



MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

DOCUMENT TYPE: Council policy

DOCUMENT STATUS: Approved

POLICY OWNER POSITION: Communications Officer

INTERNAL COMMITTEE ENDORSEMENT: Not applicable

APPROVED BY: Council

DATE ADOPTED: 24/08/2021

VERSION NUMBER: 2

REVIEW DATE: 24/08/2025

DATE RESCINDED:

RELATED STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS, POLICIES OR PROCEDURES: Media Procedure
Social Media Procedure
Staff and Contractors' Code of Conduct
Community Engagement Policy
Community Engagement Procedure
Business Continuity Management Policy
Election Period – Communication and Events Procedure
Governance Rules
Privacy Policy
Loddon Shire Council Customer Service Charter

RELATED LEGISLATION: Local Government Act 2020
Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014
Defamation Act 2005
Copyright Act 1968

EVIDENCE OF APPROVAL:

Signed by Chief Executive Officer

FILE LOCATION: K:\EXECUTIVE\Strategies policies and procedures\Policies - adopted PDF and Word\POL Media and social media policy v2.docx

Policy documents are amended from time to time, therefore you should not rely on a printed copy being the current version. Please consult the policies on the Loddon Shire website (Council Policies) or Intranet (Organisational Policies) to ensure that the version you are using is up to date.

This document is available in alternative formats (e.g. larger font) if requested.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Loddon Shire Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land comprising the Loddon Shire Council area. Council would like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present.

1 PURPOSE

This policy outlines protocols for managing communication between Loddon Shire Council, the media and the community.

2 SCOPE

This policy applies to all Councillors and Council staff, including contractors, and those staff authorised to contribute to media on behalf of Council.

3 POLICY

Council is committed to using a range of methods to communicate its services and events, and to update the community on current issues. This includes using traditional print and broadcast media, and electronic media.

This policy ensures that communication between Council, the community and the media is managed appropriately, including:

- providing accurate, timely and consistent information
- that only authorised spokespeople provide information to the media or on social media on behalf of Council
- Council's integrity and professional image is preserved
- issues are handled in an appropriate manner

Loddon Shire will make the following information available to external parties at all times:

- policy positions of Council
- progress on actions and programs developed and undertaken in accordance with an approved plan or strategy of Council

The key messages that Council communications should carry, including website and social media platforms are:

- promoting benefits to citizens and businesses through improvement
- efficient, customer-focused, market competitive services
- efficient and effective use of ratepayers' funds
- encouraging consultation, inviting the community to participate in some way
- tourism promotions

Council shall provide timely information to relevant external parties on:

- temporary changes (less than three months) to services
- the introduction of new services
- new or amended policy positions of Council
- events that Council wishes to promote

3.1 Authorisation to make comment to the media and on social media

The Mayor and Chief Executive Officer are the official spokespersons for Council.

3.1.1 Councillors

Only the Chief Executive Officer and the Mayor can speak to the media on behalf of the Council. The Mayor or Chief Executive Officer may delegate this authority to other Councillors.

Where a matter is ward specific, the relevant ward Councillor is able to speak on the issue without being required to first receive delegation from the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer.

3.1.2 Staff

Upon delegation from the Chief Executive Officer, Directors can act as authorised spokespersons on issues from their areas of responsibility.

Managers and officers are not authorised to make comment to the media unless authorised by the Chief Executive Officer.

Any enquiries to staff from the media must be referred immediately to their Director and the Chief Executive Officer. In their absence, the enquiry should be referred to the Manager Executive and Commercial Services.

3.2 **Comment as a private citizen**

Staff members shall not make comment as a private citizen on issues relating to Council or staff colleagues to the media and on social media.

Staff should also be mindful of the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 and Local Government Act 2020 which prohibit the disclosure of personal and confidential information. Staff should also ensure they act within the guidelines of the Loddon Shire Council Staff, Volunteers and Contractors Code of Conduct, their position description and employment contract.

If staff are in any doubt regarding making comment as a private citizen, they should discuss the matter with their Director or the Chief Executive Officer.

3.3 **Potential media and social media issues**

If a staff member becomes aware of an issue that has potential to escalate and harm Council's reputation, or an opportunity to be promoted, it should be brought to the attention of their Director immediately.

3.4 **Approval of media releases**

All media releases for distribution by Council must be endorsed by the relevant Director and approved by the Chief Executive Officer or an officer delegated by the Chief Executive Officer. This also pertains to other information provided to the media.

3.5 **Social media authorisation**

Staff must be authorised by the Chief Executive Officer to maintain and post to social media sites on behalf of Council. Only authorised staff members are to post to social media sites on behalf of Council.

Any new Council-owned social media pages must be approved by the relevant Director and Chief Executive Officer. A staff member wanting to create a Council-owned social media page must provide a strategy and plan for the use of that social media, including:

- demonstrating how it will support the achievement of an action in Council's business plan
- identifying how Council branding will be used
- demonstrating how the obligations in this policy, other relevant policies, and the Staff and Contractors Code of Conduct will be met

3.6 Use of social media on behalf of Council

Social media posts must be approved by the requesting officer's Director or an officer delegated by the Chief Executive Officer, in accordance with the Social Media Procedure, before they are published on any Council social media page.

When using social media on behalf of Council, staff:

- are responsible for maintaining, updating and responding to items instigated by them personally, in adherence with relevant approvals
- must not make political comment or contribute to political and social debate
- must abide by the general responsibilities in Council's Staff and Contractors Code of Conduct
- must understand and comply with relevant legislation, e.g. privacy, defamation, anti-discrimination, copyright and trade mark laws
- must reinforce the integrity, reputation and values of Council

3.7 Comments and posts from public

Council social media pages should be actively monitored from 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Where relevant, all posts and comments that require a response from Council should link back to its website, for accurate and more detailed information.

Where appropriate, comments or private messages on social media should be responded to within two business days. This response time is in line with the Council Customer Service Charter.

Approval must be obtained from the Loddon Shire Council Chief Executive Officer or an officer delegated by the Chief Executive Officer before responding to comments.

Where applicable, conversations should be taken offline and referred to appropriate staff.

All Council social media pages will carry a disclaimer outlining the terms of use, including the times the social media site will be monitored.

3.8 Council Facebook page

Council will maintain a single official Facebook page for all social media interactions. Additional approved service specific Council-owned social media pages will be managed by the department responsible for the page development.

The pages will be maintained and monitored Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm.

Staff must undergo social media training before making posts or comments on the page.

The pages will be administered in accordance with Council's Social Media Procedure.

A Loddon persona will be established by the IT officer which will be used by that staff member to manage all Facebook dealings on behalf of Council.

3.9 Advertising

All advertising related to Council must be endorsed by the relevant Director and authorised by the Chief Executive Officer or an officer delegated by the Chief Executive Officer, before it is provided to outlets for publication.

3.10 Email signatures

Use of signature banner promotions on centrally-managed email signatures must be endorsed by the relevant Director and authorised by the Chief Executive Officer or an officer delegated by the Chief Executive Officer.

3.11 Record keeping

All content published or communicated on behalf of Council must be recorded, along with author's name, date, time and media used.

Any passwords and logins associated with social media sites used by Council must be registered and accessible by staff with the appropriate authority. The Manager Information and Business Transformation will be responsible for maintaining these credentials.

3.12 Emergency management

Statements made in times of an emergency can have far-reaching effects. Therefore, staff and Councillors should note that informal comment or discussion with the media or on social media channels must be avoided.

In the case of a Council emergency (i.e. an emergency localised to Council that affects services, such as a building fire), please refer to the Business Continuity Management Policy.

During a wide-ranging emergency (e.g. flood), **all** communications (including media and social media messaging) will be coordinated through the Municipal Operations Centre.

During an emergency, where Council is authorised or directed to make comment by the agency responsible for coordinating the emergency response **only** the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer will do so.

3.13 Local government election period

During the local government election period, special provisions will be in place pertaining to the authorisation of media releases and media comment. This is to ensure no electoral matter is included in Council content during this period. Please see the Election Period Policy in the Governance Rules, and the Election Period – Communications and Events Procedure for more information and the authorisation process during this time.

4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS OR ABBREVIATIONS USED

Term	Definition
Social media	<p>Digital communication sites where people may comment, contribute, create, post, upload and share content, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blogs and micro blogging sites (e.g. Twitter) • Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn) • Instant messaging facilities • Video and photo sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and Pinterest) • Forums and discussion boards
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional media forms, such as newspapers, radio and television. • Council websites

5 HUMAN RIGHTS STATEMENT

It is considered that this policy does not impact negatively on any rights identified in the Charter of Human Rights Act. Loddon Shire Council is committed to consultation and cooperation between management and employees. The Council will formally involve elected employee Health and Safety Representatives in any workplace change that may affect the health and safety of any of its employees.

6 REVIEW

The Communications Officer will review this policy for any necessary amendments no later than 4 years after adoption of this current version.