

Title:	Communication and Social Media Policy
Type:	Council
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Attachments:	

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to enhance Murrindindi Shire Council's (MSC) communication with its community and other stakeholders. Council will achieve this by communicating via multiple media platforms, including both traditional and digital media, to assist with sharing and exchanging information and ideas in a variety of formats. The Policy will also help to ensure consistency, accuracy and appropriateness of communication across different media platforms.

2. Rationale

Council's approach to communication and engagement with the community needs to be flexible and responsive, providing multiple ways to inform, connect and respond. The communication platforms used by Council should be sufficiently diverse to meet the different communication needs and preferences for receiving information within the community, while also ensuring best value for money. These platforms, taken together, should also work to maximise the reach of Council's communications across the Shire.

Traditional media such as print and radio are important vehicles for communication in the Shire, but do not allow for quick dissemination of information or two-way conversation with the community.

Used well, social media is a valuable tool to help Council reach rapidly expanding online communities. Social media will enhance Council's ability to communicate with, and listen to, its community and will provide a means by which Council can improve the speed and reach of two-way information flow. It will supplement and enhance traditional channels of communication.

3. Scope

This Policy governs all forms of written Council communication by representatives of Council with communities, individuals and other stakeholders. It also covers all methods and platforms by which Council communicates.

The Policy sets down guidance for use of social media, noting the particular challenges associated with use of this tool, both in carrying out Council business and in relation to private use of social media with a bearing on Council business. This Policy does not apply to 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.

This Policy applies to representatives of Council at all times and for all forms of communication, including social media, to communicate any issue which reflects a view on Council business or services, Council's role, or Representatives of Council.

4. Definitions

Reference Term	Definition
Council Staff	Includes employees, contractors (agencies and individuals who provide services to the Council) volunteers and consultants appointed to undertake Council business.

Reference Term	Definition
Representatives of Council	Councillors and all Council staff (as defined above)
Social media	Any web-based or mobile technology including all digital environments in which people may add comment, contribute, create, forward, link, tag, post, upload and share digital or other content. The absence of a reference to a particular kind of social media activity does not limit the application of this Policy.

5. Policy

This Policy provides a framework to guide and govern Shire-wide communication by representatives of Council.

Council will work to keep the community informed about what it is doing. Provision of clear, accurate and timely information is necessary to ensure the community can access Council's programs and services. Communication is a necessary first step in supporting active and meaningful community participation in the democratic process. Council will be strategic and creative in looking for alternative and additional mechanisms to boost the reach of its communications.

Further, Council has an obligation to enable two-way communication with the community so that Council's work, and the services it provides, are informed by community priorities and needs. Council will work to ensure its communications are distributed in a way which enables citizens across the Shire to access information in a timely way.

Council's communication will be informed by the needs of the community and customers. Council will ensure its communication reflects a whole-of-organisation view. Council's communication will also be motivated by the need to ensure it provides comprehensive and helpful information that will assist the community and individual customers to understand, access and use its services.

This Policy should be read together with Council Community Engagement Policy, given the overlap between Communication and Community Engagement.

5.1 Communication Style

It is important that Council's communications are clear, timely, jargon-free and relevant to the community's needs. They must be easy to access via multiple channels and platforms. Council also needs to ensure information it provides is in an accessible format.

All Council communication must adhere to Council's approved style guidelines, including for colours, fonts and logos. Guidance on Council's communication is available in Council's Style Guide.

Use of Council's logo for communication material issued by other organisations and agencies must be approved by the Communications Unit in advance. Council's logo must not be altered or reproduced in whole or in part without permission from the Communications Unit.

Communication material issued by other agencies which reproduces Council material or logos must be approved by the Communications Unit in advance.

5.2 Consistency of Communication

Council communicates in many different forms and by different methods. Processes to ensure compliance with this Policy will vary according to the form of communication involved.

All Council communication produced for distribution outside Council must be approved by the relevant departmental manager and the Communications Unit before despatch. This includes publications such as advertisements, articles, interviews, flyers, invitations, banners, programs and calendars of events.

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The CEO will approve all media releases and any other material referred by the Communications Unit before despatch. Any media items quoting a councillor will be approved by that councillor before despatch.

Communication via social media will be managed by the Communications Unit and those officers with authorisation from the CEO.

Approval of written correspondence within individual departments is the responsibility of the relevant manager.

5.3 Website

While Council will use multiple communication platforms to disseminate information, all platforms will point to Council's website. The website will be the repository of all publicly-available Council information and also offer a method by which the community can easily request an action or information from Council or provide feedback to Council.

All media releases and advertisements are to appear on Council's website, in addition to any other platforms to which they will be distributed. The Communications Unit (and other delegated officers) is responsible for ensuring Council's website is updated in a timely way.

Managers are responsible for ensuring the content on Council's website which relates to their work areas is current, accurate and relevant and should advise the Communications Unit of any changes required.

5.4 Social Media

It is important to ensure that social media is managed appropriately, both to expand the reach of Council's two-way communication with the community and to enhance the service Council provides to the community.

When compared with other written formats, a more casual communication style is appropriate in social media. Language used on social media platforms should be clear and accurate, yet informal and friendly.

Council staff seeking to use social media for Council-related business must put a business case to the Communications Unit and Chief Executive Officer for approval.

5.5 Conduct on Social Media Platforms

Council's policies and Codes of Conduct apply to all online activities at all times. Disciplinary action might result from breaches of policies and Codes of Conduct which occur in the use of social media (both personal and Council-related use).

Council staff authorised by the CEO 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 don'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
- Acknowledge and correct any errors or misleading information as soon as possible

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- Assume everything they say or post online is both public and permanent (including in private messaging). Such information may be viewed, accessed or saved by colleagues, the public or the media, despite best intentions
- Respect intellectual property rights and copyright laws
- Get permission before uploading images or video of, or from, others on social media
- Not suggest you represent Council when using social media for personal communication

A social media protocol document governing delegations, usage and practices relating to social media provides more guidance.

Any concerns about appropriateness of language, content and usage should be addressed to the Manager Communications, Library and Customer Services.

5.6 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 individual members of staff or councillors and will take action to protect staff from such behaviour. Staff or councillors who become aware of instances of vilification or reputational damage to them or other Council representatives via social media should immediately alert the Manager Communications, Library and Customer Services.

Council will take appropriate action to ensure the privacy and reputations of individuals are protected.

5.7 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 other policies and procedures, including customer service and records management.

Councillors must forward to Council 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.

Records of interactions on social media must be kept as per Council's Information Management and must be captured in a timely manner. The 'owner' of the social media page or platform will save the content via screen shot (converted to PDF) to the appropriate TRIM folder.

Councillor usage of social media is not subject to record keeping provisions.

5.8 Private Social Media Usage by Staff

This Policy is not intended to cover private use of social media by staff which is unrelated to Council.

Staff are encouraged to 'like' and 'share' Council pages and posts. If staff comment, post, express or imply a personal opinion relating to Council or its business during private social media use (or via any other medium), they must ensure they meet their obligations under the Code of Conduct.

Council Officers authorised to use social media for Council business are allowed to use social media for business purposes at work. Other officers are allowed personal usage of social media during scheduled breaks.

5.9 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. Such pages are the personal responsibility of the individual Councillor.

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To ensure social media is used to best effect and to avoid problems arising in the use of online platforms, Councillors should ensure they observe the provisions of the Councillor Code of Conduct in all online interactions.

Councillors should also be alert to the fact 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.

Councillors are encouraged to 'like' and 'share' Council pages and posts but in commenting on those posts, need to be conscious of the principles set out in this Policy.

Councillors should ensure they abide by the provisions of Council's Election Caretaker Policy in using social media in the lead up to Council elections.

6. Related Policies, Strategies and Legislation

The acceptable use of social media within Council is regulated by other laws, regulations and Council policies, including:

- Confidentiality and Privacy Policy
- Equal Employment Opportunity Policy
- Customer Services Policy
- Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy
- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Election Caretaker Policy
- Council Staff Code of Conduct
- Prevention of Bullying and Occupational Violence
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0
- Community Engagement Policy
- Fraud Prevention and Control
- Conflict of Interest policy
- Information Management Policy
- *Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007*
- *Local Government Act 1989*

7. Council Plan

This Policy supports a range of strategies and objectives in the Council Plan 2013-2017; to communicate key Council decision and strategies to the community in a variety of ways; to build on our customer service and communications with the community and to continue to provide opportunities for community input and engagement.

8. Management and Review

The Executive Management Team and Senior Management Team, in conjunction with Manager, Communications, Customer and Library Service, are responsible for ensuring understanding of, and compliance with this Policy by members of their work area. The Manager Communications, Library & Customer Service will review the Policy every three (3) years.

9. Consultation

In the creation of this Policy, Council has been informed by approaches taken by other local Councils.

10. Human Rights Charter

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