



## MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

### 1. POLICY OBJECTIVE

To provide a professional, consistent and cohesive approach to addressing media related issues within the Shire of Derby/West Kimberley (the Shire).

This policy provides detail on obligations and protocols for responsible engagement with the community through traditional and digital communication platforms. This includes but is not limited to advertisements, media releases and public statements, media interactions, written publications, website, social media, online and web-based forums, blogs and online surveys/polls.

### 2. SCOPE

This policy is applicable to all Council Members, employees, consultants, volunteers, contractors and outsourced service providers of the Shire.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

**Council Members** means current Council Members (Shire President and Councillors) of the Shire.

**Employee** means any employee, contractor, volunteer etc. of the Shire.

**Media** means all mediums used for communication including but not limited to, television, radio, newspaper, newsletter, magazine, internet, and social media.

**Social Media** includes internet-based tools for sharing and discussing information among people and communities. It refers to user-generated information, opinion and other content shared and discussed over open digital networks. Social media may include (although it is not limited to):

- Social networking websites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+);
- Video and photo sharing platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, Flickr, YouTube, Tik Tok);
- Blogs, including corporate blogs and personal blogs;
- Blogs hosted by media outlets (e.g., ‘comments’ or “your say” features on news articles);
- Micro-blogging (e.g., Twitter);
- Wikis and online collaborations (e.g., Wikipedia);
- Forums, discussion boards and groups (e.g., Google groups, Reddit);
- Video on demand (VOD) and podcasting;
- Online multiplayer gaming platforms;
- Instant messaging (including SMS); and
- Geospatial tagging (e.g., Foursquare, Facebook, Check-in).

**Comment** includes but is not limited to, public speaking engagements, comments to radio, television, press, online media outlets, views expressed in letters to newspapers or in books, journals and notices where it is expected that the publication or circulation of the comment will spread to the community at large.

**Confidential information** is defined as information or data that must be protected from unauthorised access to safeguard the privacy or security of Council.



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## 4. POLICY STATEMENT

The Shire aims to provide consistent information to the community, in a timely manner using various modes of media.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Outline the standards and expectations the Shire has of its Council Members and employees as public officers, when making public comment both in their professional and personal lives;
- Provide public image of Council in line with corporate objectives;
- Ensure consistent information is provided to the media and community, in an open and transparent manner;
- Ensure Council presents a consistent message;
- Maximise media opportunities for Council's achievements and programs, and
- Maintain Council's corporate integrity.

This policy also acknowledges the rights and responsibilities of Council Members as outlined in the *Local Government Act 1995*. The Shire acknowledges that everyone has the right to contribute content to public communications and that individuals may use social media in their personal life. The Shire does not intend to discourage nor unduly limit personal expression or online activities. However, the potential for damage to be caused (either directly or indirectly) to the Shire in certain circumstances via the use of social media, should be recognised. Accordingly, this policy is to ensure that the risk of such damage is minimised when using social media.

## 5. OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

The purposes of the Shire of Derby/West Kimberley's official communications include:

- Sharing information required by law to be publicly available.
- Sharing information that is of interest and benefit to the community.
- Promoting Shire events and services.
- Promoting Public Notices and community consultation/engagement opportunities.
- Answering questions and responding to requests for information relevant to the role of the Shire
- Receiving and responding to community feedback, ideas, comments, compliments and complaints.

The Shire's official communications will be consistent with relevant legislation, policies, standards and the positions adopted by the Council. Our communications will always be simple to understand, respectful and professional.

The Shire will use a combination of different communication modes to suit the type of information to be communicated and the requirements of the community or specific audience, including:

- Websites;
- Advertising and promotional materials;
- Media releases prepared for the President, to promote specific Shire positions;
- Social media; and
- Community newsletters, and letter drops and other modes of communications undertaken by Administration at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).



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## **5.1 Media Engagement and Comment**

All public statements on behalf of the Shire can only be issued by the Shire President or, if the President permits, the CEO. This is addressed under section 5.41(f) of the *Local Government Act 1995*.

The CEO may refer an issue to another employee where appropriate, including at the request of the Shire President, but only the CEO may direct another employee accordingly.

The Shire President, CEO or authorised person should express the will of the Council and should not in any way present views which are, or could be interpreted as being inconsistent with the formal decisions or will of the Council.

No employee can speak on behalf of the Shire, to journalists in the media or social media outlets, without prior authorisation by the CEO.

## **5.2 Responding to Media Enquiries**

The media team shall manage and coordinate all media relations.

Council and employees shall encourage all media to direct initial enquiries to the CEO or the media team, who is responsible for liaising with media and coordinating responses to media enquiries.

Written statements to the media on behalf of Council shall be issued through the media team with the approval of CEO and Shire President prior to its issue.

All quotes included in media releases must be approved by the relevant spokesperson.

Council members and/or employees who become aware of issues or potential issues that could damage the image or reputation of the Shire, should contact the media team or CEO (as appropriate) immediately.

Providing timely information will assist in proactive communication with the media on an issue. Council Members are permitted to provide comments to the media in a personal capacity refer to clause 4 below.

## **5.3 General Expectations**

- Only disclose and discuss publicly available information.
- Ensure that all content published is accurate and not misleading.
- Expressly state on all postings that the stated views are your own and not those of the Shire.
- Adhere to the terms of use of the relevant social media platform/website, as well as copyright, privacy, defamation, contempt of court, discrimination, harassment and other applicable laws.
- Be polite and respectful to all people you interact with.
- Do not post or share material that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, breach a Court suppression order, or is otherwise unlawful.
- Do not imply that you are authorised to speak as a representative of the Shire, nor give the impression that the views you express are those of the Shire.
- Do not use the identity or likeness of another.
- Do not use or disclose any confidential information obtained in your capacity.



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- Do not use your Shire email address or any logos or insignia that may give the impression of official support or endorsement of your personal comment.
- Do not post or share material that is, or might be construed as, threatening, harassing, bullying or discriminatory towards another.
- Do not make any comment, post, or share any material that might otherwise cause damage to the Shires' reputation or bring it into disrepute.
- Do not comment on any posts even if in defence of the Shire or even to provide information if not authorised to do so.
- Social media accounts or unsecured website forms must not be used to transact meetings.
- Recognise that communications and statements of a personal nature, whether conveyed in conversation, in writing, through recordings, emails, texts, or posted on social media have the potential to become public (whether intended or not).

## 6 COUNCIL MEMBERS

A Council Members right to express an opinion on any issue of public interest is recognised.

Council Members:

- Are at liberty to express personal views on any matter which is pertinent to the business of the Shire, including Council decisions, provided they do not purport to represent Council. Council Members are permitted to maintain their own personal social media accounts and tools.
- Will refrain from making any negative comments publicly regarding a resolution of Council under any account, profile or page that uses the title of Council Member/Councillor.
- May make public statements to the media relating to their own personal matters provided their comments do not imply to represent Council or bring the Council into disrepute.
- Should not make comments about the Shire, other Council Members, employees or its partners and stakeholders, on their personal social media tools.
- Should not make comment or disclose any confidential information relating to employees.
- Council Member communications must comply with the policy *Code of Conduct (Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates)*, Council policy *Publish Statements by Council Members and Chief Executive Officer* and the *Local Government Act 1995*.

## 7 EMPLOYEES

Employees within the media team are responsible for coordinating Council's media responses and may respond to media enquiries on behalf of Council provided that the enquiry is general in nature and is information freely available to the public.

Employees shall not respond directly to media requests except as authorised within this policy. If an employee receives a request or enquiry directly from the media, the employee shall refer the enquiry to the media team. Employees, including employees within the media team, shall not:

- Engage in any media activity which is deemed by the CEO to be specifically for the personal advantage of the Shire President, Council Members, or an employee.
- Compromise their capacity to perform their public role in an unbiased manner.
- Breach the *Code of Conduct (Employees)*.
- Imply the Shire's endorsement of personal views.
- Imply the employee is speaking on behalf of the Shire, unless authorised to do so.
- Disclose, without authorisation, any confidential information.



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Employees should refrain from using the media to make negative personal reflections on each other or comment that could be interpreted as such and which are likely to undermine public confidence in the Council or local government.

Employees are entitled to enter public debate and make comment on civic affairs, provided they do not give the impression they are speaking in their official position for or on behalf of Council.

Should a situation arise where employees are requested to disclose information externally, they should consult with the media team or the CEO in the first instance.

## **8 WEBSITE**

The Shire will maintain an official website, serving as the primary online resource for our community to access the Shire's official communications.

## **9 SOCIAL MEDIA**

The Shire uses social media and maintains social media accounts to facilitate information sharing and to provide feedback to our community in a relevant and meaningful way and is mindful of the ever increasing and important role of online social media for communication, engagement, and interaction.

Social media will not be used by the Shire to communicate or respond to matters that are complex or relate to an individual's or entity's private matters.

The Shire manages various social media accounts and the media team is responsible for all public social media platforms and members of that team are authorised to distribute information and respond to comments and feedback posted on these platforms, ensuring that the Shire's strategic objectives are accurately represented and promoted.

The Shire will moderate its social media accounts to address and, if necessary, delete content that is considered:

- Offensive, abusive, defamatory, objectionable, inaccurate, false, or misleading.
- Promotional, soliciting, or commercial in nature.
- Unlawful or encourages others to break the law.
- Information that may compromise individual or community safety or security.
- Repetitive material that is copied and pasted or duplicated.
- Content that promotes or opposes any person campaigning for election to the Council, appointment to official office, or any ballot.
- Content that violates intellectual property rights or the legal ownership interests of another party
- Any other inappropriate content or comments at the discretion of the Shire.

The CEO will determine the authorised contributors for the Shire's social media accounts.

Council Members and employees are permitted to maintain their own personal social media accounts and tools, however, shall not initiate social media discussions on work related matters.

In using social media in a way that identifies their employment with the Shire, employees should be conscious that their online behaviour reflects upon them and the Shire. When using social media for



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private purposes, employees must ensure that they make it clear that any comments relating to the Shire's activities are not official, and that they are speaking only on behalf of themselves. Employees must ensure that any personal comments do not compromise their capacity to perform their public role in an unbiased manner.

If personally approached online regarding a work matter, employees should immediately inform media team and seek advice on how to reply in a way that positively reflects the Shire.

Although Council considers social media such as, for example Facebook, to be an informal communication channel, we will endeavour to reply to comments that ask a question about Council, or a matter related to Council.

## **9.1 Use of Social Media in Emergency Management and Response**

The Shire will use the following channels to communicate and advise our community regarding Emergency Management:

- Social Media.
- Website.
- Advertising.
- Media releases or media statements.
- Community newsletters.
- Letter drops and other modes of communications at the discretion of the CEO.
- Radio Broadcasting

## **10 INCORRECT INFORMATION**

In the event of incorrect information or information that has a personal or corporate reputation risk being published, the media team will investigate and report to the CEO on how the information came to be published. If necessary, the CEO will issue or will authorise a media release clarifying the incorrect information.

## **11 INAPPROPRIATE COMMENTS**

The following is guidance to help you comply with obligations under this policy:

- Persons covered by this policy should only use personal information in their role with the Shire in a manner consistent with this policy. This includes not publishing or reporting conversations or information that is deemed confidential or sensitive.
- Persons covered by this policy should refrain from publishing material that may cause injury to another person, organisation, association, or company's reputation.

## **12 RECORD KEEPING AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION**

Official communications undertaken on behalf of the Shire, including on the Shire's social media accounts and third-party social media accounts must be created and retained as local government records in accordance with the Shire's *Record keeping Plan 2025*. These records are also subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1992*.



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Policy Details			
<b>Original Adoption Date:</b>	29 February 2024. Item 12.3 Res. 09/24	<b>Review Frequency:</b>	2 years
		<b>Next Review Due:</b>	November 2027
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<b>Legislative Head of Power (Act, Regulation, or Local Law):</b>	<i>Local Government Act 1995;</i> s.2.8 Role of mayor or president s.2.10 Role of councillors s.5.41(f) Function of CEO <i>State Records Act 2000</i> <i>Freedom of Information Act 1992</i>		
<b>Related Documents (other Policies, Operational Procedures, Delegations, etc.):</b>	Code of Conduct (Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates) Code of Conduct (Employees) Public Statements by Councillors and Chief Executive Officer Policy SDWK Record Keeping Plan 2025		
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