



Media and Communications Policy



Yarriambiack
SHIRE COUNCIL

Yarriambiack Shire Council encourages a working environment which promotes gender equality and models non-violent and respectful relationships.

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Chapter 1 - Media and Communications Policy

1. Policy Purpose

This Policy provides guidance for the appropriate use of communications tools to help build the positive reputation of Council and to facilitate Council's effective voice within, and on behalf of, the community.

2. Scope

This policy applies to elected Councillors, and all Council Officers including full-time, part-time, contract, casual, work experience and trainees, contractors and volunteers of Yarriambiack Shire Council.

This policy may also apply to agencies and individuals who provide services to Council and may be included in relevant external supplier's contracts.

In all forms of communication, including verbal, printed or digital, Councillors, employees and contractors must adhere to the highest standards of ethical practice and professional competence. This policy should be read in conjunction with all related documents.

During a Council election this Policy should be read in conjunction with the Yarriambiack Shire Council Election Period Policy.

During an emergency it should be read in conjunction with the Municipal Emergency Management Plan.

3. Definitions

Term	Definition
Broadcast Media	Television, commercial radio, community radio
Centralised Customer Request Handling Process	Councillor Requests submitted via the Councillor HUB.
Community Strengthening Team	Yarriambiack Shire Council Officers that are part of the Community Strengthening Team
Confidential Information	Has the same meaning as at section 3 of the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> (Vic).
Corporate Social Media Account	All corporate social media accounts and platforms that Council support and manage.
Councillor Social Media Account	A social media page or profile that has been created by a Councillor and is identified as a page that is used predominantly for their role as a councillor.
Electronic Communication	Any form of communication is transmitted electronically or digitally. This includes text message (SMS), voice recording, in-application communication and email delivery such as e-newsletters.
Health Information	Has the same meaning as at section 3 of the <i>Health Records Act 2001</i> (Vic).
Leadership Team	Yarriambiack Shire Council Officers that are Managers, Chief Officers, Chief Executive Officer

Term	Definition
Model Councillor Code of Conduct	Means the Code of Conduct prescribed in accordance with section 139 of the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> (Vic).
Personal Information	Has the same meaning as at section 3 of the <i>Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014</i> (Vic).
Personal Social Media Account	A social media account or page, used predominantly for private use.
Print Media	Printed publications including, but not limited to, magazines, newspapers, and community newsletters
Social Media	<p>Means online interactive technologies through which individuals, communities and organisations can share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content or pre-made content posted online. Social media may include but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social networking websites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Yammer, Threads). • Video and photo sharing websites (e.g. Flickr, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Vimeo, YouTube). • Blogs, including corporate blogs and personal blogs. • Blogs hosted by media outlets (e.g. 'comments' on news articles). • Micro-blogging (e.g. Mastadon, Truth Social, X). • Wikis and other online community generated forums (e.g. Wikipedia). • Forums, discussion boards and groups (e.g. Google groups). • Vodcasting and podcasting • Group messaging technologies/apps (e.g. WhatsApp, SMS). • Streaming platforms (e.g. Twitch, Mixer). • Geospatial tagging (e.g. Foursquare, Facebook Check In). <p>Any other tool or emerging technology that allows individuals to publish or communicate in a digital environment (excluding website content).</p>

4. Policy

This policy ensures Yarriambiack Shire Council is delivering services in-line with community needs and expectations. Council communicates with key stakeholders through a variety of channels to engage with their needs, concerns, ideas and objectives.

Council communications will be a positive reflection of Council's commitment to informing the community in a manner that is clear, concise, accurate, and consistent with Council decisions and policies. All communications will be written, produced and

distributed in an accessible manner. Council will maximise the use of electronic and online communication to reduce printed material where practicable, both for the benefit of the environment and to expedite communicative outcomes.

Yarriambiack Shire Council reserves the right to remove, where possible, content that violates this policy or any related policies. This policy will be published and promoted to Councillors, employees and contractors.

4.1 Collaboration with Stakeholders

Yarriambiack Shire Council appreciates the importance of and actively contributes to collaborations within our communities and region. Council will endeavour to share and promote key activities, projects and information from external stakeholders that align with Council's values.

4.2 Media Relations and Spokespeople

Public Relations

Media is a key part of Council's operations, an important source of information for our community and a significant part of Council's role as a community leader and advocate within the region. Yarriambiack Shire Council will use this policy to assist the Mayor, Councillors, Chief Executive Officer and Council Officers in understanding the correct communication processes when handling media enquiries, identifying spokespersons for media interviews, preparing media statements and making comments to the media.

Council will endeavour to respond to media enquiries within a respectful deadline where possible and attempt to reply to all enquiries within 48 hours of being received. Should Council choose to provide a response or in the event that response time cannot be met due to the complexity of the request, the Chief Executive Officer will contact the media and advise. All enquiries will be acknowledged by the Chief Executive Officer once received.

Spokespeople

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

The Community Strengthening Team are responsible for all media enquiries. Council staff are not permitted to be interviewed or provide a response to the media and must direct any enquiries to the Chief Executive Officer or Community Strengthening Team in the first instance.

The Mayor is the official spokesperson on decisions of the Council. If the Mayor is unavailable, an authorised delegate of the Mayor will act as Council's official spokesperson.

The Mayor in consultation with Councillors is responsible for the allocation of public speaking roles at Council organised events requiring Council participation.

The Chief Executive Officer is the official spokesperson on all operational matters. Responses to media enquiries of a technical nature may be referred to the relevant member in the Leadership team to act as spokesperson.

The roles and responsibilities for each spokesperson are outlined in the following table:

Authorised Officer	Roles and Responsibilities
Mayor	Official spokesperson on all policy matters and decisions of the Council.
Councillors	Able to speak to the media if delegated by the Mayor to be the official spokesperson.

Chief Executive Officer	Official spokesperson on high level operational matters.
Leadership Team	Delegated spokesperson on day-to-day operational or technical enquiries.
Community Strengthening Team	Responsible for coordinating responses and providing information to the media on behalf of Council.
Staff	No media role unless requested by the Chief Executive Officer to provide information or comment in the form of a media enquiry. May be chosen by the Community Strengthening Team to feature in communications material as the subject matter.

Media training will be made to all relevant staff and Councillors with CEO approval.

4.3 Key Communications Methods

Yarriambiack Shire Council utilises a variety of communication tools to provide the media and community with timely information.

Council will actively develop positive relationships with the media and pursue all opportunities for media involvement.

All content published or communicated by or on behalf of Yarriambiack Shire Council using social media will be monitored and recorded.

Council Meetings

Shire Council meetings are held every month and are open to the community and media. Council Meetings are also livestreamed on Council's YouTube Channel. The link is available via Council's website.

The recording of Council Meetings will be available for viewing until the next scheduled Council Meeting.

Media Releases

The Community Strengthening Team are responsible for coordinating and dispatching all media releases, photo opportunities and media briefings following authorisation. These will be emailed to councillors for their information.

All media releases from Council must be approved by the CEO prior to distribution.

Website

Content published on Council's website must be approved by the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate.

Any development of sub-sites, including social media pages, must be approved by the Chief Executive Officer and is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Digital Communications (including Social Media)

Councillors and employees are encouraged to share Council's content in a positive and respectful manner; however, they are not permitted to post on behalf of Council or to comment on Council matters from their personal social media accounts. When sharing content, Councillors and employees must ensure that it does not harm the reputation of Council or seek to disparage it in any way.

The Community Strengthening Team will monitor Council-managed social media platforms for relevant contributions that may impact the municipality, its operations or its reputation. In line with Council's commitment to the principles of good governance, transparency and respectful engagement under the Local Government Act 2020 (Vic),

the Community Strengthening Team reserves the right to moderate, remove, or hide comments or posts that are offensive, misleading, defamatory, or that incite discrimination or hostility.

Where necessary to protect community wellbeing or uphold respectful communication, the ability to comment on Council posts may be limited or turned off entirely. This approach ensures Council maintains a safe and constructive digital environment consistent with the Act's principles of community accountability and integrity (Part 2, Division 1, Sections 9 and 10).

Personal use

Yarriambiack Shire Council encourages employees to participate in all forms of digital communications.

When using digital communications in a personal manner, employees are reminded of their employment and obligations in relation to the Employee Code of Conduct.

All staff have a responsibility to demonstrate professionalism when interacting with members of the community. As a result of living and working in small communities, this responsibility extends to activities outside of the workplace.

Failure to adhere to the above guidelines may result in disciplinary action as per the Employee Code of Conduct and Human Resources Policy and Guidelines Manual.

Details regarding Councillors' personal use of social media can be found in Chapter 2 – Councillor Social Media Policy.

Yarriambiack Shire Council encourages Councillors to participate in all forms of digital communications in accordance with Chapter 2 – Councillor Social Media Policy.

Publications

The Community Strengthening Team assists Council departments to prepare publications for external use. Publications must be professionally produced and meet Council editorial standards in line with official style guides and must be proofread before seeking final approval from the Chief Executive Officer.

All outgoing Yarriambiack Shire material will include Council's logo and website details.

4.4 Branding Requirements

Logo Usage

Yarriambiack Shire Council logos are to appear on all Council communications including correspondence, publications, forms, brochures, advertisements, displays, signage, employee uniforms, fleet vehicles and other plant, electronic communications and any other relevant communication medium. Refer to Council's Motor Vehicle Manual for vehicle identification requirements and exemptions from branding.

Where appropriate and in-line with contractual obligations, Council contractors are to display the Yarriambiack Shire Council logo on their vehicles/plant/publications, with the approval of the Chief Executive Officer.

Where appropriate, successful applicants of Council's Community SHARE Grant funding program must acknowledge Yarriambiack Shire Council's contribution to their event or project. Promotional materials using the Yarriambiack Shire Logo must be approved by the Chief Executive Officer, or approved delegate prior to public release.

All the Yarriambiack Shire Council logos are to be used in line with the respective branding guidelines as per the official Style Guide. Approval must be sought by the Chief Executive Officer prior to using a logo. Failure to use a Council logo without permission is in breach of Council's copyright.

Council's logos include (but are not limited to):

- Yarriambiack Shire Council

- Yarriambiack Libraries
- I Am Yarriambiack

Advertising

Council will undertake paid advertising to communicate information and promote events, activities and services to both the local community and beyond.

Advertising is recognised as a key tool for marketing purposes. Advertising spend will be in adherence to approved budget and procurement policy and procedures.

Advertising will be placed within the channel most appropriate to reach the target audience with the relevant content and includes (but is not limited to):

- Print media
- External Publications
- Broadcast media (television and radio)
- Online (including social media)
- Outdoor advertising

Signage

Yarriambiack Shire Council signs (including digital signs) are to adhere to the standards outlined in appropriate branding guidelines and must be approved by the Chief Executive Officer.

Public Displays

Displays or exhibits promoting Council are to include the appropriate Yarriambiack Shire Council logo and be of a professional standard and adhere to Occupational Health and Safety standards and legislation.

Breaches

Breaches of this policy will be dealt with in accordance with the relevant Code of Conduct.

Chapter 2 – Councillor Social Media Protocol

5. Protocol Purpose

To outline the benefits and risks of social media use by Councillors and provide guidance on its appropriate use and specific provisions which must be observed.

6. Introduction

Social media is a powerful tool to maintain connections between Councillors and members of the public. The use of social media can foster an environment of open communication between Councillors and the municipal community.

Used well, social media can be used by Councillors to:

- Strengthen community engagement;
- Foster transparency and trust;
- Provide a trusted voice in the social media environment;
- Distinguish the role of the individual Councillor from that of the Council;
- Provide another avenue to contact the Councillor directly; and
- Enable Councillors to hear from members of the community that may otherwise be difficult to reach.

Councillor social media use also presents risks for Councillors, including:

- The exposure to trolling, cyberbullying and other abusive behaviour;
- The creation of a platform for the dissemination of misinformation;
- The creation of an expectation about the 24/7 availability of a Councillor;
- A significant administrative workload associated with managing a platform;
- The risk of inadvertently disclosing confidential information; and
- An exposure to legal liability.

7. Councillor Social Media

A Councillor is not required to have a social media presence but that they have a right to do so. For Councillors who choose to be active on social media, there are specific rights and responsibilities associated with their online activities.

Councillors have the following rights regarding their social media presence:

- Councillors are under no obligation to maintain a social media presence.
- Councillors who choose to maintain a social media presence:
 - Do so of their own volition;
 - Have a right to express an independent view consistent with the Charter of *Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*; and
 - Acknowledge that they are required to adhere to the Model Councillor Code of Conduct.

Councillors who choose to maintain a social media presence are responsible for:

- Compliance with this policy;
- Administration of the social media platform;
- Moderation of community content; and
- Compliance with the terms of service of the social media platform in use.

The provisions applicable to Councillor social media also apply to a social media presence operated by another person who, with the Councillor's authorisation, administers, moderates, or uploads content on the Councillor's behalf.

8. Council Resources and Support

This section outlines the support available from the organisation to Councillors who choose to maintain a social media presence. It also explains the prohibition on the use of Council resources for certain social media activity.

Councillors who choose to maintain a social media presence will be provided with:

- Technical support for Council provided hardware;
- Training in social media obligations as part of the mandatory Councillor induction and ongoing professional development programs;
- Generic collateral (such as graphics, images and suggested copy) that promotes Council programs; and
- Access to Council's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) - a voluntary and confidential service designed to assist Councillors with personal concerns that affect their personal wellbeing and/or performance as a Councillor.

Councillors will not be provided with:

- Technical or other support for the use of social media platforms;
- Social media monitoring or reporting services; or
- Legal advice regarding social media content.

Councillors must not use Council resources, including Council facilities, computer equipment, smartphones and internet connections for social media activity:

- To gain or attempt to gain, directly or indirectly, an advantage for themselves or for any other person;
- To cause, or attempt to cause, detriment to the Council or another person;
- In a way that is intended to, or is likely to, affect the result of an election under the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic);
- In a way that is intended to, or is likely to, affect the result of an election for a state or federal parliament; or
- In the furtherance of private business or commercial activity.

9. Good Faith Behaviour

Councillors have a requirement to act in good faith on social media, and to uphold their obligation to ensure that their behaviour does not bring discredit upon the Council.

Councillors who maintain a social media presence are required to do so in good faith, which means:

- Not posting content which could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council (noting that Councillors are free to link or re-post social media content that has been published by the Council, including the addition of their own perspective or commentary);
- Not creating a social media presence purporting to represent a Council auspiced entity, such as an advisory committee, reference group, steering committee or similar;
- Not posting anonymously, or by using a fake or intentionally misleading identity;
- Not engaging in trolling, harassment, personal attacks or similar behaviour;
- Not intentionally publishing misinformation, falsehoods or misleading material;
- Not engaging in doxing;
- Not engaging in cyberbullying; and
- Not publishing defamatory material.

10. Freedom of Expression

There are lawful restrictions in place to ensure that Councillor expression aligns with the Model Councillor Code of Conduct and complies with various laws applicable to social media content. However, Councillors are still welcome to freely express their views within these boundaries.

Councillors enjoy the human right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, subject to any lawful restrictions reasonably necessary.

Subject to this part, Councillors are free to express an independent view on social media, provided it is made clear to the audience that it is their personal view and does not represent the Council. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Expressing a personal view that differs from that of the Council;
- Stating a desire for change to a Council policy or position;
- Expressing an opinion on a matter that is to come before the Council (without expressing a pre-determined decision);
- Encouraging members of the public to participate in the decision-making process;
- Expressing disappointment or dissatisfaction or stating that they do not support a Council position or decision;

- Explaining why they voted on a matter in the way that they did in a meeting that was open to the public; or
- Otherwise engaging in robust public debate.

Councillors must not post content on their social media that, if posted, would be contrary to the Model Councillor Code of Conduct in that it:

- Could reasonably be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where the Councillor has not been authorised by the Mayor to make such a comment;
- Is demeaning, abusive, obscene, threatening or of a sexual nature;
- Intentionally causes or perpetuates stigma, stereotyping, prejudice or aggression against a person or class of persons;
- Constitutes discrimination or vilification;
- Undermines the Council when applying the Council's Community Engagement Policy to develop respectful relationships and partnerships with traditional owners, Aboriginal community controlled organisations, and the Aboriginal community;
- Undermines the Council in fulfilling its obligation under the Act or any other Act (including the *Gender Equality Act 2020*) to achieve and promote gender equality;
- Are not in line with the Council's policies and procedures as a child safe organisation and obligations under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* to the extent that they apply to Councillors;
- Adversely affect the health and safety of other persons;
- Would bring discredit upon the Council;
- Would deliberately mislead the Council or the public about any matter related to the performance of the Councillor's public duties;
- Makes Council information publicly available where public availability of the information would be contrary to the public interest;
- Expressly or impliedly requests preferential treatment for themselves or a related person or entity; or
- Is otherwise contrary to the Model Councillor Code of Conduct.

Councillors must not post content on their social media where publication would be contrary to law, including, but not limited to:

- The *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic), insofar as it relates to misuse of position, including the disclosure of confidential information;
- The *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Vic), insofar as it relates to the disclosure of personal information;
- The *Health Records Act 2001* (Vic), insofar as it relates to the disclosure of health information;
- The *Defamation Act 2005* (Vic), in a manner that constitutes defamation;
- The *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth), in a manner that constitutes an infringement of copyright;
- The *Summary Offences Act 1966* (Vic), in a manner that is obscene, indecent or uses threatening language and behaviour;
- The *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic), in a manner that constitutes stalking; and
- The *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth), in relation to the use of a carriage service to menace or harass.

Councillors shall not post content that creates a reasonable apprehension of bias in relation to matters to subject to, or potentially subject to, Council decisions.

11. Customer Requests

This section outlines the procedure for handling customer requests and other inquiries addressed to Councillors but intended for the Council. It acknowledges that the Council's privacy obligations typically prevent the collection of personal information through a third party.

From time to time, Councillors may receive service requests, complaints, feedback or other correspondence intended for the Council (customer requests) from members of the public via social media channels.

The receipt and handling of customer requests is an operational function of the Council. Councillors in receipt of customer requests:

- May pass on customer requests to Council's centralised customer request handling process;
- May provide the customer with details of the Council's official communication channels;
- May refer a customer to Council's website which sets out the official communication channels; or
- May determine to take no action.

Councillors shall not solicit customer requests or otherwise encourage members of the public to bypass the Council's official communication channels.

12. Moderation of Community Content

Councillor social media pages are not official communication channels of the Council and are privately hosted by individual Councillors. Councillors have various rights and obligations to moderate content and manage participation on their social media platforms, including:

- Councillors have an absolute right to moderate community content on their social media platforms, including comments, reactions and other contributions.
- Councillors must remove community content that, if published by the Councillor, would be contrary to the Model Councillor Code of Conduct.
- Councillors have an absolute right to block or ban persons from their social media platform at their sole discretion.

13. Record Keeping

Councillors are not employed by a public office and are therefore not public officers as defined by the *Public Records Act 1973* (Vic). Councillors do not have any record keeping obligations in respect of social media content.

Documents made or received by Councillors are not public records (regardless of the content) unless they are then received by an employee of the Council.

Councillors are not required to maintain records of social media content for record-keeping purposes.

14. Clarification Statements

This section provides a series of clarification statements for inclusion on a Councillor's social media platform (such as the 'about me', 'biography', or 'impressum' or sections). The specific statements required will depend on the content hosted by the Councillor, and in some cases, multiple or all of the statements may need to be included.

- Councillors who maintain a social media presence must ensure their profile clarifies that their social media presence is not an official platform of the Council. For example:

"This page is hosted by me in my capacity as an individual. This is not an official page of Yarriambiack Shire Council and should not be used for making service or maintenance requests or otherwise contacting Council. Council can be contacted at www.yarriambiack.vic.gov.au."

- Councillors who use their social media presence to comment on Council matters must ensure their profile makes it clear that they are speaking in an individual capacity, and not on behalf of the Council. For example:

"The views expressed made on this social media platform are my own and not that of the Council."

- Councillors who enable community content on their social media presence should include a statement asserting the Councillor's right to control access to the page and to moderate third-party content. For example:

"As the host of this page, I endeavour to maintain a safe, positive space for the discussion of Council issues, and I reserve the right to hide or delete content and to block or ban users."

- Councillors who use their social media presence to publish electoral material must include an authorisation statement in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic), noting that this obligation applies at all times, not just during a formal election period. Councillors may not use a Council address for this purpose. For example:

"Authorised by J Citizen, 123 Main Street SUBURB VIC 9999."

Legislation and Review

15. Consistency With Governance Principles Local Government Act 2020

Governance Principle	Section of policy where covered
a) Council decisions are to be made and actions taken in accordance with the relevant law;	Section 6 - Relevant Legislative Context and Related Policies
b) priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations;	Chapter 1 - Section 4 Chapter 2 – Section 2
c) the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks, is to be promoted;	Chapter 1 - Section 4 Chapter 2 – Section 2
(d) the municipal community is to be engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making;	Chapter 1 - Section 4 Chapter 2 – Section 2
(e) innovation and continuous improvement is to be pursued;	Chapter 1 - Section 4 Chapter 2 – Section 1
(f) collaboration with other Councils and Governments and statutory bodies is to be sought;	Chapter 1 - Section 4.1
(g) the ongoing financial viability of the Council is to be ensured;	Chapter 1 - Section 4.3
(h) regional, state and national plans and policies are to be taken into account in strategic planning and decision making;	Chapter 1 - Section 6 and Section 4.1 Chapter 2 – Section 7
(i) the transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is to be ensured.	Chapter 1 - Section 4.2 Chapter 2 – Section 7 and Section 11

In giving effect to the overarching governance principles, a Council must take into account the following supporting principles—

- a) The community engagement principles;
- b) The public transparency principles;
- c) The strategic planning principles;
- d) The financial management principles; and
- e) The service performance principles.

16. Policy Review

Council commits to monitoring processes, information sharing and decision making to understand the overall level of success in the Policy's implementation.

This policy will be reviewed in conjunction with its associated procedures every three years.

From time to time, circumstances may require minor administrative changes to be made to this Policy. Where an update does not materially alter this Policy, such a change may be made administratively and need not be considered and adopted by Council.

Where any change or update may materially change the intent of this policy, or the legal responsibilities of any member of the community, it must be considered and adopted by Council, or by the Chief Executive Officer in reliance on delegated authority.

17. Relevant Legislative Context and Related Policies

Legislation

- *Local Government Act 2020* (Vic)
- *Public Records Act 1973* (Vic)
- *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth)
- *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth)
- *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic)
- *Defamation Act 2005* (Vic)
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2000* (Vic)
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Vic)
- *Health Records Act 2001* (Vic)
- Local Government (Governance and Integrity) Regulations 2020 (Vic)
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Vic)
- *Summary Offences Act 1966* (Vic)

Yarriambiack Shire Council Policies and Procedures

- Governance Rules
- Election Period Policy (embedded in the Governance Rules)
- YSC Corporate Style Guide
- Model Councillor Code of Conduct
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Media and Communications Guidelines
- Media and Communications Work Instructions
- Customer Service Charter
- Community Engagement Policy & Procedure
- Information Privacy Policy

Council Approved Policy

Policy Adopted:	Ordinary Meeting 02 December 2002	Minute Book Page
Policy Reviewed:	Ordinary Meeting 26 February 2020	Minute Book Page 51
	Ordinary Meeting 29 March 2023	Minutes Book Page 25

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