

POLICY TITLE: COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

File Reference No: C.28
Date Adopted: 27th February 2008
Minute No: 9102
Last Updated: 27th May 2009

History of Policy Review

Version	Adoption Date	Minute No	Details of Review
1	27th February 2008	11515	New Policy
2	27th May 2009	12379	Requested by Council

OBJECTIVES

To facilitate effective communication with the community and employees in the development of Council policy and to increase the level of awareness and public understanding of Council actions.

POLICY STATEMENT

Council will provide effective communication that provides timely and appropriate information and gives opportunities to the community to contribute their views and opinions, which can then be reflected in Council's decision making.

Council is committed to:

- Informing the community of key Council decisions, services, programs and initiatives
- Promoting transparency and accountability to Council's decision making processes
- Promoting opportunities for public consultation, feed back and participation in Council activities
- Representing the views of the local community and acting as advocate to the State and Federal Governments and in all appropriate formats.

In all forms of communication, including verbal, printed or electronic, staff are expected to adhere to the highest standards of ethical practice and professional competence.

Council recognises the need to embrace new and emerging technologies in conducting its business and fulfilling its objectives. Council will utilise the most appropriate methods of information dissemination to fulfil these needs.

Communication options will allow broad community accessibility where possible and therefore consider the requirements of the Disability and Discrimination Act and Council's Disability Action Plan.

Council will achieve the principles set out in the Communication Policy through:

- (a) Access to Further Information
- (b) Community Engagement
- (c) Professional Public Relations
- (d) Open Internal Communication and Business Processes

Access to Further Information

Council will ensure that appropriate access to information is available to the community through:

- (a) Ensuring Council publications are written in plain English.
- (b) Translating information regarding Council services into relevant Community Languages
- (c) Targeting information to people with disabilities and their carers and key organisations.
- (d) Delivering information about activities of Council through a variety of means including Council publications, local newspapers, Werris Creek Flyer, quarterly newsletters, Council's website, electronic formats including using social networking tools and email newsletters, public meetings, displays and exhibitions.
- (e) Maintaining opportunities for feedback.
- (f) Adhering to the GIPPA and Privacy and Personal Information Protection Acts.

Community Engagement

Refer to Policy 1.51 - Community Engagement Strategy

Professional Public Relations

Council will establish and maintain a good working relationship with media outlets. All enquiries by media representatives are to be directed to the Communications Manager for co-ordination of a response.

Public comment includes public speaking engagements, comments on radio and television, views expressed in letters to print and electronic media where it may be expected that the publication or circulation of the comment will spread to the community at large.

If staff members are approached by journalists, photographers or camera operators, they should politely direct all enquiries to the General Manager or Mayor. They are not to provide background information, discuss Council matters, Council staff or Councillors, make a comment as a Council representative or issue official statements without prior approval from the General Manager.

Council Public Comment Guidelines

- (a) The Mayor, Chairpersons of Committees and the General Manager are the official spokespeople for Council. At the discretion of the General Manager, Directors or Managers may be authorised to make public statements.
- (b) Staff may make public comment on behalf of the Council and on matters of factual information only if the information has been approved by the Mayor or General Manager.
- (c) Other staff must not discuss sensitive, confidential or political matters with the media, in particular current court cases or confidential legal advice.
- (d) As specified by the Local Government Act, Councillors must not disclose material classified as confidential in reports presented to Council.
- (e) Written statements to the media on behalf of the Council must be issued through the General Manager and on media release letterhead.
- (f) The General Manager must approve requests for interviews or media permission to film Council owned assets or Council staff.
- (g) All Council material which is to be published electronically should be submitted to the IT Manager for publishing.
- (h) In emergency situations e.g. building evacuation or flood, an Emergency Planning Committee is to ensure that there is a flow of information to the media and residents from a single authoritative source.
- (i) In situations which may impact significantly on Council, adequate background information should be readily available. Reacting to negative publicity or issues without planning or background information could exacerbate a situation.

Failure to adhere to this will result in action being taken under Council's Code of Conduct.

Open Internal Communication and Business Processes**Answering Correspondence**

Council defines correspondence as including letters, facsimiles, e-mail messages and information collected using Council's online services. In all of these cases Council will provide a clear, concise and prompt response to all customer enquiries in accordance with Council's Customer Service Charter. Council captures this information into an electronic database (Tr@ceR) to ensure that it is accessible and searchable.

Council will:

- (a) Acknowledge correspondence or provide an interim reply within fourteen days.
- (b) Respond to correspondence by telephone where appropriate (such as simple requests and correspondence for information only).
- (c) Provide a substantive responsive within a further two weeks.
- (d) Keep the writer informed if a final reply cannot be provided within the time allowed.
- (e) Ensure all correspondence includes the name and contact details of the officer dealing with the matter and Council's internal reference.
- (f) Use plain language that is clear and concise, and ensure a courteous and professional approach to all correspondence.
- (g) Provide delegated authority to the appropriate staff to respond to specific correspondence such as ministerial letters.

Telephone Calls

Council has existing Telephone and Voicemail Guidelines. Council staff will answer all calls promptly, quickly refer calls to the appropriate officer and provide clear and concise information in response to caller inquiries.

Council will:

- (a) Answer calls as promptly as possible.
- (b) Advise the caller on answering of the name and department of the officer answering
- (c) Deal with the call, redirect the call or take a clear message as appropriate
- (d) Always return calls and ensure any follow-up activities are carried out promptly
- (e) Record all significant telephone calls in the form of a file note in Council's record keeping system.

Internal Communication

Consideration and implementation of the following are imperative to the success of an effective internal communications procedure:

- Knowledge or the lack thereof, is one of the greatest negative factors affecting internal communication. A full understanding of the operations of Liverpool Plains Shire Council should be imparted to all new and existing staff. Without this knowledge, staff members are at a disadvantage and may feel uncomfortable in dealings with other Directorates and their customers. Councillors and staff should be given the opportunity to increase their knowledge of Council by training and access to pertinent documents including:
 - Community Strategic Plan;
 - Delivery Program;
 - Operational Plan;
 - Long Term Strategic Plan;
 - Fees and Charges;
 - Annual Report;
 - State of the Environment Report;
 - Works Program;
 - Organisational Structure.
- Produce a monthly staff newsletter which is distributed to all staff.
- Management Executive Meetings to be held fortnightly.
- Departmental staff meetings are to be held on a monthly basis and whole of staff meetings every six (6) months.

- Attachments to payslips are an ideal way to pass important information to all staff members.
- The Human Resource Manual will ensure that Council's business and the workplace are thoroughly understood by all new staff members.
- Ensure all internal committees such as Safety, EEO and Consultative Committees communicate information on their activities to appropriate staff.
- Council Business Paper Agendas and Minutes are accessible to all staff.
- The e-mail system is used to enhance communication (see below).
- The use of the phone messaging system and corporate calendar on Microsoft Outlook are to be encouraged as they provide the switchboard and staff with information as to an individual staff member's activities at any given time.
- Informal meetings with staff on a social basis.
- Copies of all petitions will be provided to Councillors.

Responsibilities of Members of the Local Community

Communication is a two way process. To be effective both Council and the public should strive to adopt a fair and reasonable approach to communicating with each other.

When communicating with Council, where possible Council will encourage the community to:

- (a) Focus their comments on specific issues, or if necessary on the performance of Council.
- (b) Provide Council with all relevant information in order that their opinion, concern or complaint can be readily understood.
- (c) Accept that Council operates under resource constraints, noting that the allocation of resources is a matter for Council to determine.

If Council is unable to address the issue, community members are welcome to pursue alternative means of resolving complaints and disputes through external agencies.

Council will not accept the excessive use of abusive language, threatening or inappropriate behaviour from the public. In turn, Council officers will be required to adhere to Council's Code of Conduct at all times when dealing with the community and all other external stakeholders.

Use of Electronic Mail for Official Correspondence

Electronic mail (email) is increasingly becoming the standard for correspondence. It is a comparatively fast and inexpensive medium for creating, transmitting and responding to messages and documents. Used responsibly it contributes to efficient running of business and effective service provision.

This policy covers transactions between Council and a customer sent from a Council email account and includes official and significant correspondence.

Significant Correspondence refers to correspondence which Council sends as part of a process directed by law and correspondence to which non-response is likely to have a significant negative impact on the correspondent.

For Council to communicate via email for significant correspondence, agreement must be obtained from the customer.

By providing agreement for Council to communicate via email the correspondent agrees to:

- (a) Regularly check their email account
- (b) Notify Council of changes to email address

Council will not be responsible for failure of the customer to undertake these actions resulting in non delivery of correspondence.

Delivery of correspondence by email is assumed. Council will deem official correspondence sent by Email to have been delivered if the email system has not generated a notice that the message could not be delivered. Where such notice is received Council will post a copy of the correspondence to the recorded postal address.

APPENDIX "A"

LOCAL MEDIA CONTACT DETAILS

Press

QUIRINDI ADVOCATE

George Street,
Quirindi. NSW. 2343

Phone: 02 6746 1188
Fax: 02 6746 2007
Email: editor@gppmedia.com.au

Deadline for copy – Tuesdays 10.00 a.m.

NORTHERN DAILY LEADER

Brisbane Street,
Tamworth. NSW. 2340
Phone: 02 6768 1200
Fax: 02 6766 3181
Email:

Classifieds classifieds.ndl@ruralpress.com
Editorial mail.ndl@fairfaxmedia.com.au

Deadline for copy
Classifieds – 3.00 p.m. previous day
Editorial – 11.00 a.m. previous day

WERRIS CREEK FLYER

David Holley – davidholley@westnet.com.au

Television

PRIME TELEVISION

New England Highway,
Tamworth. NSW. 2340
Phone: 02 6761 9777
Fax: 02 6765 3572
Email: tamworth.news@primetv.com.au

NBN TELEVISION

226 Bridge Street,
Tamworth. NSW. 2340
Phone: 02 6762 1990
Fax: 02 6762 3455
Email: tamnews@nbntv.com.au

Radio

ABC RADIO

470 Peel Street,
Tamworth. NSW. 2340

Phone: 02 6760 2411
Fax: 02 6760 2499
Email: tamworth.regional@abc.net.au

2TM / 92.9

Radio Centre,
Calala. NSW. 2340
Phone: 02 6765 7055
Fax: 02 6765 0312
Email: news@2tm.com.au

APPENDIX "B"

MEDIA RELEASES

All media releases will be issued in accordance with a standard media release layout on Council letterhead. See below.



SAMPLE MEDIA RELEASE

**Liverpool Plains Shire Council
MEDIA RELEASE**

HEADLINE

This format should be used for all Liverpool Plains Shire Council media releases.

The document should be prepared using Arial font.

All media releases should be sent on Liverpool Plains Shire Council letterhead.

If there are opportunities for photographs or interviews, details of these should be clearly spelt out underneath the contact details. A suggested caption should accompany any photograph submitted.

Media releases may be embargoed to ensure that the story breaks at the same time or information is not available until a certain date.

For further information, please contact _____ on 6746 1755.

APPENDIX “C”

USE OF LOGO

Samples of logo are:



The colours for the logo are as follows:

Blue	Process Blue
Green Hill	PMS 369
Green Paddock	PMS 376
Yellow	PMS 610

The coloured logo should be used wherever possible. Logos are available on Council’s computer network on the k drive – under admin\logo.