

	COUNCIL POLICY POLITICAL NEUTRALITY AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS	Version No:	1
		Issued:	19 September 2023
		Next Review:	September 2027

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this Political Neutrality and Government Relations Policy is to outline Council's approach to political and government relationships.

This Policy is established to ensure that the activities and decisions of the City of Mount Gambier are conducted in a manner that upholds the principles of political neutrality, impartiality, and fairness. This policy aims to prevent the council from being influenced by partisan politics and to maintain public trust and confidence in the council's actions.

1.2. Scope

This policy applies to all council employees, elected representatives, and volunteers.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

The City of Mount Gambier is apolitical and will work in a bipartisan way to progress the objectives of the community and Council.

Council is committed to maintaining political neutrality and ensuring that its activities, decisions, and communications are conducted in a manner that does not favour, endorse, or align with any political party, individual candidate, or political ideology. The council remains dedicated to serving the best interests of the community without bias or discrimination.

3. DEVELOPING COUNCIL'S ADVOCACY POSITION

Advocacy on behalf of the community by Council will be informed by considered policy and by resolutions of Council. This includes Council's strategic plan and other strategic management documents.

Council has also developed a "Partnership Priorities and Advocacy" document which will be updated regularly, to highlight specific objectives or issues which Council wishes to work on in partnership with government, with policy makers or other stakeholders. This document provides a basis for advocacy with Members of Parliament, and will also be used during State and Federal elections to seek policy or financial commitments.

In addition to the "Partnership Priorities and Advocacy" document, Council will develop other policies or positions on matters of importance to our local community. These may be captured in policy documents or by way of report to Council resulting in a Council resolution. These may also be used to advocate with Government or other Members of State and Federal government.

Council notes that the Mayor and CEO are Council's official spokespersons on all matters.

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4. GUIDELINES

4.1 Meetings with Members of Parliament

The Council may resolve from time to time to arrange meetings with Members of Parliament. The Mayor is also empowered to arrange meetings with Members of the State or Federal Parliament (and their attendees) for the purposes of pursuing specific or general matters that will further the causes of Council or the wider community. These may be initiated by the Council, the Mayor or at the request of Members of Parliament.

At the Mayor's discretion, meetings may include invitations to other Members of Council, the CEO or other senior Council officers. Such meetings can be held regardless of whether the relevant politician is within the Government of the day, or Independent or in Opposition. Where time permits, the Mayor will arrange for Councillors to be advised in advance of such meetings and the intended subjects for discussion.

A record of the occurrence of these meetings will be made within the Mayoral report, which is tabled on a monthly basis at the Ordinary Council meeting.

Council will also extend an invitation to Member of Parliament for the seat of Barker (Federal) or Mount Gambier (State) and those in the Senate (Federal) or Legislative Council (State) who live within the City of Mount Gambier or surrounds to meet on a regular basis with Councillors at a workshop or information briefing.

The purpose of these discussions is to hear from Members of Parliament about current matters of interest to Mount Gambier, to raise advocacy issues and to foster positive working relationships for the betterment of the region. Such workshops or information briefings will generally be open to the community, unless the Member of Parliament requests that it be held in closed/confidential for particular topics and provides the reasons for such confidentiality. Where captured by section 90A confidentiality will be only on grounds allowed under the Local Government Act section 90(3).

4.2 Deputations to Federal or State Members

The Council may resolve to undertake a Deputation to Members of Parliament. The Mayor is also empowered to arrange deputations (representing the Council) with Members of the State or Federal Parliament, Ministers etc. and/or their advisers to enable Council to pursue issues of importance to Council or the wider community. At the Mayor's discretion, other Members of Council, the CEO or other senior Council officers may form part of any deputation depending on the issue at hand and the location.

A record of the occurrence of these meetings will be made within the Mayoral report, which is tabled on a monthly basis at the Ordinary Council meeting or by way of specific report to Council.

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4.3 Joint advocacy

The Mayor may advocate alongside local Members of Parliament for issues which are reflective of Council's existing advocacy or policy positions. This may be advocating in the media or directly with Government, Government Departments or other stakeholders. Such instances may then also be reported from time to time in Council's official documents, such as the Annual Report.

4.4 Written submissions and correspondence

The Mayor and CEO are empowered to correspond with Members of State or Federal Parliament to pursue issues of importance to Council and the community.

This may include submissions to various Parliamentary Committees or Enquiries where those matters have already been considered by Council and Council's position is agreed.

4.5 Acknowledgement of Members of Parliament or Funding from Government

There will be certain circumstances when Council will formally and informally acknowledge working relationships with Members of Parliament and with the relevant Government or Government agency. This will include meeting requirements of grant funding agreements where the funder contributions must be acknowledged. Where a local Member of Parliament has advocated on behalf of Council or the community, acknowledgement of that effort may be made by the Mayor on behalf of Council in response to media enquiries or in such public forums (including Council meetings) or Council documents (such as the Annual Report) as are appropriate.

4.6 Membership of Political Parties

In accordance with sections 65 and 66 and Schedule 3 of the Local Government Act, SA, any membership of a political party must be declared on Councillor's Primary and Ordinary Returns. Councillors are also required to provide declarations regarding donations as per the Local Government (Elections) Act 1999 and Regulations.

Council Members commit to considering any issue before Council on its merits and not on the basis of any political affiliation.

4.7 Non-Endorsement of Political Entities and Candidates

The Mayor and Councillors will not provide testimonials or endorsements for political candidates for the purposes of preselection or during Elections on behalf of Council.

The council and its elected members, staff members, and volunteers shall refrain from endorsing, promoting, or engaging in activities that directly or indirectly endorse political parties, candidates, or ideologies in the conduct of official council duties.

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If elected members, staff members, and volunteers participate in such activities in a private context, they should make clear they do so as private citizens and consider and address any conflict of interest or perceptions of bias that might arise from such activity.

4.8 Council Resources and Facilities

Council resources, facilities, and communication channels (including social media platforms, official websites, and public spaces) shall not be utilised to express personal political opinions or promote political entities.

4.9 Elected Members

Elected members shall exercise their duties in a manner consistent with the council's political neutrality policy. While they are entitled to their personal political beliefs, they shall not use their position or resources to further their personal political agendas.

Elected Members may from time to time engage with or make enquiry of Members of Parliament, but are not doing so as the official spokesperson of Council, unless delegated to do so by the Council or Mayor.

4.10 Public Communications

All official communications from the council, including press releases, newsletters, engagement on policy or programs and public statements, shall strictly focus on council matters, community services, projects, and events. They shall not contain any political endorsements or opinions.

4.11 Council Meetings and Events

Council meetings, workshops, and events shall be conducted in a non-partisan manner, ensuring that all participants have an equal opportunity to express their opinions and contribute to discussions without fear of political bias.

4.12 Employee Conduct

Council employees shall conduct themselves in a politically neutral manner while on duty. Their personal political beliefs shall not influence their interactions with the public, decision-making processes, or allocation of resources.

4.13 Operational matters

Members of Parliament will from time to time contact Council's Administration on operational matters (such a local constituent issues, contractual matters, FOI requests and the like) The CEO will respond to these requests as they are operational in nature.

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5. REVIEW & EVALUATION

This Policy is scheduled for review by Council in September 2027 however, will be reviewed as required by any legislative changes which may occur.

6. AVAILABILITY OF POLICY

This Policy will be available for inspection at Council's principal office during ordinary business hours and on the Council's website www.mountgambier.sa.gov.au. Copies will also be provided to interested members of the community upon request, and upon payment of a fee in accordance with Council's Schedule of Fees and Charges.

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Applicable Legislation:	
Reference: Strategic Plan – Beyond 2015	
Related Policies:	Behavioural Management Policy Medial Statements on behalf of Council Visits by Parliamentary Governmental Representatives
Related Procedures:	
Related Documents:	

DOCUMENT DETAILS

Responsibility:	General Manager Corporate and Regulatory Services
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