

Title:	Communication Policy
Type:	Council
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Attachments:	N/A

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to provide direction for Council's approach to its communication, including the use of communication tools and interactions with media. The Policy aims to ensure

- Council communicates effectively across a range of platforms
- consistency in quality, accuracy and appropriateness of external communication
- transparency of communication between Council and the community

2. Rationale

Council's reputation in the community is linked to the quality of its communication with the community. Inadequate, inaccurate or poorly-judged communication can damage the community's trust and confidence in Council's activities, decisions and effectiveness. Importantly, Council's external communication underpins its efforts to enhance community engagement across the Shire, and to ensure the transparency of Council's decisions and activities.

To be effective, Council's approach to communicating must be flexible and responsive. Council must use a diverse range of platforms to meet our community's different communication needs and preferences, while also ensuring best value for money.

3. Scope

This Policy applies to

- representatives of Council (at all times and for all forms of communication) about Council's business, services, role or staff, councillors, contractors and volunteers
- all media and platforms by which Council communicates, including its social media channels

This Policy does not apply to

- representatives of Council's private use of social media, where no reference is made or could be perceived to have been made, to Murrindindi Shire Council or representatives of Council, Council policies, practices or services, suppliers or other stakeholders.
 - However, Council's Codes of Conduct apply to all online activities at all times.

4. Definitions

Reference Term	Definition
Council Staff	Includes employees, contractors (agencies and individuals who provide services to the Council) volunteers and contractors appointed to undertake Council business.
Representatives of Council	Councillors and all Council staff (as defined above)
Media	Includes print, radio, television, video, social media, websites and other online channels.

Responsible Officer: Manager Customer Experience

24 June 2020

TRIM Reference: 20/37341

Reference Term	Definition
Digital media	Digitised content that can be transmitted or broadcast via the internet, including text, images, audio, video, live-streamed content, graphics, online surveys and e-newsletters. Digital media also include platforms which can hold or transmit digitised content, including websites and social media.
Social Media	Any web-based or mobile technology to which people may add comment, contribute, create, forward, link, tag, post, upload and share digital or other content.
Intellectual Property	Describes the ownership of works that are a result of creativity and knowledge and are often intangible in nature, including trademarks, designs, logos, stories, songs or photos.
Printed Media (regardless of whether despatched in digitised form or otherwise)	Includes flyers, posters, bulk direct mailouts, letters, advertising, speeches, Frequently Asked Questions, surveys, forms, media releases, rates and animal registration notices, annual reports, council plans, articles, invitations, notices to the public, signage, banners, programs and calendars of events.

5. Policy

5.1 Communication Principles

Council's external communication will be guided by the following principles:

- We will keep the community informed about what we are doing, give the community opportunities to engage in two-way conversation with us and the ability to participate meaningfully in the democratic process
- Our communication will be
 - inclusive and pleasant in tone
 - clear and unambiguous through use of plain language
 - free from jargon and acronyms
 - consistent in quality and style
- We will be responsive to our community through timely communication, by listening and by engaging with our communities
- We will target our communication to ensure it is relevant, useful and interesting
- We will be strategic and creative in looking for new means by which to boost the reach of our communication and the communication methods and platforms we use will be informed by the needs of the community and customers
- Our communication will reflect a whole-of-organisation view
- We will respect other's Intellectual Property rights and expect others also to respect Council's Intellectual Property rights

The tone of, and standards, for Council's communication is set by *Murrindindi Shire Council's 2020 Style Guide*. The Guide is to be used to assist in the production of all external Council communication. The Guide must also be observed when Council logos and branding assets are used by a third-party, e.g., by other government agencies, or for Council-sponsored projects or events.

5.2 Council's spokespersons

While all councillors can make public statements, the Mayor (or Deputy Mayor, in the Mayor's absence) is Council's official spokesperson and is authorised to speak on behalf of Council. Close liaison between the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer is important to ensure timely and informed communication. The Mayor may delegate this authority to another councillor or officer of Council. All Councillors must ensure that there is a clear delineation between personal Facebook accounts and statements, and those made in their official role as Councillor.

The CEO is the spokesperson for all operational matters, including regarding delivery of services and the implementation of Council policy. The CEO can delegate this responsibility to an officer of Council. In times of emergency, the CEO is Council's official spokesperson.

In the event of an approach by the media or other body seeking official comment or media appearances on behalf of Council, contact must be made in the first instance with the Communications Unit.

5.3 Communication Platforms and Media

Council will use multiple methods and platforms to ensure its messages reach the largest possible number of residents and accommodates a wide-range of preferences for receiving Council's communications.

a. *Traditional media*

Traditional media such as newspaper and radio are important mainstays for Council's communication across the Shire, particularly for those residents who do not use digital communication.

All printed media produced for external distribution (except routine correspondence) must be approved by the relevant departmental manager and the Communications Unit before despatch.

b. *Social Media*

Social media is a valuable tool to help Council reach rapidly expanding online communities in a timely manner. Social media will enhance Council's ability to communicate with, and listen to, its community and enables fast and two-way information flow. Use of social media supplements and enhances traditional channels of communication.

Only officers authorised to do so can post on Council's social media pages. Council staff seeking to use social media for Council-related business should contact the Communications Unit for approval.

c. *Conduct on Social Media Platforms*

Council staff authorised to use social media on Council's behalf will

- be accurate, transparent, respectful and professional on social media, including to those who express criticisms
- discuss only publicly available information and won't post or comment on issues outside their work area/area of expertise
- not commit Council or Council staff to actions or undertakings without the express authority to do so
- be cautious in protecting their own privacy and the privacy of those with whom they are communicating
- ensure consistency with other sources of Council information

Responsible Officer: Manager Customer Experience

24 June 2020

TRIM Reference: 20/37341

Communication Policy

- acknowledge and correct any errors or misleading information as soon as possible
- get permission before uploading images or video of, or from, others on social media and ensure we attribute ownership of content appropriately
- not suggest you represent Council when using social media for personal communication

d. General Use of Social Media by Councillors

Councillors might wish to use social media to promote their activities, and Council's work, to the communities within their wards. Given their public roles, Councillors

- must have and use only an official 'councillor' social media account if they are commenting on Council matters. Councillor pages are the personal responsibility of the individual Councillor
- should be alert to the chance that any comment they make might be interpreted as a statement on behalf of Council. In addition to the standards and expectations set out elsewhere in this document, Councillors should ensure it is clear that the content or views they post or upload are their own and not those of the Council
- are encouraged to 'like' and 'share' Council pages and posts but in doing so, need to be conscious of the principles set out in this Policy
- should ensure they abide by the provisions of Council's Election Caretaker Policy in using social media in the lead up to Council elections

e. Customer Service and Record Keeping

Social media is another communication channel through which customer requests and feedback can be provided to Council. Staff must ensure information received on social media is processed and handled in accordance with policies and procedures relating to customer service, customer feedback and complaints and information management.

Councillors must forward to officers in a timely way any communication they receive by any means which requires information from, or action by, Council or which constitutes feedback for Council.

f. Protection of Privacy and Reputation Online

Council has a duty of care to ensure the privacy and reputations of staff are protected. Council will not tolerate 'trolling' of Representatives of Council and will take action to protect staff from such behaviour. Instances of such behaviour online should be brought to the immediate attention of the Manager Customer Experience.

g. Website

Council's corporate website is the central hub of Council's diverse communication model. While Council uses many means to disseminate information, each of these must drive the community back to the website to seek information and access to our services. All information that appears via other media must also be on (or accessible via) the website. It is the responsibility of directors, managers, coordinators and the local 'web champion' to ensure content pertaining to their area of responsibility is current and accurate.

Council will from time-to-time create sub-sites for specific purposes. Proposals to create new official websites for specific purposes must be discussed in advance with the Communications Unit to ensure consistency of style and branding.

6. Related Policies, Strategies and Legislation

- Privacy Policy
- Equal Opportunity Policy
- Customer Services Policy
- Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy
- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Election Caretaker Policy
- Council Employee Code of Conduct
- Prevention of Bullying and Occupational Violence
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0
- Community Engagement Policy
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007
- Local Government Act 2020
- Information Management Policy

7. Council Plan

This Policy supports and underpins a range of strategies in the Council Plan 2017-2021, including the 'Our Promise' strategy to expand our communication and two-way engagement with the community.

8. Management and Review

The Manager Customer Service is responsible for management of this Policy and for its review no later than June 2024.

9. Consultation

This Policy follows, and is informed by, consultation with staff and external stakeholders through the creation of Council's Communication Strategy and Social Media Strategy.

10. Human Rights Charter

This Policy has been developed with consideration of the requirements under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.