

POLICY REGISTER

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT POLICY

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Issue	Prepared/Revised By and Date	Action/Amendment Description	Approved By and Date
1.0	Gary Woodman	First Edition	Council Minute No. 206.9.21 (23rd September 2021)
2.0	Gary Woodman General Manager April 2025	Review, new platforms used, use of Council's Standard Review Clause.	Council Minute No. 154.5.25 (22nd May 2025)

Objective

- To endeavour to comply with Council's focus to pursue excellence, to be responsive and pro-active in the promotion and improvement of our community through responsible and innovative leadership.
- To enhance Council's ability to be transparent, accessible and responsive to the community through encouraging dialogue and two-way communication;
- To outline the responsibilities, management and other issues concerning communication and engagement by Warren Shire Council;
- To outline Council's expectations of staff and Councillors in regards to personal use of social media;
- To ensure Council's communications conforms with its corporate identity standards; and
- To define roles and responsibilities for the management of communication tools on behalf of the Organisation.

Scope

This Policy clarifies openness and transparency in engaging with the community, ensuring a process which, at a minimum, meets legislative requirements and is facilitated with better access to and understanding of information, increasing participation, raising awareness and strengthening our community.

This Policy applies to all Warren Shire Council staff, Councillors and Contractors across all operations and functions of Council involved in the process of communications and community engagement, including those who:

- Propose to use communications to promote Council's policies, functions, events and services internally with staff or with the wider community or to distribute content;
- Are authorised to administer or comment on official social media channels as Authorised Social Media Facilitators and Moderators; or
- Are users of social media in a personal or professional capacity.

Definitions

Engagement – is the process of Council working collaboratively with community and its stakeholders. It is actions or opportunities for input, feedback and advice on plans, projects or services that Council is developing or delivering.

Generally, there are three aspects to engagement:

- Inform;
- Consult; and
- Collaborate.

Communication – is a process by which Council provides announcements on services, projects and decisions. Communication can take many forms including face to face, digital or written and may be formal or structured depending on the audience. Communication is an essential component within engagement.

Community – refers to those who have an interest of the functions and future directions of Warren Shire Council, including but not limited to residents, ratepayers, visitors, schools, community/sporting/church groups, staff, users of services, businesses and developers.

Policy

Council recognises the benefits effective and positive communication has to Council and the community.

1. Forms of Communication

Communication can be by means of:

- 1.1 Surveys;
- 1.2 Social Media;
- 1.3 Website;
- 1.4 Council Publications;
- 1.5 Employee Relations; and
- 1.6 Events and Presentations.

1.1 Surveys

Surveys may include online polls, questionnaires and surveys and are to be undertaken in line with the NSW Privacy and Personnel Information Protection Act 1998 which requires Council to:

- Secure and store personal information collected;
- Disclose the use, storage and collection of personal information;
- Clearly identifies that it is a Warren Shire Council survey; and
- Utilises online collection tools to restrict multiplication of entries if able.

1.2 Social Media

Social media: refers to internet-based tools for sharing and discussing information by people. Social media includes but is not limited to:

- Social networking sites (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+);
- Video and photosharing (Youtube, Flickr, Instagram);
- Blogs;
- Micro-blogging (Twitter);
- Forums, discussion boards and groups (Google groups, hangout);
- Wikis (Wikipedia, wikispaces);
- Vodcasts and Podcasts; and
- Instant messaging and chat services.

Social media is a two-way form of communication between Council, residents, the community, partners and stakeholders. It offers an opportunity to disseminate information immediately and swiftly as well as being a tool for consultation and engagement.

Warren Shire Council accepts social media has the potential to improve communication with stakeholders including residents, partners, and business and industry organisations. As such the appropriate use of social media to support communications objectives is encouraged.

Social media is integrated in Council's communications functions. Use of social media should also be considered when developing new strategies as a means of communicating with a range of stakeholders.

Warren Shire Council also recognises the value of social media as a listening mechanism to improve the understanding of community expectations and to respond as it sees fit. It is closely linked with Warren Shire Council's Social Media Policy.

1.2.1 New Social Media Channels

The General Manager must authorise the use of social media channels that are branded or deemed to be associated with Warren Shire Council.

In determining an application for a new social media channel the General Manager will consider the resourcing and management of such channels.

1.2.2 User Generated Content

User Generated Content (UGC) is content on a social media site that is created by the audience. The conventions of social media encourage user generated content. In the main Council supports this practice.

Authorised Social Media Facilitators and Moderators are responsible for establishing rules of use for the relevant social media channel and monitoring and moderating that channel appropriately.

1.2.3 Dealing with Inappropriate Content and Behaviour

Warren Shire Council will not publish UGC, or will remove any previously published UGC, that:

- Defames any individual, group or organisation;
- Vilifies any individual, group or organisation because of their political affiliation, race, religion, cultural background, gender, age or sexual identity;
- Contains obscene, racist, sexist, threatening or otherwise offensive language or images;
- Breaches copyright;
- Is/or potentially unlawful; and
- Contravenes any policies or guidelines set forth by Warren Shire Council.

1.2.4 Personal Use of Social Media

Warren Shire Council accepts employees, Contractors and Councillors will engage social media for professional and personal reasons. Staff, Councillors and Contractors should be aware that comments, including personal comments, made on social media regarding the organisation are connected to the organisation and as such relate to their relationship/employment /contract with Council.

When using social media Staff, Councillors and Contractors should at all times:

- Ensure personal online activities do not interfere with the performance of duties;
- Clearly distinguish personal comments from official comments;
- Not disclose confidential information obtained through their role;
- Act lawfully;
- Not post defamatory, discriminatory, disrespectful or deliberately misleading comments; and
- Best practice is that Staff/Contractors/Councillors should not comment directly on any Council social media posts or when those posts are shared.

Inappropriate behaviour (not limited to the examples above) may lead to a breach of Council's policies and Code of Conduct. This breach may result in disciplinary action including formal warnings and/or dismissal.

1.3 Website

Council will endeavour to provide an up to date, user and mobile friendly website that portrays information on Council services, functions, decisions and future in a way that proves a valuable source of information and customer service tool for its stakeholders.

Regular communication, initiatives and updates of the website must be maintained to encourage the community to use the website for Council and community information.

Information should be reviewed regularly by all Council Departments to ensure the most current and relevant information is presented. Request for changes or updates should be sent through to authorised persons for update via the council@warren.nsw.gov.au

Stakeholders can promote their events through Council's website by emailing a request through to council@warren.nsw.gov.au with all relevant details.

1.4 Council Publications

Council publishes and distributes newsletters and/or news items to relevant stakeholders by Division/Department. These publications must be created in line with Council's Brand Style Guides and approved templates. Prior to distribution, publications should be submitted through the relevant approval process.

Council's publications include, but are not limited to:

- Council Newsletters;
- Library Newsletters;
- Ratepayers Information Booklet;
- From the Mayor's Desk;
- Business Papers;
- Council Meeting Precis;
- Council Notices and Advertisements;
- Digital Media Programs; and
- Whispir Platform.

1.5 Employee Relations

The Staff and elected Councillors of Warren Shire Council are significant and effective ambassadors for Council. It is essential that the information presented to these ambassadors is received in a way that is timely, relevant, consistent and user friendly to best ensure they are equipped and adequately informed on Council's activities.

Effective internal communication encourages acknowledgement, ownership and accountability to Council's present and future, increasing staff morale and more effective communication between employees across Departments and management. Staff are to be made aware of any key issues or projects which will affect them e.g. a specific focus on safety.

Strategies to ensure such communication to employees include, but are not limited to:

- Staff induction process;
- Regular staff, Senior Management Team and MANEX meetings;
- Memorandums;
- Staff noticeboards;
- Email;
- Text or other digital messages;
- Attachments on pay slips;
- Employee surveys; and
- LinkedIn.

1.6 Events and Presentations

Council Staff and Councillors should secure permission from the relevant Divisional Manager, Acting Divisional Manager, Manager, Acting Manager or General Manager prior to accepting speaking engagements at events or conferences.

Written or verbal support of community events should also have the approval of the relevant Divisional Manager, Acting Divisional Manager, Manager, Acting Manager or General Manager.

Appropriate branded documents, presentations and collateral must be used for communication in line with Council's Brandmark Guide.

All presentations, videos and external documents should have relevant approvals prior to distribution or use.

If a presentation is accepted by a Councillor or Staff Member as a private citizen, it must be made clear to the audience that there is no affiliation with Warren Shire Council.

Warren Shire Council's Marketing and Communications Team can provide and assist in facilitation, marketing and public relations support to Council and community events through collateral, digital sharing of information across website and social media channels.

2. When Council Should Engage

Council will undertake a formal community engagement process in the following circumstances:

- Where there is a legislative/statutory requirement;
- When Council resolves to undertake community consultation;
- On issues that have the potential to affect the delivery of services or facilities that contribute to community well-being, growth and prosperity;
- When identifying and understanding the needs and priorities of the community for the purposes of strategic planning; and
- To monitor and evaluate community satisfaction with Council or Council services.

3. Project Engagement Plans

Council Staff can utilise a Project Engagement Plan with the Marketing and Communications Team when planning to undertake community engagement for a specific event or project. Council Department's should advise the Marketing and Communications Team of projects and together determine the need for a formal plan.

The plan will:

- Define the project;
- Determine objectives;
- Outline appropriate communication and engagement methods;
- Detail timeframes and responsibilities; and
- Consider feedback, reporting and evaluation.

4. Copyright

Warren Shire Council respects the copyright of others and will protect the copyright of its own materials.

Warren Shire Council retains the copyright on all material created by Warren Shire Council and shared via the above communication channels.

Authorised Social Media Facilitators and Moderators, website content officers and the Marketing and Communications Team will ensure content shared does not breach copyright and that Council copyrighted material is approved for use.

5. Records Management

Records of all communication will comply with Council's Records Management Policy.

6. Appropriate Content

Council's communication activities should not have political purpose (unless otherwise directed and approved by General Manager and Mayor). Any communication will be presented in unbiased language, grammatically correct and in line with this Policy, and all related policies, procedures, legislation and approval processes.

6.1 Social Media Content

All Authorised Social Media Facilitators and Moderators must exercise sound judgement in regard to content and material communicated via Council's social media channels. All material published on the social media channels must reflect content that is aligned to Council's corporate approval process.

All communication via Council's social media channels must:

- Comply with all related Council policies, including the Social Media Policy, and Code of Conduct;
- Be approved by relevant staff when and where appropriate;
- Be of a high standard;
- Not plagiarise or breach copyright; and
- Comply with the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.

The following content is not appropriate to be communicated via Council's social media channels:

- Unassociated commercial advertising and sponsorship; and
- Intentionally misleading or inaccurate information.

Council's Authorised Social Media Facilitators and Moderators reserve the right to remove material from social media if deemed inappropriate.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

All staff have a responsibility to act ethically and honestly when communicating with the community. Staff should take measures to ensure personal comments cannot be mistaken for an official comment of Council.

Council's Divisional Managers, Managers and Staff should also:

- Inform the Marketing and Communications Team of information being communicated to the community and follow relevant approval processes; and
- Comply with Council's relevant policies and procedures including Council's Brandmark Guide, Social Media Policy, Community Engagement Strategy and Communication & Engagement Policy.

7.1 Digital

- Comments, post, images, video and any other material that is deemed defamatory of Council, other employees or Councillors, will result in disciplinary action;
- The Marketing and Communications Team will maintain a register of approved social media platforms and channels used within Warren Shire Council; and
- Only Authorised Social Media Facilitators and Moderators may comment via official social media channels on behalf of Warren Shire Council.

Relevant Legislation

NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998

NSW Local Government Act, 1993

Associated Documents

Warren Shire Council's Code of Conduct

Warren Shire Council's Social Media Policy

Warren Shire Council's Brandmark Guide

Warren Shire Council's Records Management Policy

Project Engagement Plans

Review

This Policy should be reviewed every four (4) years or within 12 months following an election of Council. The Policy may be reviewed and amended at any time at Councils discretion (or if legislative changes occur).