photos taken at official Council events and launches which Councillors have attended in their role as Councillor.

This will be at the discretion of the Manager Communications and Public Affairs (taking into consideration the balance of photos in any given publication). The exception is the Mayor who can appear in more than one general photo due to the nature of his/her role as Mayor.

1.2. Feedback

Councillors will receive a draft copy of KYC a minimum of four days (which can include the weekend) prior to publication which is to serve as advanced notice of what is to be published.

Councillors can comment on the stories and photos that they appear in, as well as their own draft ward column. All comments on the draft are to be directed to the Manager Communications and Public Affairs prior to the deadline.

Corrections of a factual nature will be rectified. Suggested 'style' changes based on a Councillor's personal preference will be considered on merit; however, will not be changed if inconsistent with Council's official position or the style of the publication.

1.3. Councillor Ward Newsfeature

Each edition of KYC will feature a Councillor Ward News section. Each Councillor is featured with a photograph (headshot), contact details and a story of maximum 250 words.

Councillors are encouraged to write their own columns although assistance can be provided if the Councillor provides guidance on the topics to cover in advance of the ward column deadline. Councillors can choose not to have a column.

The aim of the Ward News columns is to provide Councillors with an opportunity to promote Council activities, events, initiatives, policies, projects, and consultation occurring within their own ward or the City, as well as discuss other community issues or invite feedback on such matters.

All content must be relevant and newsworthy to Council. The columns are not to be used for political purposes or to criticise a Council decision, another Councillor, Council Officers, external parties or the general community. Content must be accurate in that it is factually correct.

Councillor ward columns must be submitted by the ward column deadline in order to be distributed to all Councillors in the draft version of KYC. Any ward column not received by the ward column deadline will not feature in that edition and the space will be filled with 'what's on' ward-based content. No ward column will be left blank.

A fair and equitable interpretation of these protocols will be applied to all Councillor Ward Column submissions. KYC production deadlines cannot be altered or deferred to wait for any dispute resolution arising from the application of the protocols.