

DOCUMENT TYPE	Policy
TITLE	PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS & MEDIA
NUMBER:	POL-1024

PURPOSE

This policy establishes the governance framework for public communications issued on behalf of the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1995*.

It defines statutory authority, accountability, risk controls and behavioural standards relating to media engagement, public statements and digital communications to ensure communications are transparent, accurate and timely, supporting informed community participation and maintaining public confidence in local government decision-making.

DEFINITIONS

Media means any broadcaster of communications, including digital (online), social, radio, print, television or newsletter distributor.

Social Media means any form of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (e.g videos).

Corporate communication means any internal or external communication issued on behalf of the Shire relating to Council decisions, policies, services, projects, operations or reputation.

A **spokesperson** means someone engaged or elected to speak on behalf of others.

Media relations involves working with media for the purpose of informing the public of an organisation's mission, policies and practices in a positive, consistent and credible manner.

Communications Coordinator means the officer appointed to oversee reputational risk, crisis communications and high-risk messaging under the direction of the Chief Executive Officer.

Official Communication is any communication representing the formal position of Council or the Shire.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY AND ROLES

Council

Council governs and speaks through formal resolution.

Shire President

Under section 2.8 of the *Local Government Act 1995*, the Shire President is the official spokesperson.

Nothing in this policy alters that statutory role.

Chief Executive Officer

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the management and approval of all operational communications issued on behalf of the Shire.

The CEO may speak on behalf of the Shire where authorised under section 5.41 of the *Local Government Act 1995*.

The CEO may delegate administrative functions in accordance with legislation but retains ultimate accountability.

Communications Coordinator

Assists the Chief Executive Officer in coordinating communications, assessing reputational risk and preparing high-risk messaging.

The Communications Coordinator operates under the direction of the Chief Executive Officer and does not hold independent approval authority unless formally delegated.

Elected Members

Elected Members must comply with the *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021*, including obligations relating to misuse of information, misuse of position and conduct that may adversely affect the reputation of the local government.

Elected Members may express personal views on matters relating to the Shire, provided that:

- The view is clearly identified as a personal view;
- It is not represented as the formal position of Council;
- It complies with the *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021* and the Shire's *POL-1005 Code of Conduct for Elected Members & Candidates*; and
- It does not mislead the public or unlawfully damage the reputation of the Shire.

Nothing in this clause permits an Elected Member to contradict or undermine a formal resolution of Council in a manner inconsistent with their obligations under the Code of Conduct.

Alleged breaches of this policy by Elected Members may constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct and may be dealt with in accordance with POL-1005 and applicable legislation.

Ordinary Council Meetings are recorded and published in accordance with the *Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996* and form part of the public record.

Where Council or Committee meetings are recorded or broadcast, they are public forums and statements made in these settings are publicly accessible and may be relied upon in external or legal processes. Elected Members must recognise that legal liability may arise from public statements, and any entitlement to legal representation or financial assistance is subject to the provisions of POL-1020 Legal Representation for Council Members and Employees.

Internal Communications to Employees

Official communications to Shire employees that represent, or purport to represent, the formal position of the Shire must be authorised by the Chief Executive Officer or a delegated officer.

In accordance with section 5.41(g) of the *Local Government Act 1995*, the CEO is responsible for the management of the local government's employees. Communications that direct or influence employees must not be issued by Elected Members outside authorised processes.

Elected Members must not issue or distribute communications to Shire employees in a manner that represents the formal position of Council or the Shire unless authorised in accordance with this policy.

Nothing in this clause prevents routine interaction between Elected Members and employees in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1995* and the Code of Conduct.

POLICY STATEMENTS

Where inconsistency arises between this policy and the *Local Government Act 1995* or subsidiary legislation, the legislation prevails.

COMMUNICATION CLASSIFICATION AND ESCALATION

Communications will be classified as:

- Tier A - High Risk (political, media, financial or significant reputational impact)
- Tier B - Moderate Risk
- Tier C - Routine

All external-facing communications with reputational, political or media implications require review prior to release.

- The Communications Coordinator will assess communication risk and coordinate internal consultation under the direction of the Chief Executive Officer.
- The Chief Executive Officer retains final approval authority for all operational communications.
- Where the statutory spokesperson role is engaged, the Shire President's approval is required in accordance with legislation.

CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS AUDIENCE

The Shire's corporate communications audience includes:

- Local, regional and national media
- Shire ratepayers and residents
- Potential residents to the Shire
- Visitors to the Shire
- Investors, developers and individuals with business interests in the Shire
- Community and government organisations
- Shire Councillors
- Shire employees

CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

All communications are subject to the Risk Classification and Escalation framework outlined in this policy.

The Chief Executive Officer retains final approval authority for communications issued on behalf of the Shire, unless approval has been formally delegated in accordance with legislation and internal delegations.

The Shire utilises the following communication tools:

Media Releases

- a) Used to communicate matters of public interest or significance.
- b) Approval must align with the Risk Classification and Escalation framework.
- c) Where the statutory spokesperson role is engaged, the Shire President's approval is required.

SWEK News (local publications)

- a) Used to provide information and community updates.
- b) Approval is required in accordance with the Risk Classification and Escalation Framework.

Website (www.swek.wa.gov.au)

- a) The Shire's primary authoritative source of information.
- b) Content is approved in accordance with the Risk Classification and Escalation framework and may be approved by delegated officers under the authority of the Chief Executive Officer.

Official Social Media Platforms

- a) Used to engage with the community and share information.
- b) Access is restricted to authorised employees under the authority of the Chief Executive Officer.
- c) Moderation is undertaken in accordance with the Social Media Moderation Procedure.

Public Notices and Print Advertisements

- a) Used to meet legislative notification requirements or inform the community.
- b) Approval is required in accordance with the Risk Classification and Escalation framework.

Television and Radio Interviews

- a) Used to provide comment in response to media enquiries.
- b) Where representing the Shire publicly, approval must align with the statutory spokesperson provisions of this policy.

Internal and Direct Communications

- a) Includes staff meetings, Councillor Communiques, community emails, direct mail, workshops, surveys, advisory groups and similar engagement mechanisms.
- b) Approval is required in accordance with the Risk Classification and Escalation framework and relevant internal delegations.

MEDIA SPOKESPERSON

The Shire President is the statutory spokesperson for the Shire under section 2.8 of the *Local Government Act 1995*.

For clarity, the relevant provisions of the *Local Government Act 1995* are reproduced below:

Local Government Act 1995

2.8. Role of mayor or president

(1) The mayor or president –

(c) carries out civic and ceremonial duties on behalf of the local government; and

(d) speaks on behalf of the local government

The Chief Executive Officer may speak on behalf of the Shire where authorised by the Shire President in accordance with section 5.41 of the *Local Government Act 1995*.

Local Government Act 1995

5.41. Functions of CEO

The CEO's functions are to –

(f) speak on behalf of the local government if the mayor or president agrees; and

The Shire President may authorise another Councillor to speak to the media for a specific purpose. Where authorised by the Shire President, the Chief Executive Officer may authorise an employee to speak for a specific purpose.

Nothing in this policy alters the statutory role of the Shire President as spokesperson.

CARETAKER PERIOD (ELECTION PERIOD) SILENCE

During a Caretaker Period as defined in POL-1009 Council Elections – Caretaker Period, communications must comply with the restrictions and requirements contained in that policy. Where inconsistency arises, POL-1009 prevails.

POST-COUNCIL DECISION COMMUNICATIONS

Following each Ordinary Council Meeting, a summary of key decisions will be prepared for public release in a timely manner.

Where matters are classified as Tier A or Tier B, the Shire President will be briefed on proposed messaging prior to release where practicable.

DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA GOVERNANCE

Official social media accounts are administered under the authority of the Chief Executive Officer and must be managed by authorised officers.

Moderation of official social media platforms is undertaken in accordance with the Social Media Moderation Procedure.

Personal use of social media by Councillors and employees must comply with this policy and the relevant Code of Conduct.

Official platforms must not be used to publish or promote electoral material or content that supports or opposes a candidate or group of candidates in a local government, State or Federal election.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Media engagement and approval pathways will align with the Risk Classification and Escalation framework outlined in this policy. Media engagement is subject to approval by the Chief Executive Officer, and where applicable, the Shire President in accordance with statutory requirements.

PERSONALITY & TONE

Communications must not disclose information classified as confidential under section 5.23 of the *Local Government Act 1995* or any other legislation.

Official communications must be lawful, accurate, respectful and reflect adopted Council positions. Communications representing the Shire should generally be presented in the third person.

CRISIS OR SIGNIFICANT INCIDENT COMMUNICATIONS

In the event of a crisis or significant incident, communications will be managed in a coordinated, timely and transparent manner.

Crisis or Significant Incident communications will:

- Identify a single authorised spokesperson in accordance with this policy;
- Ensure the spokesperson is appropriately briefed and available to respond to media enquiries;
- Provide accurate, factual and timely information;
- Where information is not immediately available, provide a clear timeframe for response;
- Prioritise the interests of the community, acknowledge responsibility where appropriate, and outline actions taken to address the matter;
- Maintain regular communication with key stakeholders;
- Monitor media coverage and public correspondence to inform response and messaging.

A Crisis or Significant Incident Communication Plan will be maintained as a supporting operational document defining crisis classification levels, approval pathways and delegated spokesperson arrangements.

During a crisis, approval and spokesperson arrangements will align with the statutory role of the Shire President and the administrative authority of the Chief Executive Officer.

DOCUMENT AND VERSION CONTROL

Responsible Directorate	Office of the CEO		
Responsible Officer	Chief Executive Officer		
Operational Contact	Coordinator Communications and Public Relations		
Statutory References	<i>Local Government Act 1995</i> <i>Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021</i> <i>Interpretation Act 1984 (s.59 - delegation framework)</i>		
Related Documents	WALGA Social Media Guideline 2018 POL-1005 Code of Conduct for Elected Members & Candidates DIR-1022 Code of Conduct for Employees		
Amendment History (Adoption and last 3 amendments)			
Version	Date Issued - Resolution Number	Item #	Description of Change
1.0	TBA	TBA	Council Adoption
Date of Next Review	April 2029		

