



Communications and Social Media Policy

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this policy is to detail legislative obligations and establish protocols applicable to the Shire of Chittering's (**the Shire**) official communications with our community to ensure the Shire is professionally and accurately represented and to maximise a positive public perception.

SCOPE

This policy applies to communications initiated or responded to by the Shire with our community and Council Members when commenting or engaging with the community, in both a private and public capacity, about matters relevant to the Shire.

POLICY STATEMENT

1. Official Communications

The purposes of the Shire'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 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:

- Website;
- Advertising and promotional materials;
- Media releases prepared for the Shire President, to promote specific Shire positions;
- Social media; and
- Community newsletters, letter drops and other modes of communications undertaken by the Shire's Administration at the discretion of the CEO.

2. Speaking on behalf of the Shire

The *Local Government Act 1995* (**the Act**) states that the Shire President is the official spokesperson for the Shire, representing the Local Government in official communications, including; speeches,



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comment, print, electronic and social media. Where the Shire President is unavailable, the Deputy Shire President may act as the spokesperson.

The CEO may speak on behalf of the Shire, where authorised to do so by the Shire President.

The provisions of the Act essentially direct that only the Shire President or the CEO, if authorised, may speak on behalf of the Local Government. It is respectful and courteous to the office of Shire President to refrain from commenting publicly, particularly on recent decisions or contemporary issues, until such time as the Shire President has had opportunity to speak on behalf of the Shire.

Communications by Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates, whether undertaken in an authorised official capacity or as a personal communication, must not:

- Bring the Shire into disrepute.
- Compromise the person's effectiveness in their role with the Shire.
- Imply the Shire's endorsement of personal views.
- Imply the Council Member, Committee Member or Candidate is speaking on behalf of the Shire unless authorised to do so.
- Disclose, without authorisation, confidential information.

Social media accounts or unsecured website forums must not be used to transact meetings which relate to the official business of the Shire.

Council Member communications must comply with the Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates (Code of Conduct) and the *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021*.

3. Responding to Media Enquiries

All enquiries from the Media for an official Shire comment, whether made to an individual Council Member or employee, must be directed to the CEO or a person authorised by the CEO. Information will be coordinated to support the Shire President or CEO (where authorised) to make an official response on behalf of the Shire.

Council Members may make comments to the media in a personal capacity – refer to clause 7.1 below.

4. Decision Making

The Shire uses social media platforms to encourage and foster meaningful interaction and engagement with the local community, serving as a place for discussion, feedback, questions and an exchange of ideas.

The Shire's social media pages also exist to provide information on Shire services, events, programs, initiatives and news.

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



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Members of the local community who want to request works or maintenance should still contact the Shire by phone or email, or via the Shire website to lodge a formal request

The Shire may also post and contribute to Social Media hosted by others, so as to ensure that the Shire's strategic objectives are appropriately represented and promoted.

The Shire actively seeks ideas, questions and feedback from our community however, we expect participants to behave in a respectful manner. The Shire will moderate its social media accounts to address and where necessary delete content deemed to be:

- Offensive, abusive, defamatory, objectionable, inaccurate, false or misleading;
- Promotional, soliciting or commercial in nature;
- Unlawful or incites others to break the law;
- Encouragement or glamorisation of the use of alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs;
- Information which may compromise individual or community safety or security;
- Repetitive material 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 of interests or another party; and
- Any other inappropriate content or comments at the discretion of the Shire.

Where a third party contributor to a Shire social media account is identified as posting content which is deleted in accordance with the above, the Shire may at its complete discretion block that contributor for a specific period of time or permanently.

5. Private Profiles and Private Groups

While it is good practice to ensure that any social media platforms being used are set to private so that only immediate 'followers' can view the content, private profile settings and private groups are no guarantee that information is only seen by the target audience. Posts can be screenshot and distributed further than the intended audience, even after the original post has been deleted, meaning that nothing that is posted on-line is truly 'private'.

6. Personal Communications

Personal communications and statements made privately in conversation, written, recorded email or posted on personal social media accounts have the potential to be made public, whether it was intended to be made public or not.

Therefore, on the basis that personal or private communications may be shared or become public at some point in the future, Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates must ensure that their personal or private communications do not breach the requirements of this Policy, the Code of Conduct or the *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021*.

7. Council Member statements on Shire matters

A Council Member may choose to make a personal statement using social media on a matter related to the business of the Shire. However, it is not the Council Member's role to find the answers to social media enquiries, or become involved in resolving a community member's request, as that is the role of Shire Officers. If Council Members are using social media to connect with the community, then it is important that the Council Member forward any community requests to the CEO for action by Shire Officers.

Any public statement made by a Council Member, whether made in a personal capacity or in their Local Government representative capacity, must:

- Clearly state that the comment or content is a personal view only, which does not necessarily represent the views of the Shire
- Be made with reasonable care and diligence.
- Be lawful, including avoiding contravention of; copyright, defamation, discrimination or harassment laws.
- Be factually correct.
- Avoid damage to the reputation of the local government.
- Not reflect adversely on a decision of Council.
- Not reflect adversely on the character or actions of any other person/s.
- Maintain a respectful and positive tone and not use offensive or objectionable expressions in reference to any other person/s.

A Council Member who is approached by the media for a personal statement may request the assistance of the CEO.

Comments which become public and which breach this Policy, the Code of Conduct, *the Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021* or the Act, may be referred for investigation. Complaints may be made to the Local Government Standards Panel, may determine sanctions under the Act. Serious misconduct may be referred to the Corruption and Crime Commission. Social media activity from Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates must not:

- Bring the Shire into disrepute.
- Compromise the person's effectiveness in their role with the Shire.
- Imply the Shire's endorsement of personal views.
- Disclose, without authorisation, confidential information.

Social media accounts or unsecured website forums must not be used to transact meetings which relate to the official business of the Shire.



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8. Record Keeping

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 and the *State Records Act 2000*. These records are also subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1992*.

Council Member communications that relate to their role as a Council Member are subject to the requirements of the Shire's Record Keeping Plan and the *State Records Act 2000*. Council Members are responsible for transferring these records to the Shire's administration. Council Member records are also subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1992*.

DEFINITIONS

Social Media means to any form of electronic communication through which users create and/or join online communities to share information; this includes all websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking.

Social Media Content means to all forms of content published through social media channels, such as, but not limited to, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter.

Official Use is defined as staff using social media as a representative of the Shire of Chittering.

Personal Use refers to a personal presence on social media separate to an individual's professional association with the Shire of Chittering.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Manager Place Management is responsible for the implementation of this Policy.

COMPLIANCE

Legislation	Local Government Act 1995, Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021, State Records Act 2000, Defamation Act 2005, Freedom of Information Act 1992.
Industry	WALGA Elected Member Social Media Guideline, State Records Office Guideline – Management of Digital Records
Organisational	Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Election Candidates
Strategic Community Plan	5 Strengthen the Council's commitment to accountability, transparency, and responsible financial management while empowering residents and stakeholders.

POLICY ADMINISTRATION

Review Cycle	3 Years	Next Review Due	2027
Policy Owner	Deputy Chief Executive Officer		

Version	Decision Ref	Date	Change
1		21/06/2023	Adoption
2		2025	Amendment – alignment to WALGA Communications and Social Media Template Policy