

Elected Members - Communication

Policy Objective

To provide guidance to Elected Members when engaging in communications, whether verbal, written, or electronic, as an Elected Member of the City of Belmont and, in some circumstances, a personal capacity.

This Policy is not intended to discourage nor unduly limit an Elected Member's personal expression or other communications; however, it identifies obligations and requirements for Elected Member's communications as governed by the local government statutory framework

Policy Detail

1. Spokespeople

Only the Mayor and the CEO (if authorised by the Mayor), can make official comments on behalf of the City of Belmont.

Where the Mayor is unavailable, the Deputy Mayor may act as the spokesperson.

It is respectful and courteous to the office of the Mayor to refrain from commenting publicly, particularly on recent decisions or issues, until such time as the Mayor has had opportunity to speak on behalf of the City.

2. Media Enquiries

All enquiries from the media for an official City of Belmont comment, whether made to an individual Council Member or employee, must be directed to the CEO or a person authorised by the CEO.

Information will be coordinated to support the Mayor or CEO (where authorised) to make an official response on behalf of the City.

3. Mayoral Letterhead

Mayoral letterhead will be available for the Mayor for responses to civic invitations, functions and mayoral business. If the Mayor receives correspondence relevant to the business of the City, the Mayor may use mayoral letterhead to acknowledge receipt and advise that the City will respond to the matter raised.

Where the Mayor is providing technical information to correspondents, the Chief Executive Officer will be requested to draft the correspondence or that section of the correspondence for the Mayor.

4. Recordkeeping

Correspondence and communications generated and received by Elected Members that relates to the business of the City is subject to the *State Records Act 2000*, the City's Records Management Policy and Recordkeeping Plan, and as such must be retained within

the City's corporate recordkeeping system. These records are also subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1992*

5. Email

Each Elected Member is provided with a City of Belmont email address and this email must be used for all electronic correspondence between the community, stakeholders and the Elected Member when it relates to the business of the City.

Each Elected Member will be provided with an e-mail signature block that must be applied to all emails.

6. Electronic Equipment

Electronic equipment, such as computers, tablets, mobile phones etc., utilised by any Elected Member, is subject to Council policy, the conditions of use and any service agreement between Elected Members and the City.

7. Social Media

The City of Belmont recognises that Elected Members may wish to use social media to promote the activities of the City to their communities online.

In this regard, Elected Members should be aware that statutory obligations apply to their social media platforms in the same way as any other form of communication.

Social media can be used as a positive avenue to:

- a) Increase resident's access to Council information.
- b) Increase the level of trust in Council.
- c) Reach targeted audiences on specific issues, events and programs.
- d) Provide effective, fast communication channels to a large population very quickly when needed.

Guidelines for using social media:

- e) Be credible, accurate, fair, thorough and transparent.
- f) Be respectful, cordial, honest and professional at all times.
- g) Be responsive and share information where appropriate.
- h) Behave with honesty and integrity.

Elected Members are personally responsible for the content they publish in a personal or professional capacity on any form of social media or digital platform, and in this regard must personally ensure that they understand their legal obligations.

As with other electronic communication channels, what is said on social media platforms is likely to be permanent and public.

When using social media in a private capacity Elected Members are equally bound by this Policy and its legal obligations, in certain circumstances, if they are identifiable as an Elected Member of the City of Belmont.

8. Local Government Elections

During a Local Government election period some communications including electronic and social media may fall into the category of 'election material'.

Election material is any material which is published in any format which is intended to affect the result of the election.

All election material must contain the name and the address of the person who authorises the material. Therefore, any communications which may in some way comment on candidates or Council during an election campaign must meet the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1995* and associated Regulations (*Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997*).

9. Communications General

Communications by Elected Members should:

- a) Only disclose publicly available information. No communications should disclose, without authorisation, confidential, private or legal matters.
- b) Remember that Council decision making is by majority. There may be decisions you disagree with, but once a decision is made, all communications including email and social media posts are to be consistent and respectful of this decision. Once Council has made a decision, you will recognise your collegiate duty and support that decision, irrespective of your own opinions.
- c) Ensure that no copyrighted or trademarked material is published without permission.
- d) Ensure that communications are not illegal, libelous, discriminatory, defamatory, abusive, or obscene.
- e) Ensure that communications do not infringe the City of Belmont Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.
- f) Any request for comment or communications in regard to a quasi-judicial decision made by Council can only be made by the City's official spokesperson.
- g) Not make any statements expressing an opinion on matters before Council which may indicate bias or a predetermined voting position.
- h) Adhere to the City of Belmont's Customer Service Charter by responding to requests within 10 normal working days and complaints within five days. If a request cannot be finalised within 10 normal working days, notification of the reasons why and the expected timeframe for completion is required.
- i) Provide relevant, accurate, fair and thorough information.
- j) Create 'engagement guidelines' for your social media platforms to ensure a framework is in place to manage your social media network. Refer to City of Belmont's Facebook Engagement Guidelines as an example.
- k) Ensure regular monitoring of social media account/s to ensure adherence to engagement guidelines.
- l) Elected Members must not use personal accounts to make adverse comments about the Council or its programs, services, projects, other Elected Members, employees, volunteers, community members or decisions.

Non-compliance with this Policy by Elected Members will be managed through the relevant Code of Conduct and disciplinary processes.

Reference/Associated Documents

Local Government Act 1995

Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996

Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997

Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021

State Records Act 2000

Freedom of Information Act 1992

Elected Member Event Approval Request Form

Elected Members and CEO Gift Disclosure Form

City of Belmont Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates

Reference to Internal Procedure

WI – Communications

Definitions

‘CEO’ means the Chief Executive Officer of the City.

‘City’ means the City of Belmont.

‘Code of Conduct’ means the Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.

‘Communications’ means any comments made verbally or in writing.

‘Digital/ Electronic communications’ means communications in a digital environment which may include email, e-newsletters, social media, blogs, vlogs website and others.

‘Media’ means a media or news organisation including print, broadcast or online.

‘Social media’ means a social networking channel that enable users to create and share information digitally.

This Policy is supported by:		
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