



**EXECUTIVE**

**DOCUMENT NUMBER**

**EXE-01**

**DOCUMENT TITLE**

**COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

| <b>DATE</b> | <b>CHANGE</b> | <b>BY</b> | <b>APPROVED</b> | <b>REVIEW</b> |
|-------------|---------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------|
| 01-02-96    | Initial Issue | PR&CO     | 01-02-96        |               |
| 06-03-01    | Review        | PR&CO     | 06-03-01        |               |
| 25-10-01    | Review        | CO        | 30-09-02        |               |
| 09-04-02    | Review        | CO        | 07-05-02        | Annually      |
| 11-09-03    | Review        | CO        | 02-12-03        | Annually      |
| 16-12-05    | Review        | CO        |                 | Annually      |
| 15-02-06    | Review        | CO        | 23-5-11         | 3 years       |

## **1.0 PURPOSE**

This Communications Policy has been developed to:

1. Increase the level of community knowledge and awareness concerning Council's roles, services, achievements and events
2. Improve communication among and between those involved in the promotion and delivery of Mitchell Shire Council programs and services
3. Set out clear guidelines for the overall communication objectives and practices of the Mitchell Shire Council
4. Promote a positive image of Council and the services it provides

## **2.0 APPLICATION**

This policy applies directly to all staff, Councillors, volunteers and contractors involved in the delivery of Council services at all levels.

## **3.0 PROCEDURE**

Communication plays a major role in enabling Council to meet its strategic objectives to:

1. Better inform the community
2. Maximise involvement and participation in community affairs
3. Gain community feedback and input for service improvement and consultation/policy guidance purposes
4. Eliminate incorrect and misunderstood information and perceptions
5. Effectively advocate for the best interests of the community

Communications includes all correspondence (including email), media comments/releases (including informal conversations with the media), printed and electronic publications (including websites), posters/signs, public statements, invitations, promotional items, events, social media and other official/formal interactions with internal or external stakeholders.

### **Objectives**

- To implement and maintain improved community information and awareness programs that will provide two-way open communication between Council and the Community
- To promote a positive public image of Council as a responsible governing organisation that provides strong leadership and direction within the Community
- Communicating Council's intentions and activities to the Community and bringing important issues to the attention of the public to facilitate the decision making process
- To provide the Community with relevant and current information that will increase access to Council facilities and services
- To develop internal communication programs for Councillors and employees through one on one interaction

- To effectively deal with issues of emergency

### **3.1 Who does Council communicate with?**

Council communicates internally and externally with a wide range of individuals and organisations. These stakeholders all have different reasons for interacting with Council, they do it in different ways and they are seeking different outcomes.

Internally, Council communicates with the Mayor, Councillors, Chief Executive Officer, General Managers, Senior Management Group, staff, units/departments, other staff groups, contractors and volunteers. This is known as internal communications.

Externally, Council communicates with residents and non-residents, ratepayers, visitors/tourists, community organisations/committees, businesses, media organisations, state and federal governments, other municipalities, members of parliament, tourism authorities and others. This is known as external communication.

### **3.2 Internal communications**

#### **3.2.1 Internal publications**

Council produces various internal publications for staff. These are the responsibility of the relevant department/unit, but can be approved by the Communications Unit.

#### **3.2.2 Intranet/Infoexchange**

Council maintains an internal information site for the use of staff. This is hosted on Council's intranet.

The Communications Unit is responsible for publishing content and maintains editorial control over the intranet site.

#### **3.2.3 Staff newsletter**

Council publishes a fortnightly staff newsletter, Staff Snapshot. This newsletter is the responsibility of the Communications Unit together with the Organisational Development Manager.

### **3.3 External communications**

#### **3.3.1 Advertising**

Advertising includes Council's fortnightly page 'Connecting Communities', public notices, employment advertisements, tenders and other forms of advertising.

Communications Unit is responsible for placing all types of advertising.

### **3.3.2 Correspondence**

Council corresponds with a variety of external stakeholders including individuals, community groups, businesses, public sector organisations and other tiers of government.

Council's written correspondence is a formal record of Council and requires appropriate authorisation before being issued. Officer-level staff should only sign everyday or routine correspondence.

Letters should be printed on the correct letterhead and be proof read by at least one person other than the author to ensure accuracy.

Emails are usually issued by individual staff, but remain a formal record of Council. Everyone should ensure the content of emails is appropriate at all times.

Council correspondences, including emails, are entered into Council's Records Management (TRIM) database.

### **3.3.3 Events**

Council organises a variety of events throughout the year. These are the responsibility of the relevant department/unit, but an Events Checklist must be completed for each event. The Communications Unit supports event management across Council.

### **3.3.4 Media relations**

The local media, including newspapers, newsletters, radio and television is the main source of community information regarding Council.

Council has a responsibility to ensure it dedicates sufficient resources to media relations to ensure a pro-active approach that delivers accurate, strategic, timely and positive coverage.

The majority of Council's media coverage occurs locally, but there are times when regional, statewide and national media interest is generated or occurs due to external conditions.

Good media relations requires a commitment to good governance, transparency and regular media contact in addition to a strategic outlook, political sensitivity and access to senior staff/information.

Communications initiatives may originate at officer or manager level, however the Communications Unit develops them for final approval by the Chief Executive Officer.

All media materials, including media releases and official comments, are finalised by the Communications Unit and approved by the Chief Executive Officer.

Councillors will exercise discretion when dealing with the media and refrain from comments regarding confidential, operational or staff issues.

Councillors are able to provide their personal views on policy or political issues as long as their statements are given as personal opinion and not as an official statement of Council.

The only spokespeople authorised to speak on behalf of Council are the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer or his/her nominated delegate.

The Mayor or his/her delegate is the appropriate spokesperson for political and strategic issues, council decisions, council achievements and for other official statements from Council.

The Chief Executive Officer or his/her delegate is the appropriate spokesperson for business and operational issues. The Chief Executive Officer may delegate this role to a General Manager, Manager or the Communications Unit.

The Communications Unit may provide background information to the media in addition to official statements authorised by the Chief Executive Officer.

Councillors and staff are reminded that statements made in time of crisis often have far reaching effects and can be used in legal proceedings against Council or individuals.

Informal conversations during or outside work hours with any person known to be a member of the media are defined as communications under this policy and are not permitted without official delegation from the Chief Executive Officer.

### **3.3.5 Media enquiries**

It is important that Council respond promptly to media requests to ensure that the media has easy access to accurate information on issues of importance.

Any contact by a media representative is to be directed to the Communications Unit to facilitate an official response. Staff may not answer questions or provide information without official delegation from the Chief Executive Officer.

Staff should ask for a list of questions, the journalist's contact details and their deadline. This information should be forwarded to the Communications Unit.

Council will not be provoked to respond by aggressive or negative journalists/media outlets. Communication with journalists and media outlets is entirely at the discretion of the CEO.

### **3.3.6 Photography**

Council maintains a photographic library of images from council events and other depictions of the shire for use in publications, promotional activities and for other purposes as required.

Council will not retain copies of images in its photographic library where it does not possess the required permission for their use. Photos of identifiable children require permission from parents. Photos of identifiable adults require permission from the individual concerned. Permission forms are stored in TRIM for reference.

Photos taken at public events and at events where there is no reasonable expectation of privacy do not require signed permission for their use.

A member of the public may at any time request that Council not use any image featuring them in the future, but this can not apply retrospectively to images already used.

### **3.3.7 Public exhibition**

Council makes available various documents, plans, planning scheme amendments and proposals for public comment prior to final adoption as part of its commitment to community consultation and in line with statutory obligations. A reasonable time for public responses will be provided.

### **3.3.8 Publications**

Council produces and publishes a variety of publications. Initial development and content are the responsibility of the relevant department or unit, but are approved by the Communications Unit and the Chief Executive Officer before being made available publicly.

Publications can be referred to translation services for residents if required.

### **3.3.9 Speeches**

Council provides support to council staff, the Mayor and Councillors in the research and writing of speeches as required in the course of official council duties. Official speeches are approved by the Chief Executive Officer.

The Mayor and Council staff are to use this service when speaking publicly. Councillors are to use it when speaking at official Council events and may use it at their discretion when speaking at appropriate community events.

### **3.3.10 Website**

Council's website continues to grow in prominence as both a source of information and a customer service tool. Council's website is the responsibility of the Communications Unit together with the Organisational Development Manager and the Information Technology Coordinator.

Council's website is a corporate publication with high visibility and its image and content must reflect Council's corporate image and strategic objectives.

The Communications Unit is responsible for publishing content to the website and maintains editorial control over the website.

### **3.3.11 Social Media**

Social Media is at this time, a growing method of communicating with user groups and stakeholders. The proper use, documentation and record keeping of all of Council's social media communications is summarised in Council's Social Media Policy.

## **4.0 Review**

Review of this policy and relevant procedures will take place every three years by 30 September.