

Councillor Media and Civic Representation Protocol

Description of policy	The Councillor Media and Civic Representation Protocol provides a set of understandings on the individual and collective roles and responsibilities of Councillors. The Protocol guides Councillors in the conduct of their role, and covers processes supporting Shire representation roles of Councillors.
Policy applies to	<input type="checkbox"/> Councillors, CEO, EMT and Communications and Engagement Team
Policy category	<input type="checkbox"/> Revised Policy
Description of revision and Version Number	Version Number: 01 DOC/22/16358

Approved by	Council
Approval date	26 April 2022
Effective date	26 April 2022
Date of last revision	
Date of next review*	29 April 2025

*Unless replaced, this policy will still apply beyond the review date.

Related legislation, standards and guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>• Councillor Code of Conduct 2020
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1. Policy Statement

Nillumbik Shire Council recognises the important role of both traditional media, social media and civil representation in shaping the community's perception and understanding of Council's decisions, services, events and activities.

2. Purpose / Objectives

Opportunities for the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillors to represent the Shire will arise through a range of mechanisms including media activity, event attendance and contribution to internal and external publications.

The Councillor Media and Civic Representation Protocol (the Protocol) provides a set of understandings on the individual and collective roles and responsibilities of Councillors. The Protocol guides Councillors in the conduct of their role, interaction with each other and covers processes supporting representation roles of Councillors.

The objectives of the Protocol are to:

- To ensure clear and consistent messages are communicated from Council.
- To establish a positive profile for Council as an authoritative and responsible governing body.
- To ensure the appropriate delegation for Council's media and official social media comment.
- To establish the processes by which opportunities regarding media commentary and event attendance will be progressed and allocated.
- To ensure a centralised system of issues management.

3. Scope

The Protocol:

- seeks to complement the function and conduct expectations of Councillors as described in the *Local Government Act 2020*.
- recognises the role of Mayor as principal spokesperson for Council as described in the *Local Government Act 2020*.

The commitment by Councillors to the expectations in the Protocol is embedded in the Councillor Code of Conduct 2020.

4. Media and Social Media

The Mayor is the principal spokesperson for the Council in accordance with Section 18 of the *Local Government Act 2020*. The Mayor is the most appropriate person to provide official comment to the media and on Council's social media accounts on behalf of Council on matters of public interest, particularly those which are political, controversial or sensitive in nature.

The Mayor may delegate authority to an appropriate Councillor, or the CEO, to make an official comment on behalf of the Council, on a Ward or Advisory Committee.

The Mayor is the official spokesperson for all policy matters that broadly affect the Nillumbik community including:

- State-wide political issues affecting local government
- Contentious local issues that impact the community that do not relate directly to the business of Council but to the representation of the community
- Issues pertaining to policy and Council decisions
- Issues relating to the strategic direction of Council

While it is recognised that some Councillors may not have supported the decision, it is highly desirable that Councillors do not seek to undermine or publicly denigrate the decision. Once Council has made a decision, it becomes the collective decision of Council.

If the Mayor does not wish to publicly support the adopted/agreed position of the Council he/she should delegate the media spokesperson role to the Deputy Mayor, another Councillor or to the CEO in that instance.

The Protocol acknowledges that the resources of the Communications and Engagement Team will be made available to assist the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Councillors and Chief Executive Officer (or delegate) in any liaison with, or commentary to, media outlets on matters of Council policy, decisions or operations.

Personal social media accounts need a clear statement that all views expressed on that account are that of the individual Councillor and not that of the Council. For example:

'These are my individual views and opinions and do not represent the view of the elected Council or the organisation'.

If a Councillor believes that their accountability to constituents requires an expression of dissent this should be done thoughtfully, with respect and in accordance with the Councillor Code of Conduct. While differences of opinion will occur, Councillors must bear in mind that post-decision dissent has the potential to compromise Council's ability as a collective, to deliver on its main aims to the community.

The CEO and the Executive Manager Governance, Communications and Engagement are the appropriate people to comment on all other operational matters pertaining to Nillumbik Shire Council as an organisation, including:

- Staffing and structure of the organisation
- Corporate issues relating to service provision or the day-to-day business of Council

The CEO may delegate authority to a Council officer, if appropriate.

5. Media Releases

All media releases will quote the Mayor or, in the case of Ward or Advisory Committee, another Councillor where appropriate. The Mayor may choose to delegate comment to another Councillor or the CEO.

Drafts of media releases will be forwarded to Managers for first round approval or amendments. The Mayor/Councillors will only approve all comments attributed to them. The CEO/Executives will approve the factual content of the release.

All media releases will receive final approval for distribution by the CEO and/or Executives.

Where a specific comment is required from a Council officer, the Mayor or relevant Councillor will also have an opportunity to provide a comment. Media releases will be issued to the media in line with deadline.

All media releases are available on Council's website www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au.

6. Media Enquiries

The Communications and Advocacy Lead has regular contact with the local media and needs to be familiar with any issues or stories that are running or likely to run.

In all circumstances, media enquiries should be directed to the Communications and Advocacy Lead.

If a media representative contacts a Councillor, the Councillor should take details and inform the caller that all enquiries must be handled by the Communications and Advocacy Lead. Details about the issues are then to be provided to the Communications and Advocacy Lead.

The Communications and Advocacy Lead will provide appropriate advice on a media enquiry and will draft official responses and comment. If these responses are attributed to the Mayor or any Councillor, they will have final approval of those words.

Media enquiries from the Communications and Engagement Unit must be dealt with as a priority, relative to the deadline provided.

The Communications and Advocacy Lead is the 24 hour media contact. All media inquiries should be directed to the Lead on 0439 682 753.

7. Social Media Procedures

Social media is defined in the Protocol as digital spaces where people may comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload and share content, including, but not limited to:

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn)
- Blogs, including personal and corporate blogs, and media blogs
- Bulletin boards
- Citizen journalism and news sites
- Forums and discussion boards
- Instant messaging facilities
- Microblogging sites (e.g. Twitter)
- Wikis and online collaborations (e.g. Wikipedia)
- Podcasts
- Video and photo sharing sites (e.g. Flickr, YouTube)
- Video podcasts
- Any other websites (including social bookmarking sites) that allows individuals to use simple publishing tools or new technologies emerging from the digital environment.

It is not possible to include an exhaustive list of the specific sites or kinds of online and social media outlets, however, the absence of a reference to a particular site or kind of online media activity does not limit the application of these guidelines.

Individual Councillors' can have online and social media channels included in their Councillor contact details (on Council's corporate website, in Nillumbik News, e-News and individual Councillor business cards) if these channels are used only in their role as a Councillor and not for private or business purposes.

If a Councillor is contacted by the media on social network sites on matters that relate to Nillumbik Shire Council, Councillors are able to seek advice from the Communications and Advocacy Lead.

The administration can provide training opportunities, general guidance and advice around appropriate use but will not draft or edit Councillors' social media posts. Councillors are free to seek clarification on specific matters via the CEO or EMT.

8. External Publications

Opportunities to contribute to publications produced by external sources shall be referred to the Mayor or Councillors as appropriate to Ward or that of the Mayor as principal spokesperson. Appropriate support will be provided where the subject matter has a strong alignment with Council goals, policies and objectives.

9. Representing the Shire at events, functions and delegations (official and unofficial)

The Mayor is the principal representative of Council and all Councillors support the Mayor.

The Deputy Mayor will deputise for the Mayor at a function or event where the Mayor is unable to attend. Where the Deputy Mayor cannot attend, the Mayor will nominate another Councillor taking into consideration whether the function is associated with a Councillor's ward and whether the function is associated with a group or committee to which a Councillor has been appointed as Council's representative.

In the event of the Mayor delegating attendance of a function to a Councillor, the CEO's office will communicate with the nominated Councillor to ensure that the Councillor is aware of the relevant issues and is prepared for the function.

Where a Councillor has played a key role in development of a Council organised or supported event and would like the opportunity to represent the Shire at that event, the Councillor should advise the Councillor/s otherwise entitled to be the representative, and either request that the speaking opportunity be passed on, or that arrangements otherwise be made to include the Councillor in the formal proceedings of the event.

Should a Councillor be directly approached by a party external to Council to participate in events, functions and activities important or relevant to Nillumbik (this includes photo opportunities), the request must be referred to the Mayor, who in turn will notify the CEO and Executive Manager Governance Communications and Engagement.

If the Mayor is unavailable and the opportunity is transferable, the opportunity will be referred to the Deputy Mayor. If unavailable, the Mayor will refer to another Councillor and may take into account Wards, positions on advisory committees and external organisations, areas of expertise and interest expressed by Councillors.

To ensure that all Councillors are kept informed, opportunities for representation by Councillors, the Chief Executive Officer and Executives will be communicated through a Corporate Calendar system which provides full details of opportunities and background information to maximize benefits from Council involvement.

10. Use of Digital Imagery

All official Nillumbik Shire Council images and footage remains the copyright of the Administration, are maintained by the Administration for official use and meets Privacy and Data Protection Act requirements.

Official council images can be made available to Councillors upon request for Council business-related matters. Images can be used on social media channels that are specifically established for Councillors in their capacity as an elected representative. Care must be taken during Caretaker period in relation to Council images that have been provided to Councillors.

Images shared online by Councillors in a private capacity must in no way bring Nillumbik Shire Council, its employees, volunteers, contractors or visitors into disrepute.

11. Communications and Engagement Team Support

The Communications and Engagement Team will support the spokesperson in undertaking their role and in generating and responding to media.

A member of the Communications and Engagement Team will generally accompany the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillors, if required, to media opportunities or events where a media spokesperson role is likely.

The Communications and Engagement Team will also provide briefing notes and other preparatory material should a Council spokesperson (Mayor, Councillor or designated Officer) be required to conduct a media interview on a Council-related matter.

While Councillors are entitled to speak to the media on any topic, if they are not acting as the authorised spokesperson on Council matters or positions as described in this protocol, the Communications and Engagement Team's resources and assistance are not available to them.