

## Introduction

---

The Shire of Capel (Shire) Communications & Social Media Policy details the framework for communication between the Shire and our internal and external stakeholders. Active and effective information provision and community engagement are vital to building and promoting a positive identity and reputation for the Shire.

The Shire must create awareness, distribute regular and consistent messages, inform, consult with the community, and must be open and honest in all matters to achieve effective communications.

We recognise the fast-paced and responsive way in which local government operates, and this policy seeks to enable an organisation that is fully connected with the community. We need to use all channels available to reach our audience; guided by how they like to communicate and continue to progress multiple layers of engagement.

Success will be achieved by using our 'owned' media to communicate clear, consistent, transparent, trusted and timely messaging.

## Purpose

---

This policy considers legislative obligations and establishes protocols applicable to our official communications with our community, to ensure the Shire is professionally and accurately represented and to maximise a positive public perception.

The policy also seeks to ensure that the Shire's reputation is enhanced through the integrity and effectiveness of communications.

This policy applies to Councillors, Staff, contractors, consultants and any other persons including volunteers who undertake activities for the Shire of Capel.

## Policy statement

---

The Shire is committed to ensuring each person that the Communications & Social Media Policy applies to, understands the expectations of them when making public comment both in their representative and personal capacity.

## Application

---

This policy applies to:

1. Communications initiated or responded to by the Shire of Capel as an organisation with our community; and
2. Staff and Councillors when making comment in either a Shire of Capel representative role or in a personal capacity about matters relevant to the Shire of Capel.

3. Contractors, consultants and any other persons including volunteers when making comment about matters relevant to the Shire of Capel.

## Official Communications

---

### 1.1 Outline

Communication is the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using other medium between a representative of the Shire, stakeholders and the broader community.

Community includes all people who live, work, study or conduct business in, or who visit, use and enjoy the services, facilities and public places of the Shire of Capel.

Consultation is the provision of timely information and engagement by the Shire with the community and stakeholders (internal and external) that provides them the opportunity to provide ideas and feedback, respond with any concerns, and query issues that will be considered or actioned, before a final decision is made or implemented.

Via this policy, the Shire aims to ensure our communications methods will:

1. Comply with required legislation and codes of conduct.
2. Be regular and consistent, with the Shire communicating in a timely manner on projects and activities to all stakeholders.
3. Create a positive and professional image for the Shire.
4. Increase awareness of the Shire's activities, major projects and achievements.
5. Foster a meaningful community consultation process.
6. Implement timely, regular and consistent internal communication.
7. Effectively manage negative messaging.
8. Effectively manage unexpected crisis/disaster issues or events; and
9. Use a variety of methods to communicate and to provide information in formats that accommodate the needs of all stakeholders.

The Shire of Capel 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:

1. Website.
2. Advertising and promotional materials.
3. Media releases prepared for the Shire President, to promote specific Shire of Capel positions.
4. Social media.
5. Email; and
6. Community newsletters, letter drops and other modes of communications undertaken by the Shire of Capel's Administration.

### 1.2 The Shire of Capel's Spokesperson

The Shire President is the spokesperson for the Shire. Where the Shire President is unavailable, the Deputy President may act as the spokesperson [*Local Government Act 1995* s2.8 (1)(d)]. s2.9 & 5.34, s5.41(f).

The CEO is accepted to include the authorised Acting CEO in this Policy.

The CEO may speak on behalf of the Shire of Capel when authorised to do so by the Shire President

### 1.3 Responding to Media Enquiries

All enquiries from the media for an official Shire of Capel comment, whether made to an individual Councillor 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 of Capel.

Councillors may communicate and make comments with reference to clauses 1.6 and 1.7 below.

#### 1.4 Website

The Shire of Capel will maintain an official website, as our community's principle on-line resource to access to the Shire of Capel's official communications.

#### 1.5 Dealing with Negativity

The Shire actively seeks ideas, questions and feedback from our community. We expect participants to behave in a respectful manner in return. The Shire will moderate our 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.
- Information which may compromise individual or community privacy, 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.
- Not in accordance with any lawful requirement.
- Any other inappropriate content or comments at the discretion of the Shire.

## Councillor and Staff Communications

---

#### 1.6 Councillor Public Statements and/or Communication on Shire Matters

Communications by Councillors is encouraged to advocate for the Shire and promote Shire projects, services and activities, as well as actively sharing Shire-driven communications, information and updates through official Shire channels and via attendance at community events as Council representatives.

Councillors and Staff may also share communications on initiatives they are committed to through their personal networks.

Communications by Councillors and Staff, whether undertaken in an authorised official capacity or as personal communication, in whatever form, must not:

Bring the Shire of Capel into disrepute;

1. Compromise the person's effectiveness in their role with the Shire of Capel;
2. Imply the Shire of Capel's endorsement of personal views; or
3. Disclose, without authorisation, confidential information.

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

A Councillor may choose to make a personal statement or communicate publicly on a matter related to the business of the Shire of Capel. Any public statement by a Councillor made in a personal capacity, must:

1. Clearly state that the comment or content is a personal view only, which does not necessarily represent the views of Shire.
2. Be made with reasonable care and diligence [*Rules of Conduct Reg.3(a)*];
3. Be lawful, including avoiding contravention of; copyright, defamation, discrimination or harassment laws.
4. Be factually correct [*Rules of Conduct Reg.3(b) and (f)*].
5. Avoid damage to the reputation of the local government [*Rules of Conduct Reg.3(d)*];
6. Not reflect adversely on a decision of the Council.
7. Not reflect adversely on the character or actions of another Council Member or Employee [*Rules of Conduct Reg.10(3)*]
8. Maintain a respectful and positive tone and not use offensive or objectionable expressions in reference to any Council Member, Employee or community member [*Rules of Conduct Regs. 3(g) and 10(3), Shire of Capel Code of Conduct for Councillors. Div. 3*].

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

Employees are to understand the Council's position on particular matters and ensure compliance with the Shire of Capel Staff Code of Conduct in all communications, whether representative or personal.

### 1.7 Personal Communications

Personal communications and statements made privately; in conversation, written, recorded emailed, private messaged or posted in personal social media, have the potential to be made public, whether intended or not.

On the basis that personal or private communications may be shared or become public at some point in the future, Councillors should ensure that their personal or private communications do not breach the requirements of this policy, the Code of Conduct and the *Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007*.

Staff are to ensure that their personal or private communications do not breach the requirements of this policy or the Shire of Capel Staff Code of Conduct.

## Social Media Communications

---

### 1.8. Social Media Outline

The purposes of the Shire of Capel's social media communications include:

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

The Shire uses social media to facilitate interactive information sharing and to provide official and responsive feedback to and from our community.

Social media will not however, 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.

The Shire's official communications will be consistent with relevant legislation, policies, standards and the policies, positions and codes adopted by the Council.

Our communications will always be respectful, professional and must reflect the Shire's values and vision, as well as adopted Code of Conduct.

### 1.9 Social Media Channels

The Shire will use a combination of different communication modes in line with our Communications Strategy to suit the type of information to be communicated, engagement to be undertaken and the requirements of the community or specific audience.

The Shire of Capel maintains the following social media accounts:

- Social networks, including - Facebook and LinkedIn
- Media Sharing networks, including – Instagram and YouTube

Where a third party contributor to a Shire of Capel's social media accounts is identified as posting content which is deleted in accordance with the above, the Shire may at our absolute discretion block that contributor for a specific period of time or permanently.

### 1.10 Use of Social Media in Emergency Management and Response

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

- Facebook – Shire of Capel
- YouTube – Live Stream Emergency Management Meetings

## Record Keeping and Freedom of Information

Official communications and Council member 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*.

Department:	Office of the CEO	Next review:	January 2025
Reviewer:	Gordon MacMile	Legislation:	Local Government Act 1995 LG 9(Rules of Conduct) Regulations 207
Adopted:	Minute 72/2018, 28.11.18	Delegation:	
Amended:	Minute OC/2023/7	Risk:	
Policy ref #:		Version:	2