5.38 - Communications and Social Media

Policy Owner	**Governance / Community and Customer Services**
Person Responsible	**Chief Executive Officer / Manager Community and Customer Services**
Date of Adoption	**24 September 2026 – Resolution 070926**
Date of Last Review	**24 September 2026 – Resolution 070926**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear principles and protocols for communications, media engagement, and social media activities undertaken by the Shire of Wongan-Ballidu.

The policy aims to ensure the Shire is represented professionally, accurately, transparently and consistently, while supporting effective community engagement and maintaining public confidence in the Shire.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Ensure official communications are accurate, timely, professional and aligned with Council decisions.
- Promote transparent, accessible and effective communication with the community.
- Provide clear guidance regarding who may speak on behalf of the Shire.
- Provide clear protocols for the management and use of official social media channels.
- Support responsible and appropriate use of social media by Elected Members, employees and contractors.
- Protect the reputation, integrity and credibility of the Shire.
- Ensure communications comply with applicable legislation, policies and recordkeeping obligations.
- Provide consistent processes for responding to media enquiries, community enquiries and complaints.
- Ensure communication methods consider accessibility, inclusion and the needs of the local community.

SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- Elected Members.
- Employees and contractors acting on behalf of the Shire.
- All official communications issued by the Shire.
- All Shire-managed digital communication channels, including websites and social media platforms.
- Any person authorised to administer or contribute to an official Shire communication channel.

This policy does not prevent Elected Members from expressing personal views in their private capacity, provided those communications comply with applicable legislation, the Code of Conduct and this policy.

DEFINITIONS

Authorised Officer – means an employee or other person authorised by the CEO to undertake a specific communication, media or social media function on behalf of the Shire.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – means the person appointed by Council under the *Local Government Act 1995*.

Council – means the Council of the Shire of Wongan-Ballidu.

Elected Member – means a Council Member serving on the Council of the Shire of Wongan-Ballidu.

Media – means print, broadcast, digital or online news organisations.

Official Communication – means any communication prepared or issued on behalf of the Shire through an approved communication channel.

Official Social Media Account – means a social media account established, owned or authorised by the Shire for the purpose of communicating with the community.

Shire – means the Shire of Wongan-Ballidu.

Social Media – means digital platforms that allow users to create, share or exchange information and content.

Website – means any website operated or administered by the Shire.

POLICY

1. Official Communications

The Shire's official communications may include:

- Information required to be publicly available by legislation.
- Promotion of Council services, facilities, projects and initiatives.
- Public notices and statutory advertising.
- Community engagement and consultation activities.
- Emergency management and public safety information.
- Responses to community enquiries and feedback.
- Promotion of events and programs.
- Information relating to Council meetings, decisions and strategic priorities.

The Shire of Wongan-Ballidu will use a combination of different communication methods to suit the type of information to be communicated and the requirements of the community or specific audience, and may include:

- Shire website.
- Social media platforms.
- Media releases and statements.
- Community newsletters.
- Electronic communications and email updates.
- Printed publications and notices.
- SMS messaging.
- Public meetings and community engagement activities.
- Letter drops.
- Other communication channels approved by the CEO.

Digital communication will not be relied upon as the sole method of communication where other methods are reasonably required to ensure community access to important information.

2. Authority to Speak on Behalf of the Shire of Wongan-Ballidu

The Shire President is the official spokesperson for the Shire and is authorised to speak on behalf of the local government in official communications, which may include, speeches, comment, print, electronic and social media. Where the Shire President is unavailable, the Deputy Shire President may act in that capacity.

The CEO may also act as the spokesperson when authorised by the Shire President.

The CEO is responsible for operational communications and may speak on behalf of the Shire regarding administrative and operational matters.

Unless authorised, Elected Members, employees and contractors must not present themselves as speaking on behalf of the Shire.

Communications by Elected Members, employees and contractors must not:

- Bring the Shire into disrepute.
- Disclose confidential information.
- Compromise their effectiveness in their role.
- Suggest Shire endorsement of personal views.
- Misrepresent Council decisions or Shire positions.
- Imply they are speaking on behalf of the Shire.
- Breach the Shire's Code of Conduct.

3. Media Relations

All enquiries from the media for comment on behalf of the Shire must be referred to the CEO or an authorised officer. The CEO will coordinate media responses and facilitate enquiries through the appropriate spokesperson.

Where appropriate, the Shire President and CEO may jointly participate in media responses.

Elected Members may provide comments in a personal capacity, provided they:

- Clearly identify that they are speaking in their personal capacity.
- Do not represent their personal views as the position of Council or the Shire.
- Comply with the Code of Conduct and applicable legislation.
- Do not disclose confidential or restricted information.

The Shire will endeavour to provide accurate and timely responses to media enquiries while recognising that some matters may require additional investigation or approval before a response can be provided.

4. Website

The Shire will maintain an official website as our primary resource for all stakeholders to access official Shire information and communications.

5. Social Media

The Shire uses social media to:

- Inform and engage with the community.
- Promote initiatives, events and services.
- Share emergency and public safety information.
- Promote community participation.
- Provide timely information and updates.
- Receive and respond to appropriate community feedback.

Approved social media platforms may include:

- Facebook.
- Instagram.
- LinkedIn.
- YouTube.
- Other platforms approved by the CEO.

The Shire may also contribute information to third-party platforms where appropriate.

Official social media is a communication and engagement channel and is not intended to replace formal processes for:

- Complex complaints or investigations.
- Requests for confidential or personal information.
- Formal applications or submissions.
- Freedom of Information requests.
- Matters requiring statutory processes.
- Matters involving personal, sensitive or confidential information.

Where a matter raised through social media requires a formal response, the Shire may direct the person to the appropriate communication, complaint or application process.

Simple enquiries may be answered through social media where appropriate.

Complaints or matters requiring further investigation should be acknowledged and referred to the appropriate officer or process.

Personal or confidential matters should be moved to an appropriate private communication channel.

6. Management of Official Social Media

Official Shire social media accounts must be managed by employees or other persons authorised by the CEO. Access to official social media accounts must be limited to authorised persons and managed in accordance with the Shire's information security requirements.

Official social media accounts must:

- Be established using Shire-approved accounts and contact details where practicable.
- Be administered using appropriate access controls.
- Maintain appropriate records of official communications.
- Use approved branding and presentation.
- Provide accurate and up-to-date information.
- Be monitored at a level appropriate to the nature and use of the platform.

Content published on official Shire social media should be consistent with Council decisions, adopted policies, the Shire's strategic direction and this policy. Where appropriate, content should be reviewed or approved before publication in accordance with internal procedures.

Employees administering social media must exercise professional judgement when responding to comments and should escalate matters to the relevant officer where:

- The matter involves a complaint or dispute.
- The person alleges misconduct or serious wrongdoing.
- The matter involves legal proceedings or potential legal action.
- The matter concerns a sensitive or confidential issue.
- The person makes a threat or allegation requiring escalation.
- The employee is unsure whether a response is appropriate.

Official social media accounts must not be used for personal communication or personal political activity.

When an employee ceases to have responsibility for an official social media account, their access must be removed or amended as appropriate.

The CEO may establish administrative procedures or guidelines to support the day-to-day management of official social media accounts.

7. Social Media Moderation

Community members engaging with Shire social media are expected to interact respectfully and appropriately.

The Shire may moderate, hide or remove content that is:

- Offensive, abusive, threatening or discriminatory.
- Defamatory or knowingly misleading.
- Commercial, promotional or spam-related.
- Unlawful.
- In breach of privacy or confidentiality requirements.
- Partisan political campaigning or election advocacy unrelated to the purpose of the Shire's communication.
- Repetitive or deliberately disruptive.
- In breach of copyright or intellectual property laws.
- Likely to compromise public safety or an emergency response.
- Otherwise inconsistent with the reasonable and appropriate use of the platform.

The Shire will not remove content merely because it is critical of the Shire, provided the content complies with the requirements of the platform and this policy.

Users who repeatedly breach these requirements may be blocked or restricted from participating. Where content may constitute a serious threat, unlawful conduct or other matter requiring investigation, appropriate records should be retained and the matter referred to the relevant authority or officer where necessary.

8. Emergency Communications

During emergencies or significant incidents, the Shire may use:

- Social media.
- The Shire website.
- SMS alerts.
- Media releases.
- Email communications.
- Public notices.
- Direct community engagement.
- Other communication methods considered appropriate.

Emergency communications will be coordinated through the CEO or delegated officer and align with emergency management arrangements.

Where another agency has responsibility for issuing official emergency warnings or instructions,

the Shire will seek to share or amplify information from the appropriate authority rather than provide conflicting information.

Emergency communications should prioritise:

- Public safety.
- Accuracy.
- Timeliness.
- Clear instructions.
- Consistency with information provided by relevant emergency management authorities.

9. Recordkeeping and Information Management

Official communications, including social media content, are public records and must be managed in accordance with:

- *State Records Act 2000*.
- *Freedom of Information Act 1992*.
- The Shire's Record Keeping Plan and Policy.
- Other applicable legislation and Shire procedures.

Records created by Elected Members in connection with their Council role must be retained and provided to the Shire where required.

10. PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Elected Members and employees should recognise that comments made in private or personal forums, including social media, may become public.

Individuals must ensure that personal communications do not:

- Breach confidentiality obligations.
- Contravene the Code of Conduct.
- Damage the reputation of the Shire.
- Misrepresent Council decisions or positions.

11. ELECTED MEMBER STATEMENTS ON SHIRE MATTERS

An Elected Member may choose to make a personal statement publicly on a matter related to the business of the Shire of Wongan-Ballidu

Any public statement made by an Elected 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 Shire of Wongan-Ballidu.
- 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 the Council.
- not reflect adversely on the character or actions of another Elected Member or employee.
- maintain a respectful and positive tone and not use offensive or objectionable expressions in reference to any Elected Member, employee or community member.

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

12. STAFF USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Staff use of social media, including the use of official Shire social media accounts and personal social media accounts where relevant to an employee's role, is governed by the Shire's Social Media Operational Policy.

This policy establishes the overarching principles and governance requirements for the Shire's communications and social media activities. Staff must refer to the Social Media Operational Policy for detailed requirements regarding the use, management, moderation and administration of social media, including expectations for staff conduct, approval processes, account access and security, content management and responding to community engagement.

Where there is any inconsistency between this policy and the operational policy, this policy takes precedence.

13. BREACHES OF POLICY

Failure to comply with this policy may result in action under:

- *Local Government Act 1995*.
- The Shire's Code of Conduct.
- Employment and disciplinary procedures.
- Other relevant legislation or Shire policies.

Serious or repeated breaches may be referred for investigation where appropriate.

Where a breach involves an Elected Member, the matter may be dealt with through the applicable statutory or Code of Conduct process.

Where a breach involves an employee or contractor, the matter may be managed through the appropriate employment, contractual or disciplinary process.

14. REVIEW

This policy shall be reviewed at least every three (3) years, or earlier if required.

15. RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the implementation of this policy.