



ADM07 COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA POLICY

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| Aim | To provide a professional, consistent and cohesive approach to addressing media related issues within the Shire of Ashburton. |
| Application | Elected Members, Employees, Contractors and Volunteers |
| Principles | Strategic Community Plan 2017 – 2027 (Desktop Review 2019) Goal 05 Inspiring Governance Objective 2 Community ownership |

OVERVIEW

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.

SCOPE

This policy is applicable to all officers, councillors as well as consultants, contractors and outsourced service providers of Shire of Ashburton.

PURPOSE

The Shire of Ashburton aims to provide consistent and factual information to the community in a timely manner utilising various modes of media.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- outline the standards and expectations the Shire of Ashburton has of its staff members and elected members, who are representatives of the Shire at all times;
- provide public image of Council in line with corporate objectives;
- ensure consistent and factual 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 Councillors as elected members as outlined in the Local Government Act 1995

DEFINITIONS

- **CEO** refers to the Chief Executive Officer of the Shire of Ashburton
- **Shire President** is the title given to the Chief Elected Officer of the Shire of Ashburton
- **Council** refers to the Shire of Ashburton
- **Employee** refers to any employee, contractor, volunteer etc. of the Council
- **Councillor** refers to current elected members of the Shire of Ashburton Council
- **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);
 - Blogs, including corporate blogs and personal blogs;
 - Blogs hosted by media outlets (e.g. 'comments' on news articles etc.);
 - Micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter);
 - Wikis and online collaborations (e.g. Wikipedia);
 - Forums, discussion boards and groups (e.g. Google groups);
 - 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.
 - **Sensitive information** is defined as information or data that must be protected from unauthorised access to safeguard the privacy or security of Council.

POLICY PRINCIPLES

MEDIA

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

The Shire President or CEO may refer an issue to another officer where appropriate. 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.

Councillors are not permitted to speak on behalf of the Council to the media unless appropriate approval has been granted by the Shire President or CEO. No employee can speak on behalf of the Shire to journalists in the media or social media outlets, without prior authorisation by the CEO.

The Media & Communications Department shall manage and coordinate all media relations and communications strategies.

Council shall encourage all media to direct initial enquiries to the Media & Communications Manager, 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 & Communications Department with approval of CEO and Shire President prior to its issue.

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

Councillors and/or employees who become aware of issues or potential issues that could damage the image or reputation of the Shire, should contact the Shire President/CEO (as appropriate) immediately. Providing timely information will assist in proactive communication with the media if and when an issue arises.

COUNCILLORS

A Councillor's right to express a personal opinion on any issue of public interest is recognised. Councillors 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.

Councillors are permitted to maintain their own personal social media accounts and tools.

Councillors will refrain from making any negative comments publicly regarding a resolution of Council under any account, profile or page that uses the title of Councillor.

Councillors 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 to disrepute.

Councillors should not make comments about the Shire of Ashburton, its elected representatives and staff or its partners and stakeholders on their personal social media tools.

EMPLOYEES

Employees within the Media & Communications Department 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 & Communications Manager.

Employees, including employees within the Media & Communications Department, shall not engage in any media activity which is deemed by the CEO to be specifically for the personal advantage of the Shire President, Councillors or an employee.

Employees should support Council decisions and 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 reasonably likely to undermine public confidence in the Council or local government generally.



Employees are entitled to enter into 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, please consult with the Media & Communications Manager or the CEO.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The Shire of Ashburton 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 a person's or entity's' private affairs.

Councillors and employees are permitted to maintain their own personal social media accounts and tools, however it is the preference of the Shire of Ashburton that councillors and employees do not initiate social media discussions on work related matters.

The Media & Communications Department is generally responsible for all public social media platforms on behalf of Council and members of that team are authorised to distribute information and respond to comments and feedback posted on these platforms.

Engaging in social media on behalf of Council on social media sites not owned by Council is not permitted, except as approved by the Media & Communications Manager or the CEO.

The CEO and/or authorised members of the Media & Communications Department, reserve the right to approve or reject (as they see fit) requests from employees in relation to content to be posted or promoted on Council's social media sites. Social media should be one component of an overall marketing and communication campaign.

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

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

When using social media for 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 don't compromise their capacity to perform their public role in an unbiased manner.



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.

INCORRECT INFORMATION

In the event of incorrect information or information that has a personal or corporate reputation risk being published, the Media & Communications Department will investigate and report to the Chief Executive Officer on how the information came to be published. If necessary, the Chief Executive Officer will issue or will authorise a media release clarifying the incorrect information.

BREACHES

Breaches of this policy will be dealt with in accordance with Local Government Act 1995 and Shire of Ashburton Code of Conduct.

| Document Control Box | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------|------|---------------------|--|
| Document Responsibilities: | | | | | | | |
| Owner: | Chief Executive Officer | Owner Business Unit: | Media & Communications | | | | |
| Reviewer: | Manager Media & Communications | Decision Maker: | Council | | | | |
| Compliance Requirements: | | | | | | | |
| Legislation: | Local Government Act 1995 - Sections 5.41 (f); 2.8; 2.10 | | | | | | |
| Industry: | WALGA Guidelines | | | | | | |
| Organisational: | Code of Conduct Record Keeping Plan CORP5 Risk Management Framework CORP5 Strategic and Operational Risk Register ELM14 Governance Policy. | | | | | | |
| Document Management: | | | | | | | |
| Risk Rating: | Low | Review Frequency: | Biannual | Next Due: | 2022 | Records Ref: | |
| Version # | Decision Reference: | Synopsis: | | | | | |
| 1. | 722/2019 | OMC 17 December 2019 | | | | | |
| 2. | 221/2020 | OMC 11 December 2020 | | | | | |