Document Name	Document Version Number	Review Date
Communications Policy	1.0.0	December 2018
Date Adopted	**Minute Number**	**Status**
21 December 2016	4577	New Policy

Purpose

The Greater Hume Shire Council Communications Policy provides the framework for communication between Council and its internal and external stakeholders. The effective dissemination of information and communication engagement is a vital element in building a positive identity for Council through awareness of its services, activities and projects, achievements and resources. Community engagement, consultation and public relations are embraced in this policy statement.

Successful communication will be achieved through the distribution of regular, consistent and truthful information in partnership with productive community consultation on key issues.

Scope

This policy applies to councillors, employees, contractors, consultants and any other persons including volunteers who undertake activities for Council.

Greater Hume Shire Council's 'communication stakeholders' include:
• Ratepayers and residents
• Potential residents of Greater Hume Shire
• Greater Hume Shire Councillors
• Employees and volunteers of Greater Hume Shire
• Visitors to the Greater Hume Shire
• Investors, developers and individuals with business interests within the Greater Hume Shire
• Customers who seek products or services or information from Council
• Community and government organisations
• Local, regional and national media.

Definitions

- **Communication** is the imparting or exchanging of information between Council, the community and stakeholders.

- **Community** includes all people who live, work, study or conduct business in, or who visit, use and enjoy the services, facilities and public places of Greater Hume Shire.

- **Consultation** is the provision of information and engagement by Council to its community and stakeholders (external and internal) that enables them to respond (expressing concerns and identified issues) so these can be considered before a final decision is made.

- **Social Media** is the term given to computer-mediated technologies that allow the creating and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks.

Policy Content

Objective

In committing to this policy Council aims to ensure that its communication strategy will:
- Provide regular and consistent communication on Council's projects and activities to all stakeholders

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- Create a positive and professional image for Greater Hume Shire Council through open communication and increased awareness of Council's activities and projects
- Foster a meaningful community consultation process in Council's activities
- Ensure that internal communication is a key factor in all communication
- Develop a strong customer service focus within Greater Hume Shire Council
- Effectively manage negative issues
- Effectively manage unexpected crisis/disaster issues or events, e.g. Loose Fill Asbestos
- Ensure print, web based and electronic communication layouts comply with the Disability Inclusion Act 2014
- Use a variety of methods to communicate and to provide information in formats that accommodate the needs of all stakeholders.

Corporate Identity

The corporate image must express Council's approach to business, its culture and its values. Council needs to present a consistent and uniform visual image to ensure that its values are most effectively portrayed. Visual symbols include the correct use of Council's logo and corporate colours and use of consistent fonts and layouts in all publications and promotional material including stationery, Council strategic documents, printed community newsletter, electronic newsletters, banners, displays, etc.

Council will adhere to the Greater Hume Shire (GHS) Brand Manual which will ensure a consistent image is portrayed across all mediums and formats.

Senior management will encourage the wearing of corporate uniforms and name badges.

Greater Hume Shire Council Brand Manual

GHS Brand Manual is a document that establishes distinct guidelines on how all aspects of Council's brand will be handled. It should establish rules for creating a unified and identifiable presence for the Council brand.

Council's Brand Manual will define the Council logo and formats, and provide a guideline when the corporate brand and corporate brand with positioning statement formats are to be used.

The Brand Manual will provide templates for letterhead, business cards, Integrated Planning & Reporting document layouts, front covers for strategic documents, community newsletter layout, Microsoft Powerpoint template, email signatory format, website design/layout, community engagement guides, media releases, regional entry signage and town/village signage layouts, office external branding, facility signage (e.g. Customer Service Offices, Depots, Libraries), park signs, interpretative town/tourism signs, vehicle decal signage, corporate banners, as well as prescribe layouts for agendas, public notice and employment advertisements. In addition, icons created for Facebook posts will also be defined in the Brand Manual (e.g. Council announcement, Council News, etc.), and front page imagery for Survey Monkey online survey platform.

It is proposed that the GHS Brand Manual will include the three other brands in the Greater Hume 'brand family' and reaffirm definitions for these brands:
- Greater Hume Children Services
- Greater Hume Youth Advisory Committee
- Buy Local in Greater Hume Shire.

Communication Plan

The adoption of the policy will be the catalyst for development of the Greater Hume Shire Council Communication Plan, ensuring that contemporary and effective community engagement techniques are utilised. This policy provides staff with the platform for the development of the plan.

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The plan will incorporate a Communication Engagement Toolkit (CET) which is a planning tool for all events/projects (including crisis management communication) which are deemed by senior management to require a CET. The CET will apply to events/projects across all departments of Council. All documents requiring public comment prior to final adoption will require a CET. The CET is prepared prior to commencement of the project and is reviewed at key milestones and/or as determined by the department or General Manager. Directors are responsible for ensuring CET documents are developed for projects that they have overall management responsibility.

Website

Council's new website will be regarded as a corporate publication with high visibility and its image and content must reflect Council's corporate image and strategic objectives.   The website will be designed to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 standards in accordance with the Australian Government Accessibility Policy.

The new website will be an effective information source which can be accessed by anyone, anywhere, at a time that is convenient to the user with computer, laptop, tablet and smartphone friendly format. As more people transact with Council online, the more the website becomes the council.

Regular communications and marketing initiatives must be maintained by Council to encourage stakeholders to use the website for Council and community information, and provide an effective mechanism for community engagement and feedback.

Council's new website design must be consistent with the Greater Hume Shire Brand Manual to support Council's corporate image and achieve the key outcomes outlined above.

Social Media

Council actively uses social media platforms to engage and communicate its services, activities, achievements and resources with residents and ratepayers.

A social media strategy will be developed as part of the Communication Plan. The proper use, documentation and record keeping of all Council's social media communications is summarised in Council's Social Media Policy.

Customer Service

The way in which Council receives, answers and responds to phone calls, letters, faxes and emails combined with its face to face contact with customers, has the greatest impact on how Council is perceived in the community. It is vital that Council ensures correct, effective, efficient and customer orientated responses are generated to develop and maintain a positive reputation for Council.

Council's Customer Service Standard defines customer service expectations of staff, including the use of Telephone Call Forward, Email Out Of Office and Status View.

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Events

Greater Hume Shire's annual Australia Day Event is Council's major sponsored event in the shire. Events are planned in accordance with Council's Event Guide. A Communication Engagement Toolkit is utilised in preparing for any Council major event.

Events play an important role in community life as a means of entertainment, social interaction and source of pride and sense of place. 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 which raise the profile of the Council.

Employee Relations

Elected Councillors and employees are its most effective public relations ambassadors. It is vital that all employees and Councillors receive timely, relevant, consistent and user friendly information to ensure that they are adequately informed on Council's activities, minimising the likelihood of misinformation. Effective internal communication also encourages a participatory approach to change management, increases employees' morale and encourages more effective communication between employees across department and management levels.

Councillors of Greater Hume Shire are expected to demonstrate standards of conduct and behaviour that are consist with relevant legislation, regulations and policies.

Media Relations

The local media, including newspapers, radio, television and digital media is a significant source of community information about Council. There are times when regional, statewide and national media interest is generated or occurs due to external conditions.

Council is committed to good media relations requiring a commitment to good governance, transparency and regular media contact in addition to a strategic outlook, political sensitivity and access to senior staff/information.

Only the Mayor and General Manager (or his delegated officer) are authorised to speak to the media on behalf of Council, in accordance with the Media Policy.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The effectiveness of Council's communication tools must be monitored to ensure that Council's stakeholders are adequately aware of and informed of Council's activities and services.

Monitoring and evaluation must occur on a regular basis to ensure that Council is achieving its communication objectives and so that Council can modify, amend or continue communication programs as needs be.

Monitoring and evaluation shall be addressed in the Communication Plan.

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Links to Policy
Code of Meeting Practice Policy
Complaints Handling Policy
Councillor Access to Information and Staff Policy
Customer Service Policy
Document Control Policy
Media Policy
Model Code of Conduct Policy
Internet, Email and Computer Use Policy
Records Management Policy
Social Media Policy

Links to Procedure
Document Control Procedure

Links to Forms

References
Document Style Guide Standard
Customer Service Standards Manual
Greater Hume Shire Community Engagement Strategy
Greater Hume Shire Communication Plan (to be compiled)
Greater Hume Shire Events Guide
Greater Hume Shire Brand Manual (to be compiled)
Greater Hume Shire Style Guide (to be superseded)

Responsibility
All Directors
General Manager

Document Author
Executive Assistant (Governance/Economic Development)

Relevant Legislation
Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009
Local Government Act 1993
Disability Inclusion Act 2014
Ombudsman Act 1974
State Records Act 1998
Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0)

Associated Records

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