



DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

01.16.04

1. BACKGROUND

Weddin Shire Council is committed to fostering clear, consistent, and effective communication with its community and stakeholders. Council's former Policy for Communication and Consultation (01.16.03) encompassed both communication and consultation; however, this update refines the policy's focus solely on communication. Since the introduction of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, Councils are required to adopt a Community Engagement Strategy. Consultation is captured in the Weddin Shire Community Engagement Strategy (CES).

By concentrating on communication, this policy ensures that Council continues to provide transparent, professional, and consistent messaging, while maintaining strong connections with the community and stakeholders. The Draft Communications Policy outlines the levels of delegation for responding to media and maintaining media relations. For any public consultation requirements, stakeholders should refer to the Weddin Shire Community Engagement Strategy (CES).

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Draft Communication Policy is to establish a framework for effective communication between Council and its stakeholders, ensuring transparency, trust, and mutual understanding.

3. POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Draft Communication Policy for Weddin Shire Council establishes a clear framework to guide all interactions with stakeholders and internal communication across teams and divisions. Council understands the importance of sharing information effectively as a key factor in strengthening its reputation and increasing community awareness of the programs, services, accomplishments, and resources it provides.

Successful communication will be achieved by:

- Providing regular and consistent communication on Council's projects and activities to all stakeholders.
- Creating a positive and professional image for Weddin Shire Council through open and transparent communication.
- Enhancing community trust through the timely dissemination of accurate and relevant information.
- Encouraging feedback and fostering two-way communication with stakeholders.
- Responding promptly and effectively to media enquiries and community concerns.



- Ensuring internal communication supports alignment and cohesion within Council operations.
- Developing a strong customer service culture within Weddin Shire Council.

4. LEGISLATION AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

- *Local Government Act 1993*
- Local Government (General) Regulation 2021
- *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*
- Model Code of Conduct and Procedures
- Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy
- Social Media Policy for Councillors
- Social Media Policy for Staff
- Weddin Shire Community Engagement Strategy.

5. APPLICATION/SCOPE

This policy applies to all Councillors, employees, and delegates (including s. 355 Committee Members) of Weddin Shire Council. It encompasses all forms of communication, including written, verbal, and digital correspondence, as well as media and public relations.

6. POLICY

6.1. Roles and Responsibilities

The following table outlines the roles and responsibilities of personnel. Noting that the position titles may change, however, the responsibilities remain the same.

Roles	Responsibility
The Elected Council	The elected Council are responsible for the governance oversight of this policy.
Mayor or their Delegate	The Mayor or their delegate is the official spokesperson for Weddin Shire Council for strategic and governance matters.
General Manager	The General Manager is responsible for the overall control and implementation of the Policy. The General Manager is the official spokesperson for the Council business.
Directors or their delegate	The Directors or their delegates are responsible for media enquiries as directed. The Directors or their delegates are responsible for the administering of communication to the key stakeholders using the policy objectives and principles outlined in this policy.
Council Officers	Council Officers are responsible in adhering to the communication objectives and principles outlined in this policy.



Roles	Responsibility
General Public	The general public must act in accordance with this policy and abide by any determination made as a result of this policy.

6.2. Communication Stakeholders

Weddin Shire Council's 'communication stakeholders' include:

- Ratepayers and residents
- Potential residents
- Councillors
- Employees
- Visitors
- Investors, developers and individuals with business interests within the Weddin Shire
- Customers who seek products or services or information from Council
- Community and Government organisations
- Local, regional and national media.

A unified commitment from all Council directorates is essential to the success of this plan.

6.3. Communication Principles

The following outlines the communication principles that form part of the Draft Policy:

i. Clarity

Use simple, clear, and concise language to avoid misunderstandings. Tailor your message to the audience's level of understanding.

ii. Consistency

Maintain a consistent tone and message across all communication channels. Ensure information aligns with organisational values and policies.

iii. Relevance

Focus on information that is meaningful and valuable to the audience. Avoid unnecessary details or jargon.

iv. Accuracy

Provide correct and fact-checked information. Avoid assumptions or spreading unverified content.

v. Transparency

Be open and honest about intentions, processes, and outcomes. Address concerns directly without evasion.



vi. Active Listening

Pay attention to feedback and concerns from the audience. Respond thoughtfully and appropriately to questions or objections.

vii. Empathy

Understand and consider the audience's perspectives, emotions, and needs. Communicate in a way that builds trust and connection.

viii. Timeliness

Share information promptly to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Respond to inquiries or concerns in a timely manner.

ix. Engagement

Foster two-way communication by encouraging participation and feedback. Create opportunities for dialogue and collaboration.

x. Professionalism

Use respectful and appropriate language and tone. Maintain a positive and constructive approach, even in challenging situations.

xi. Adaptability

Adjust communication style and medium based on the audience and context. Be flexible and open to change as the situation evolves.

6.4. Dealing with the Media

The following provides guidance on dealing with the media for Councillors, staff and delegates. Further guidance is provided in the Appendix - Guidance on Council Communication.

i. General Matters

Statements on general Council matters are limited to the Mayor (or their delegate), General Manager, or the appropriate Director (or their delegate).

ii. Sensitive or Controversial Topics

Official statements on behalf of the Council concerning sensitive or controversial matters are limited to the Mayor and General Manager.

iii. Photographs/Film Footage

Any requests for photographs or filming should be directed to the General Manager or the appropriate Director.



iv. Media Releases

All media releases must be issued by the Mayor or General Manager or an approved delegate to ensure consistency and alignment with Council messaging.

v. Radio Promotion

Participation in radio programs or promotions on behalf of the Council is restricted to the Mayor, General Manager, or relevant Director. Permission for other staff, delegates or Councillors to participate on behalf of the Council must be granted by the General Manager.

All radio content, including advertisements and interviews, must be reviewed and approved by the General Manager to ensure accuracy and alignment with Council objectives. Radio promotions should focus on Council initiatives, events, or services that benefit the community and align with Council messaging.

6.5. Corporate Identity

Council's logo, corporate colours, and consistent fonts and layouts should be utilised in all publications, promotional materials, and documents. Councillors' email contact details will be made available on Council's website to facilitate open communication.

6.6. Crisis Communication

Advance preparation is essential when addressing potential emergencies or controversies. To minimise the risk of such situations, Council management, in collaboration with employees, must proactively identify issues that could significantly impact the community. These issues may arise internally or be identified through monitoring traditional media, social media, and community correspondence. Communication must align with the Council's Business Continuity Plan.

When an issue is identified, Council must act promptly to communicate accurate and relevant information to the community, reducing the likelihood of the issue escalating into a crisis. Effective communication methods may include distributing a media release, engaging with the media through interviews, posting updates on social media (in line with the Social Media Policy), publishing information on Council's website, or directly contacting affected parties, depending on the nature of the situation.

All media channels and correspondence must be regularly monitored to assess public sentiment and identify any emerging concerns that may require further action.

6.7. Emergency Management Communication

In the event of an emergency, the Council website will switch to an emergency mode, serving as the primary platform for sharing real-time updates and critical information with the community. Updates, such as breaking developments or emergency instructions, will be managed and published by the appointed media liaison via



Council's website. Communication must align with the Council's Emergency Management Plan.

6.8. Customer service

The way Weddin Shire Council communicates with the community, whether through phone calls, written correspondence, emails, or in-person interactions, plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion. Providing timely, professional, and customer-focused responses is essential to building and sustaining a strong, positive image of Council within the community. This includes dealing with Customer Service Requests and Customer Complaints.

6.9. Employee Relations

Weddin Shire Council recognises that its employees and elected Councillors play a vital role as representatives of the organisation and its values. To support them in this role, it is critical to provide clear, consistent, and easily accessible information about Council operations and activities. Keeping staff well-informed reduces the potential for misinformation and ensures alignment in communication efforts.

Internal communication within Council is not a one-way process but rather a collaborative exchange of information that flows throughout the organisation. This approach encourages feedback, enhances employee morale, and supports open dialogue across teams and management levels. Effective communication also fosters collaboration during periods of change, ensuring staff are engaged and involved in decision-making processes.

Building strong relationships among staff and management is key to achieving a culture of effective communication and mutual respect outlined in the Appendix which outlines the channels of communication.

6.10. Events

Effective communication is a cornerstone of Weddin Shire Council's approach to managing and supporting events. Ensuring that the community is well-informed and engaged is vital to the success of these events. Council employs a range of communication strategies to promote awareness, encourage participation, and celebrate the achievements and messages tied to each event.

By focusing on clear, timely, and accessible communication, Weddin Shire Council ensures that events are well-promoted and resonate with the community, fostering stronger connections and participation.

Weddin Shire Council supports and manages a variety of Council and community events including the Henry Lawson Festival of Arts.



These events aim to celebrate community achievements, promote key messages, and foster partnerships that benefit the local community.

Council events are commonly staged to celebrate and recognise achievements within the community and/or to promote a specific key message or interest.

Council also provides financial or in-kind support to community events to establish mutually beneficial partnerships between Council and the community; to raise the profile of the Council within the community; to provide opportunities for project development and skill development of members involved in events; to engender pride in the local community; and to generate income and employment opportunities.

6.11. Publications

Council's publications include:

- Integrated Planning Reports and Annual Reports as required under the *Local Government Act 1993*.
- Weekly newsletters and notices in the Grenfell Record.
- Digital updates on the Council's website and social media platforms.

6.12. Websites

6.12.1. Weddin Shire Council Website

The Weddin Shire Council website (www.weddin.nsw.gov.au) is a central component of Council's approach to communication. It serves as a key resource for providing information about Council's services, activities, and the region it represents, while also offering an interactive platform for residents and visitors.

The website is updated and maintained on a weekly basis at a minimum. Documents available for download are provided in Adobe Portable Document File (PDF) format to preserve their integrity and ensure accessibility.

6.12.2. Visit Weddin Website

Weddin Shire Council's Visit Weddin website (www.visitweddin.com.au) serves as the primary platform for promoting community events and tourism-related activities. This website provides residents and visitors with up-to-date information on local events, attractions, and opportunities to engage with the region's vibrant culture and heritage.

All submissions for the community events calendar are reviewed and moderated by the Tourism & Events Coordinator prior to publication. It is important to note that the calendar and other sections of the website must not be used for commercial advertising, ensuring the platform remains focused on community and tourism promotion.



6.13. Copyright

The Council logo, protected by copyright, cannot be reproduced, modified, or used on other websites, social media platforms, or online spaces without written approval from the General Manager.

All requests or inquiries regarding reproduction and copyright of Council materials should be directed in writing to:

The General Manager

Weddin Shire Council
PO BOX 125
GRENFELL NSW 2810

6.14. Social Media

Community usage of social media is ever increasing. Anyone using or intending to use social media in their capacity as a staff member or Councillor must refer to Council's Social Media Policy.

6.15. Monitoring and Evaluation

Council will monitor the effectiveness of communication tools through feedback, media analysis, and stakeholder engagement metrics. Regular evaluations will ensure continuous improvement in meeting communication objectives.

7. NON-COMPLIANCE

Non-compliance with this policy may render employees, delegates or Councillors liable for disciplinary action or legal action.

8. DEFINITIONS

Key Terms	Meaning
Communication	The process of sharing information, ideas, and messages between Council and its stakeholders.
Corporate Identity	The visual and branding elements, including logos, fonts, and layouts, used to represent Council consistently.
Crisis Communication	A planned approach to sharing information during an emergency or controversy to manage public perception. Crisis communication is likely to link with the action in the Business Continuity Plan.
Emergency Management Communication	Emergency management communication that is specified under Council's Emergency Management Plan.



Key Terms	Meaning
Customer Service	The interactions and assistance provided by Council to its stakeholders, ensuring efficient and professional responses. This includes Customer Service Requests (green forms) and Customer Complaints (Blue forms)
Media Relations	The relationship and communication strategies between Council and local, regional, and national media outlets.
Publications	Documents, reports, newsletters, and other materials produced by Council for public distribution.
Stakeholders	Individuals, groups, or organisations that interact with or are affected by Council's activities and decisions.
Website	Council's official online presence, providing information, updates, and resources to stakeholders.



Title: Draft Communications Policy		
Department: Organisation Wide		
Version	Date	Author
01.16.01	Adopted 19 August 2010	
01.16.02	Adopted 21 March 2013	
01.16.03	Adopted 20 April 2017	
01.16.04	Draft	General Manager
This policy may be amended or revoked at any time and must be reviewed at least three (3) years since its adoption (or latest amendment). The General Manager will be responsible for the review of this policy. Review of this policy will incorporate relevant legislation, documentation released from relevant state agencies and best practice guideline.		
Review Date: TBC		
Amendments in the release		
Amendment History	Date	Detail
Draft	17 April 2025	Title change and review
Annexure Attached: APPENDIX – GUIDANCE ON COUNCIL COMMUNICATION		
Noreen Vu General Manager		



APPENDIX – GUIDANCE ON COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

1. Official Response

Limiting official responses to the Mayor and General Manager ensures clear, consistent messaging and demonstrates a unified approach to communication with the community.

If you are approached, please refrain from using phrases like “no comment” or “I am not permitted to speak to the media,” as this can create the impression that Council is withholding information.

1.1. Responding to Unforeseen Crises

In the event of an unexpected crisis as outlined in s.6.6 Crisis Communication and s. 6.7 Emergency Management Communication, the following steps will guide Council in managing the situation effectively:

1. **Refer to Council's Business Continuity Plan:** For Crisis communication.
2. **Refer to Council's Emergency Management Plan:** For Emergency Management.
3. **Establish an Issues Management Team:** Form a team comprising the General Manager, Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and relevant Directors. Ensure all members are fully briefed on the situation and designate a suitable individual as the media liaison.
4. **Seek Legal Advice:** Obtain legal guidance if necessary to ensure Council's actions and statements are compliant with relevant laws.
5. **Limit Unauthorised Commentary:** Remind staff and Councillors that they are not permitted to comment publicly on the matter, in line with Council's guidelines for engaging with the media.
6. **Centralise Communication:** Direct all inquiries to the designated media liaison (likely to be the Executive Assistant to the General Manager) and advise customer service staff to route all calls related to the issue appropriately.
7. **Gather and Verify Information:** Establish the facts, collect relevant background details, identify key messages, and formulate a clear response.
8. **Appoint a Spokesperson:** Assign either the Mayor or General Manager as the sole spokesperson for the issue, ensuring their role aligns with Council's communication policies.
9. **Prepare Media Materials:** Draft and approve information for media releases and other communication channels.
10. **Handle Broader Media Interest:** If the issue attracts significant attention from state or national news outlets, arrange a press conference with the designated spokesperson.
11. **Brief the Spokesperson:** Provide the spokesperson with all necessary details and key messages to ensure accurate and effective communication.
12. **Engage with Staff:** Communicate the situation and Council's response strategy to staff to maintain internal awareness and alignment.



- 13. Monitor Coverage:** Continuously monitor media and social media platforms to track public response and identify any further developments requiring action.

1.2. Letters to the Editor

Staff and Councillors, excluding the Mayor and General Manager, are not permitted to submit Letters to the Editor regarding Council-related matters in an official capacity unless they have obtained written authorisation from the General Manager.

Staff and Councillors may submit Letters to the Editor as private individuals, provided they do not identify themselves as Council employees or Councillors, and their statements cannot be interpreted as reflecting an official Council stance or policy. This may be in contravention with other Council policies.

2. Communication Channels and Practices for Council Staff

Weddin Shire Council utilises a variety of methods to communicate with its staff effectively and maintain a connected workplace environment:

Comprehensive Onboarding

New employees participate in an induction program designed to familiarise them with Council's operations and structure.

Regular Updates

Important news and information are communicated to staff in a timely manner through whole organisation emails and Employee Newsletters, keeping staff informed of developments.

Email Communications

All-staff emails are used to distribute critical updates.

Written Notices

Updates are also communicated through staff memos, file notes, and messages included with payslips.

Meetings and Forums

Directorate meetings and manager-supervisor discussions occur regularly to align priorities and share information. This includes the WHS and Staff Consultative Committee Meetings.



Staff Recognition

Council celebrates employee contributions through initiatives such as long-service awards and recognition of achievements.

Noticeboards

Noticeboards are strategically placed throughout Weddin Shire Council facilities to serve as dedicated spaces for sharing essential updates and information. They provide a convenient platform for displaying posters, notices, and other materials to raise awareness about key issues, upcoming events, and Council initiatives. Additionally, noticeboards are used to advertise positions vacant within the organisation, ensuring that employment opportunities are clearly communicated to staff and the community. This approach supports transparent and accessible communication while fostering awareness and engagement across the Council.

Staff Presentations, Workshops and Training Days

Staff presentations, workshops, and training sessions are organised to bring employees together from all directorates and departments. These events provide a valuable platform for fostering collaboration, encouraging open discussion, and gathering feedback on specific topics. By facilitating engagement and knowledge-sharing across different areas of the organisation, these activities support professional development and help align staff with Council's goals and initiatives.

Staff Surveys

Feedback gathered from staff is carefully reviewed, and actionable insights are integrated into Council's planning processes. Progress and outcomes from these actions are communicated back to staff using internal communication channels, ensuring transparency and continuous improvement within the organisation.

By implementing these strategies, Weddin Shire Council aims to create an environment where staff feel valued, informed, and empowered to represent the organisation positively in their daily interactions. This collaborative approach strengthens internal communication and supports a productive and cohesive workplace culture.

3. Communication Methods for Events

To ensure consistent and effective communication for events, Weddin Shire Council utilises a variety of methods, including:



- **Council Event Page:** Dedicated sections on the Tourism and Events website, www.visitweddin.com.au, provide detailed information about event schedules, activities, and purposes.
- **Social Media Campaigns:** Council's social media platforms are used to share event updates, promotional materials, and reminders to encourage community participation.
- **Media Releases:** Official media releases are issued to local and regional media outlets to announce events and highlight their significance.
- **Noticeboards and Posters:** Physical noticeboards and posters displayed in high-traffic areas across the Shire share event details in a visible and accessible way.
- **Direct Communication:** Email notifications and invitations are sent to key stakeholders, community groups, and local businesses to ensure targeted engagement.
- **Post-Event Communication:** After events, Council shares outcomes, photos, and achievements through the same communication channels to celebrate success and express appreciation for community involvement.

4. Media Relations

Weddin Shire Council is committed to fostering strong relationships with local and regional media outlets to effectively share information with the community. Council prioritises providing accurate, timely, and cost-effective communication to ensure messages are clear and reflect Council's values and initiatives.

- Issuing media releases authorised by the General Manager.
- Using media platforms to enhance community awareness of Council activities.
- Ensuring all media releases are available on Council's website.
- Restricting formal commentary on sensitive issues to the Mayor and General Manager.

4.1. Media Activities

The majority of Council's media-related activities are managed by an employee delegated by the General Manager. These responsibilities include:

- Preparing and distributing media releases to inform the public about Council initiatives and updates.
- Organising photo opportunities to enhance engagement and visibility of Council activities.
- Initiating contact with media outlets to promote newsworthy events or developments involving Council.
- Developing media kits tailored to specific campaigns or announcements.
- Responding promptly to media inquiries and requests for information.

All contact with media initiated by Council staff must be coordinated through the General Manager or their delegate.



4.2. Media Releases

To maintain consistency and professionalism, all media releases:

- Are prepared using Council's standard media release template.
- Require approval from the General Manager.
- Are published on Council's website to ensure accessibility and transparency.

4.3. Visual Media

The inclusion of photographs, images, graphs, and maps in media releases is encouraged to strengthen messaging. Visual elements help explain complex issues, enhance understanding, and increase the likelihood of media outlets publishing the story. Providing high-quality images to accompany media releases further supports Council's communication goals by making stories more engaging and visually appealing.

Through these practices, Weddin Shire Council ensures professional and effective communication with media outlets, enhancing public understanding of Council's activities and initiatives while building trust and transparency.