

GOVERNANCE

G 1.10 Communications and Social Media Policy

<i>Responsible Department</i>	CEO Office
<i>Resolution Number</i>	C.4690
<i>Resolution Date</i>	15/03/2023
<i>Next Scheduled Review</i>	2024/25
<i>Related Shire Documents</i>	Shire of Northam Standing Orders Local Law.
<i>Related Legislation</i>	State Records Act 2000 - SRC Standard 8 – Managing Digital Information.

OBJECTIVE

This policy establishes protocols for the Shire of Northam’s official communications with our community to ensure the Shire of Northam is professionally and accurately represented and to maximise a positive public perception of the Shire of Northam.

SCOPE

This policy applies to:

1. Communications initiated or responded to by Shire of Northam staff with our community; and
2. Council Members when making comment in either their Shire of Northam role or in a personal capacity.

POLICY

1. Official Communications

The purposes of the Shire of Northam’s official 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 Northam events and services.
- Promoting public notices and community consultation / engagement opportunities.
- Answering questions and responding to requests for information relevant to the role of the Shire of Northam

- Receiving and responding to community feedback, ideas, comments, compliments and complaints

The Shire of Northam's official communications will be consistent with relevant legislation, policies, standards and the positions adopted by Council. Our communications will always be respectful and professional.

The Shire of Northam 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:

- Website;
 - Advertising and promotional materials;
 - Media releases prepared for the Shire President and/or Chief Executive Officer, to promote specific Shire of Northam positions;
 - Social media; and
- Community newsletters, letter drops and other modes of communication undertaken by the Shire's administration at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer.

2. Speaking on behalf of the Shire of Northam

The Shire President is the official spokesperson for the Shire of Northam and may represent the Shire in official communications, including: speeches, comment, print, electronic and social media. *[s.2.8(1)(d) of the Local Government Act 1995]*

Where the Shire President is unavailable, the Deputy Shire President may act as the spokesperson. *[s.2.9 and s.5.34 of the Local Government Act 1995]*

The Chief Executive Officer may speak on behalf of the Shire of Northam, where authorised to do so by the Shire President. *[s.5.41(f) of the Local Government Act 1995]*

The provisions of the *Local Government Act 1995* essentially direct that only the Shire President, or the Chief Executive Officer if authorised, may speak on behalf of the local government. It is respectful and courteous to the office of the Shire President to refrain from commenting publicly, particularly on recent decisions or contemporary issues, until such time as the Shire President has had opportunity to speak on behalf of the Shire of Northam. Council Members commenting publicly are able to do so in accordance with Section 7 of this policy and once the Shire President has had the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Shire (if applicable). Reference should be made to reports within Council agenda/minutes to ascertain whether an official media release will be issued for a particular matter prior to commenting publicly.

Communications by Council Members and employees, whether undertaken in an authorised official capacity or as a personal communication, must not:

- bring the Shire of Northam into disrepute;
- compromise the person's effectiveness in their role with the Shire;

- imply the Shire's endorsement of personal views;
- imply the Council Member or employee is speaking on behalf of the Shire, unless authorised to do so; or
- disclose, without authorisation, confidential information.

Social media accounts or unsecured website forums must not be used to transact meetings which relate to the official business of the Shire of Northam.

Council Member communications must comply with the Code of Conduct and the *Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007*.

3. Responding to Media Enquiries

All enquiries from the media for an official Shire of Northam comment, whether made to an individual Council Member or Employee, must be directed to the Chief Executive Officer or a person authorised by the Chief Executive Officer.

Information will be coordinated to support the Shire President or Chief Executive Officer (where authorised) to make an official response on behalf of the Shire of Northam.

Council Members may make comments to the media in a personal capacity – refer to clause 7.1 below.

4. Website

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

5. Social Media

The Shire of Northam uses social media to facilitate interactive information sharing and to provide responsive feedback to 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 of Northam maintains the following social media accounts:

- Shire of Northam Instagram: www.instagram.com/shireofnortham
- Shire of Northam Facebook: www.facebook.com/shireofnortham/
- Visit Northam Facebook: www.facebook.com/visitnortham
- Visit Northam Instagram: www.instagram.com/visitnortham
- Libraries Facebook: www.facebook.com/northamlibrary
- Rec Centre Facebook: www.facebook.com/northamrecreationcentre
- Pools Facebook:
www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=shire%20of%20northam%20aquatics
- Shire YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC39z1LW_yJoHgX27vOnKOow

- Bilya Koort Boodja – Centre for Nyoongar Culture and Environmental Knowledge: www.facebook.com/bkbcentre
- BKB Instagram: www.instagram.com/bilyakoortboodja
- Chief Executive Officer - Twitter

In addition to any other social media accounts approved by the Chief Executive Officer.

The Shire of Northam may also post and contribute to social media hosted by others, so as to ensure that the Shire's strategic objectives are appropriately represented and promoted.

The Shire actively seeks ideas, questions and feedback from our community, however we expect participants to behave in a respectful manner. The Shire of Northam will moderate its 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 safety or security;
- Repetitive material copied and pasted or duplicated;
- Content that promotes or opposes any person campaigning for election to Council, appointment to official office, or any ballot;
- Content that violates intellectual property rights or the legal ownership of interests or another party; and
- Any other inappropriate content or comments at the discretion of the Shire

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

5.1 Shire President Social Media Official Accounts

The Shire of Northam supports the Shire President in using official social media account/s to assist the Shire President in fulfilling their role under section 2.8 of the *Local Government Act 1995*, to speak on behalf of the local government. The content will be administered and moderated in accordance with this policy.

These official Shire of Northam accounts must not be used by the Shire President for personal communications.

5.2 Use of Social Media in Emergency Management and Response

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

- Shire website;
- Social media;
- Media releases or media statements;
- Community newsletter including email newsletters;
- SMS messaging; and
- Letter drops and other modes of communications at the discretion of the CEO.

6. Record Keeping and Freedom of Information

Official communications undertaken on behalf of the Shire of Northam, 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*.

Council Member communications that relate to their role as a Council Member are subject to the requirements of the Shire's Record Keeping Plan and the *State Records Act 2000*. Council Members are responsible for transferring these records to the Shire's administration. Council Member records are also subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1992*.

7. Personal Communications by Council Members

Personal communications and statements made privately; in conversation, written, recorded emailed, texted 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, Council Members 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*.

8. Elected Member Statements on Shire Matters

A Council Member may choose to make a personal statement publicly on a matter related to the business of the Shire of Northam.

Any public statement made by a Council Member, whether made in a personal capacity or in their local government representative capacity, must:

1. Clearly state that the comment or content is a personal view only, which does not necessarily represent the views of Shire of Northam.
2. Be made with reasonable care and diligence;
3. Be lawful, including avoiding contravention of; copyright, defamation, discrimination or harassment laws;
4. Be factually correct;

5. Avoid damage to the reputation of the local government;
6. Not reflect adversely on a decision of Council;
7. Not reflect adversely on the character or actions of another Council Member or employee;
8. Maintain a respectful and positive tone and not use offensive or objectionable expressions in reference to any Council Member, employee or community member.

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

Comments which become public and which breach this policy, the Code of Conduct or the *Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007*, may constitute a minor breach of the *Local Government Act 1995* and may be referred for investigation.