

**Agenda**

**Unscheduled Council Meeting**

Tuesday 25 February 2025 at 6pm

Council Chamber,

25 Ferres Boulevard, South Morang

Councillors

Cr Aidan McLindon, Mayor Kirrip Ward

Cr Daniela Zinni, Deputy Mayor Bundoora Ward

Cr Nic Brooks Thomastown Ward

Cr Blair Colwell Mill Park Ward

Cr Lawrie Cox Ganbul Gulinj Ward

Cr Deb Gunn Painted Hills Ward

Cr Stevan Kozmevski Lalor Ward

Cr Jarrod Lappin Mernda Ward

Cr David Lenberg Epping Ward

Cr Christine Stow North Ward

Cr Martin Taylor South Morang Ward

Executive Leadership Team

Craig Lloyd Chief Executive Officer

Emma Appleton Director Planning & Development

Agata Chmielewski Director Community Wellbeing

Sarah Renner Director Customer & Corporate Services

Debbie Wood Director Infrastructure & Environment

Jacinta Stevens Executive Manager Office of Council & CEO

Order of Business

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**1 Opening**

**1.1 Meeting Opening and Introductions**

The Mayor, Cr Aidan McLindon will open the meeting and introduce the Councillors and Chief Executive Officer:

Cr Daniela Zinni, Deputy Mayor

Cr Nic Brooks

Cr Blair Colwell

Cr Lawrie Cox

Cr Deb Gunn

Cr Stevan Kozmevski

Cr Jarrod Lappin

Cr David Lenberg

Cr Christine Stow

Cr Martin Taylor

Craig Lloyd, *Chief Executive Officer*

The Chief Executive Officer, Craig Lloyd will introduce members of the Executive Leadership Team:

Emma Appleton, *Director Planning and Development;*

Agata Chmielewski, *Director Community Wellbeing;*

Sarah Renner, *Director Corporate and Customer Services;*

Debbie Wood, *Director Infrastructure and Environment; and*

Jacinta Stevens, *Executive Manager Office of Council and CEO*.

**1.2 Apologies**

**1.3 Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners Statement**

The Mayor will read the following statement:

*“On behalf of Council, I recognise the rich Aboriginal heritage of this country and acknowledge the Wurundjeri Willum Clan and Taungurung People as the Traditional Owners of lands within the City of Whittlesea.*

*I would also like to acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging.”*

**1.4 Diversity and Good Governance Statement**

The Mayor will read the following statement:

*“At the City of Whittlesea we are proud of our diversity and the many cultures, faiths and beliefs that make up our community. We strive to be an inclusive welcoming City that fosters active participation, wellbeing and connection to each other and this land. We commit as a Council to making informed decisions to benefit the people of the City of Whittlesea now and into the future, to support our community’s vision of A Place For All.*”

**2 Declarations of Conflict of Interest**

**3 Officers' Reports**

3.1 Draft Election Period Policy

**3.1 Draft Election Period Policy**

**Director/Executive Manager:** Executive Manager Office of Council & CEO

**Report Author:** Executive Manager Office of Council & CEO

# Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek Council’s consideration and endorsement of the amendments made to the Election Period Policy (**Policy**) leading up to the impending Federal Election.

The amendments made to the Policy, as outlined in the Background/Key Information section of this report, are primarily enhancements to strengthen the obligations of Council officers should they nominate as a candidate in any local, state or federal election.

If Council resolve to adopt the draft Policy officers will commence community consultation seeking feedback between the period 26 February 2025 and 12 March 2025 in accordance with Council’s Community Engagement Policy.

# Officers’ Recommendation

**THAT Council:**

1. **Resolve to adopt and release the draft Election Period Policy (Policy) at Attachment 1 for community feedback between the period 26 February 2025 and 12 March 2025 via Council’s Engage page.**
2. **Note following the community feedback period, a subsequent report will be presented to Council seeking formal adoption of the Policy.**

# Background / Key Information

Section 69 of the *Local Government Act 2020* requires an Election Period Policy (**Policy**)to be established and incorporated in Council’s Governance Rules. The proposed amendments to the Policy have no impact on any aspect of the Governance Rules.

To ensure prospective candidates and nominated candidates, whether a Councillor or Council officer, maintain integrity leading up to and during an election, the draft Policy has been slightly amended to strengthen the requirements, primarily for any officers considering candidacy. The draft Policy also provides for minor administrative updates.

An example of amendments made to the Policy are:

* Councillors are prohibited from promoting their election campaign or individual policy positions during any Council meeting.
* Council officers are prohibited from approaching Councillors leading up to an election in attempt to gain an advantage or benefit in exchange for a formal decision to be made by the Council.
* A Councillor or Council officer must not place any election materials on or in any Council owned or operated facility or land.
* A Council officer will not use their position or their access to other Council officers and resources to gain media attention in support of an election campaign.

A markup version of the draft Policy is attached for Council’s consideration.

# Alignment to Community Plan, Policies or Strategies

Alignment to Whittlesea 2040 and Community Plan 2021-2025:

**High Performing Organisation**

We engage effectively with the community, to deliver efficient and effective services and initiatives, and to make decisions in the best interest of our community and deliver value to our community.

# Considerations of *Local Government Act (2020)* Principles

Financial Management

There are no costs associated with amending the Policy.

Community Consultation and Engagement

In accordance with Council’s Community Engagement Policy, officers will seek community feedback on the draft Policy during the period 26 February to 12 March 2025.

# Other Principles for Consideration

**Overarching Governance Principles and Supporting Principles**

(a) Council decisions are to be made and actions taken in accordance with the relevant law.

(b) Priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations.

(i) The transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is to be ensured.

Public Transparency Principles

(a) Council decision making processes must be transparent except when the Council is dealing with information that is confidential by virtue of the *Local Government Act* or any other Act.

(b) Council information must be publicly available unless—

(i) the information is confidential by virtue of the *Local Government Act* or any other Act; or

(ii) public availability of the information would be contrary to the public interest.

(c) Council information must be understandable and accessible to members of the municipal community.

(d) Public awareness of the availability of Council information must be facilitated.

# Council Policy Considerations

Environmental Sustainability Considerations

No implications.

Social, Cultural and Health

No implications.

Economic

No implications.

**Legal, Resource and Strategic Risk Implications**

Seeking community feedback on the draft Policy complies with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020.*

# Implementation Strategy

Communication

The draft Policy will be made available for community feedback via Council’s Engage page.

Critical Dates

It is proposed that Council adopt the final Policy prior to the upcoming Federal Election.

# Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Under Section 130 of the *Local Government Act 2020* officers providing advice to Council are required to disclose any conflict of interest they have in a matter and explain the nature of the conflict.

# Attachments

1. Draft Election Period Policy February 2025 [**3.1.1** - 11 pages]

3.2 Councillor Social Media Policy

**3.2 Councillor Social Media Policy**

**Director/Executive Manager:** Executive Manager Office of Council & CEO

**Report Author:** Manager Communications & Engagement

**In Attendance:** Manager Communications & Engagement

# Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek Council’s endorsement for the adoption of a new Councillor Social Media Policy that will assist Councillors in effectively communicating with the City of Whittlesea community.

As part of recent local government reforms it was recommended that councils adopt a Councillor Social Media Policy to ensure Councillors can confidently participate in social media if they choose to, manage and mitigate risks associated with the channel and ensure adherence to the requirements of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct.

The Policy which provides guidance on how to use social media effectively to maximise community engagement, while balancing community expectations and reputational risk.

This Policy is based on the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) model Councillor Social Media Policy.

# Officers’ Recommendation

**THAT Council endorse the Councillor Social Media Policy.**

# Background / Key Information

Social media can be a powerful tool to maintain connections between Councillors and members of the public.

The Councillor Social Media Policy provides guidance on its appropriate use and specific provisions which must be observed to ensure compliance with the Model Councillor Code of Conduct which requires Councillors act with integrity, exercise reasonable care and diligence and take reasonable steps to avoid any action which many diminish the public’s trust and confidence in the integrity of local government and or bring discredit upon the Council.

Used well, social media can be used by Councillors to:

* strengthen community engagement;
* foster transparency and trust;
* provide a trusted voice in the social media environment;
* distinguish the role of the individual Councillor from that of the Council;
* provide another avenue to contact the Councillor directly; and
* enable Councillors to hear from members of the community that may otherwise be difficult to reach.

Councillor social media use also presents risks for Councillors, including:

* potential ambiguity as to whether you are speaking as an individual or on behalf of Council;
* exposure to trolling, cyberbullying and other abusive behaviour;
* the creation of a platform for the dissemination of misinformation;
* the creation of an expectation about the 24/7 availability of a Councillor;
* a significant administrative workload associated with managing a platform;
* the risk of inadvertently disclosing confidential information; and
* an exposure to legal liability.

This policy provides guidance to minimise and mitigate these risks.

# Alignment to Community Plan, Policies or Strategies

Alignment to Whittlesea 2040 and Community Plan 2021-2025:

**Connected Communities**

We work to foster and inclusive, healthy, safe and welcoming community where all ways of life are celebrated and supported.

Used effectively social media can be a useful tool foster communication between councillors and the community.

# Considerations of *Local Government Act (2020)* Principles

Community Consultation and Engagement

The Policy supports Councillors to safely connect and engage with their local community through online platforms.

# Other Principles for Consideration

**Overarching Governance Principles and Supporting Principles**

(i) The transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is to be ensured.

Public Transparency Principles

(b) Council information must be publicly available unless—

(i) the information is confidential by virtue of the *Local Government Act* or any other Act; or

(ii) public availability of the information would be contrary to the public interest.

(c) Council information must be understandable and accessible to members of the municipal community.

# Council Policy Considerations

Environmental Sustainability Considerations

Connecting online is an environmentally sustainable alternative to traditional paper-based communication means.

Social, Cultural and Health

Used effectively social media can be a useful tool to foster communication between Council and Community.

Economic

No implications.

**Legal, Resource and Strategic Risk Implications**

This Policy is to be read in conjunction with the Model Councillor Code of Conduct, the Councillor Communications Policy, the Election Period Policy and the *Local Government Act, 2020.*

# Implementation Strategy

Communication

The endorsed Policies will be uploaded to the City of Whittlesea’s website to ensure public transparency.

# Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Under Section 130 of the *Local Government Act 2020*officers providing advice to Council are required to disclose any conflict of interest they have in a matter and explain the nature of the conflict.

The Responsible Officer reviewing this report, having made enquiries with relevant members of staff, reports that no disclosable interests have been raised in relation to this report.

# Attachments

1. Councillor Social Media Policy [**3.2.1** - 8 pages]

3.3 Updated Councillor Communications Policy

**3.3 Updated Councillor Communications Policy**

**Director/Executive Manager:** Executive Manager Office of Council & CEO

**Report Author:** Manager Communications & Engagement

**In Attendance:** Manager Communications & Engagement

# Executive Summary

The Councillor Communication Policy supports the delivery of exemplary external communications with the diverse City of Whittlesea community through media and communication channels.

The Policy articulates the roles of Mayor, Councillors, CEO, members of the executive, the Public Affairs Department and Council staff in the delivery of impactful external communications to effectively engage the City of Whittlesea community.

The Policy is underpinned by principles of accessibility, inclusivity, transparency, timeliness, responsiveness and accuracy.

The Councillor Communication Policy was adopted by Council on 19 September 2023 and articulates important information about the roles and responsibilities in relation to spokespeople and the use of Council’s external communication channels.

Since that time there have been some changes to the state legislative framework, including the Model Councillor Code of Conduct, and amendments to the *Local Government Act.* Additionally, as part of recent local government reforms it was recommended that councils adopt a Councillor Social Media Policy to ensure Councillors can confidently choose to participate in social media while still adhering to the requirements of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct.

As a result, the Councillor Communication Policy has been updated to reflect both the legislative changes and the recommendations in the Councillor Social Media Policy.

This report seeks Council endorsement for the updated Councillor Communications Policy.

# Officers’ Recommendation

**THAT Council endorse the update to the Councillor Communications Policy.**

# Background / Key Information

The Councillor Communications Policy is underpinned by the following principles:

* the City of Whittlesea commits to providing information that is accurate, transparent, and responsive through public forums and communication channels;
* a broad mix of communication channels will be utilised to inform the community of Council decisions, services, events, initiatives and foster civic pride and participation;
* communication will be inclusive, tailored for the diverse community of Whittlesea, and presented in an accessible format;
* external communication will demonstrate a strategic approach encompassing audience, desired outcomes, efficacy of channels, community impact, risk, government relations, reputation management and legal considerations; and
* external communication will not be used for the promotion of individual Councillors or political parties or affiliations for political advantage.

Minor changes have been made to the Councillor Communications Policy to ensure that it reflects best practice and current information and advice to enable councillors to communicate effectively with the City of Whittlesea community.

These changes reflect changes to the legislative framework and include:

* updates to definitions;
* ensuring clarity around the intent of media responses to ensure the best interests of Council;
* clarification about the role of spokesperson; and
* detailed advice on the use of social media has been removed as it is now included in the Councillor Social Media Policy.

# Alignment to Community Plan, Policies or Strategies

Alignment to Whittlesea 2040 and Community Plan 2021-2025:

**Connected Communities**

We work to foster and inclusive, healthy, safe and welcoming community where all ways of life are celebrated and supported.

**High Performing Organisation**

We engage effectively with the community, to deliver efficient and effective services and initiatives, and to make decisions in the best interest of our community and deliver value to our community.

# Considerations of *Local Government Act (2020)* Principles

Community Consultation and Engagement

The Policy supports Councillors to safely connect and engage with their local community.

# Other Principles for Consideration

**Overarching Governance Principles and Supporting Principles**

(i) The transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is to be ensured.

Public Transparency Principles

(b) Council information must be publicly available unless—

(i) the information is confidential by virtue of the *Local Government Act* or any other Act; or

(ii) public availability of the information would be contrary to the public interest.

(c) Council information must be understandable and accessible to members of the municipal community.

# Council Policy Considerations

Environmental Sustainability Considerations

Council’s communication activities support our W2040 goal of a sustainable environment by seeking to reduce printed materials where possible and considering the environmental impact of any communication activities.

Social, Cultural and Health

Council’s communications activities support our W2040 connected community goal through the delivery of open, accessible and inclusive communications. Ensuring the community is informed and engaged is essential to building trust, increasing community connectedness and encourage participation in the local community.

Economic

Council’s communication activities support our W2040 goal of a strong local economy by informing and connecting the community with business and encouraging local spending and investment.

**Legal, Resource and Strategic Risk Implications**

The Councillor Communications Policy is to be read in conjunction with the Model Councillor Code of Conduct, the Councillor Social Media Policy, the Election Period Policy and the *Local Government Act, 2020.*

# Implementation Strategy

Communication

The updated Policy will be uploaded to the City of Whittlesea’s website to ensure public transparency.

# Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Under Section 130 of the *Local Government Act 2020*officers providing advice to Council are required to disclose any conflict of interest they have in a matter and explain the nature of the conflict.

The Responsible Officer reviewing this report, having made enquiries with relevant members of staff, reports that no disclosable interests have been raised in relation to this report.

# Attachments

1. Updated Councillor Communications Policy [**3.3.1** - 7 pages]

**4 Urgent Business**

**5 Confidential Business**

Under section 66(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020* a meeting considering confidential information may be closed to the public. Pursuant to sections 3(1) and 66(5) of the *Local Government Act 2020*.

# Recommendation

**THAT the Chair recommends that the meeting be closed to the public for the purpose of considering details relating to the following confidential matters in accordance with Section 66(2)(a) of the *Local Government Act 2020* as detailed.**

**6 Closure**