

SOL PLAATJE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY



COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

DRAFT VERSION 1.1 OF AUGUST 2022

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1. DEFINITIONS

- Executive Mayor means the Executive Mayor of the Municipality;
- Executive Director means a senior manager appointed by council in terms of section 57 of the Municipal Systems Act;
- EMT means the Executive Management Team, a top management structure of the Municipality as contemplated in the Municipal Finance Management Act (Act No 56 of 2003)
- IDP means the Integrated Development Plan of the Municipality as envisaged in the Municipal Systems Act;
- Structures Act means the Local Government Structures Act (Act No. 117 of 1998 as amended);
- Systems Act means the Local Government Municipal Systems Act (Act No. 32 of 2000 as amended);
- MFMA means the Municipal Finance Management Act (Act No. 56 of 2003)
- Municipality means the Sol Plaatje Local Municipality;
- Municipal Manager means the Municipal Manager of the Municipality;
- Executive Mayor – means the Executive Mayor of the Municipality;
- MMC means a member of the Mayoral Committee appointed by the Executive Mayor in terms of section 80 of the Municipal Structures Act;

2. INTRODUCTION

A communication policy guides institutional arrangements regarding communication in the Municipality. It assigns responsibilities, delineates channels of communication, and provides guidelines on how, when and who should communicate on behalf of the Municipality. It provides an overarching institutional framework for communication from and within Sol Plaatje Municipality, including communication in crisis situations.

3. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The following legislative framework that provides the basis for the formulations of this policy:

- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996;
- Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act (2005);
- Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (Act No. 117 of 1998).
- Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (Act No. 32 of 2000);
- Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) (Act No. 56 of 2003) (MFMA);
- Municipal Finance Management Act (Act No. 56 of 2003);
- Promotion of Access to information Act (2000);
- Media Development and Diversity Agency Act (2002).

4. PURPOSE

The purpose of this communication policy is to ensure that the municipality communicates in an effective, standardised and coordinated way, which increases public confidence in the Municipality.

5. POLICY APPLICATION

This policy applies to the internal communication protocols of the Municipality as well as its interaction and communication with members of the public, including key external stakeholders.

6. COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

- (a) Communication, as a function, should be embedded at a strategic level in decision and policy making structures.
- (b) The communication unit is based administratively within Directorate: Cooperate Services but will have a direct reporting line to the Municipal Manager.
- (c) Communication with other spheres of government should be done through the office of the Executive Mayor and/or the Municipal Manager.
- (d) The communication policy should be visibly displayed and available to all employees and external stakeholders.

7. KEY COMMUNICATORS

- (a) Everyone at the municipality is effectively a communicator; however, those holding positions of authority such as the Executive Mayor, Speaker, Municipal Manager, Executive Directors, Ward Councillors and the Communications Manager/Media Liaison Officer can be considered key communicators. It is therefore important that they communicate the same outlook on various issues and promote the same strategic vision and objectives as contained in the IDP, budget and municipal policies and operational plans.

8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1 This policy delineates the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders as well as those working in the Communications Unit.

- (a) The Executive Mayor, in his/her absence, is the official spokesperson on any official political matter. This responsibility may be delegated to the Municipal Manager or Communications Manager/Medial Liaison Officer when required. The Executive Mayor is responsible for annually communicating the strategic objectives and priorities as contained in the IDP and the Budget of the Municipality.
- (b) The Speaker is the official spokesperson on any official council matters and comments on council rules of order. This responsibility may be delegated to the Municipal Manager or communications manager/Media liaison officer when required.
- (c) The Municipal Manager, or acting Municipal Manager in his/her absence, is the spokesperson for strategic and operational issues. S/he must ensure that the annual communication strategy is in line with municipal objectives and reflects the municipality's strategic objectives and priorities. The Municipal Manager is responsible for integrating the communication function with the decision- making process. This responsibility may be delegated to the Communications Manager/Media Liaison Officer or another competent, knowledgeable senior official.
- (d) Executive Directors are responsible for ensuring compliance with the communication policy and to ensure that their programmes have communication plans in place as part of their strategies. This task must be done in consultation with the Communication Unit.

- (e) Each executive director is responsible for communicating matters of a technical or specialist nature in relation to his or her directorate. Accordingly, they must attend to media enquiries through the Communications Unit. This authority may be delegated to a person standing in officially for the executive director. Comment will go out in the name of the director unless otherwise stipulated.
- (f) MMC's and other councillors are entitled to express their own views or those of the political party they represent through the media, subject to the codes of conduct of councillors set out in schedule 1 of the Municipal Systems Act (2000), and with due regard for the respective roles of council and the municipal administration.
- (g) Non- Portfolio Councillors will refrain from corresponding with the media or the public on matters of an administrative issue.
- (h) **Role of Ward Councillors and Ward Committees**
- Ward committees play an important role in facilitating communication and promoting access to local government. The code of conduct for councillors clearly stipulates that councillors must report back at least quarterly to communities on council matters. Through regular ward committee meetings, councillors can assist in communicating council decisions and policies.
 - Ward Committees can enable interaction between council and the citizens of the municipality. The potential exists for ward committees to play a meaningful role in policy formulation. As ward committees have a wide representation, they are in the fortunate position of being able to monitor changing citizen needs. This information could be relayed to Council and used in the formulation of policies and strategies.
 - Ward committees can assist in the sharing of information with citizens. Due to the network and membership of ward committees it is an effective way of communicating the intentions of council to a wider audience.

9. COMMUNICATIONS UNIT:

The Communications Manager is responsible for overseeing and implementing the communications strategy. These responsibilities include:

- (a) Implementing the communications strategy;
- (b) Dealing with all media enquiries;
- (c) Liaising with relevant staff for comment when required;
- (d) Coordinating all media interactions, such as conferences, briefings, letters and advertising;
- (e) Media evaluation and monitoring;
- (f) Updating of the Municipality's website, facebook, twitter accounts. The individual directorates must provide information for their respective web pages. All website maintenance and development must be done in consultation with the IT department;

In fulfilment of these duties, the Communications Manager should attend all EMT meetings, and where necessary, MAYCO meetings to advise on how to communicate decisions made and agreements reached during the meetings with the public

The items below provide some indication of the parameters of the role

- **Events:**
 - The Communication Unit must be Involved and provide assistance in planning process:
 - Advertising
 - Press statements
 - Media briefings
 - Mobilisation of communities
 - Posters, brochures/pamphlets
 - Invitations and photography
 - Any promotional material and branding
 - Programmes

- **Dealing with the press**

- The Municipality regards calls and emails from journalists as important and will strive to ensure media enquiries are handled quickly and expeditiously. The Municipality will further strive at all times where feasible to:
 - Have regular updated briefings on municipal positions on topical issues that can be issued without clearance to enable a quick response time.
 - Assist in making arrangements for interviews with the appropriate person.
 - Have weekly review of other regional and national municipal news.
 - Make sure press releases are newsworthy
 - Prepare press releases on success stories and send them to the media as feature ideas, including speciality publications- environmental, scientific and others.
 - Create photo opportunities that illustrate the message when organising news conferences.
 - Offer officials to speak on open-line radio shows where the public can call and ask questions on specific issues.
 - Negotiate with local radio stations to launch regular shows and newspapers to host dedicated space for local government issues.
 - Contact journalists involved when responding to negative coverage and offer an interview with the relevant spokesperson and /or send a letter to the paper clarifying the municipality's position. Find a way to show that the Municipality is getting better at what it is doing.
 - Contact a publication to demand an apology or correction when an article or broadcast is blatantly misleading or factually incorrect.

- When such follow up is deemed necessary, this must be done through the Municipality's Communications Manager/ Media Liaison Officer.

10. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

- (a) The Communications Unit should have an interactive relationship with MAYCO, the EMT all municipal staff and Ward Councillors on key communication matters, including issues of public participation and current affairs.
- (b) In addition, the communication unit should assist the executive Mayor's Office and the Office of the Speaker by:
 - Providing information and advice on speeches.
 - Circulating a calendar of public activities on a monthly basis.
 - Developing a programme to build communication skills.
 - Assisting the council, municipal staff and ward committees with communication advice by facilitating access to training and providing templates to enable them to conduct effective communication work.
 - Building a communication profile of each ward and develop targeted communication strategies and action plans for each.
 - Briefing the ward committees via the Ward Councillors on relevant National, Provincial and local government programmes and projects.

11. COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Communication channels are the methods by which messages are communicated. The audiences determine the channel, and can widely vary depending on factors such as language, literacy, education levels, age, gender and access to technology. Note that the channels that may best communicate a particular message may have cost implications beyond internal budgetary

constraints and may need sourcing of external funds. The Communications Unit must implement the most effective communication channel available within the budget.

10.1 POLICY FOR MEDIA INTERACTION

The Municipality is committed to transparency, integrity, and service delivery and will endeavour as far as possible to comment or answer reasonable queries from responsible media operatives. The following procedures apply to media liaison;

- (a) All municipal employees must refer media enquiries to the Communications Unit.
- (b) The relevant director must sign the media response and obtain approval from the Municipal Manager to release.
- (c) The Communications Unit will engage with relevant line functionaries and relevant political office bearer prior to issuing a media response.
- (d) All media enquiries must be dealt with within a stipulated deadline or within 24 hours.
- (e) Enquiries received after hours will be dealt with during office hours unless there is an obvious urgency or instructions to deal with them after hours.
- (f) Media enquiries and responses must be in writing including those for radio and television interviews to ensure consistency in media responses;
- (g) Media enquiries must be treated as top priority.
- (h) All municipal advertisements will be issued by the Communications Unit but must bear the name and title of the Municipal Manager, under whose authority they are issued.
- (i) Communication and media training should be provided to relevant staff and councillors to ensure that the above-mentioned communication mandate is understood and implemented correctly.

- (j) Non responsiveness to media and the Communication Unit's request for information, shall be viewed in a serious light; and the responsible employee may be liable to disciplinary measures.

10.2 POLICY ON USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media tools provide the opportunity for two-way communication between the municipality and residents and key stakeholders. However, there are risks in that they are also powerful communication tools with the potential to significantly affect institutional and professional reputations.

- (a) The use of social media is also governed by the municipality's internet and email policies that set out unacceptable online behaviour.
- (b) General principles that apply to social media include:
- Being credible
 - Being respectful
 - Being always honest and professional.
- (c) All municipal employees, *officials and Councillors* must comply with following protocols on the use of social media in their official capacity: May only make comments on behalf of the municipality with express approval of the relevant administrative or political authority;
- May not engage in online communication activities that could bring the Municipality into disrepute.
 - Should not give out personal details, only official contact details.
 - May not use logos or vision and mission statements of the Municipality without permission from the Communications Unit.
 - Must only publish information online that can be verified and not personal opinion.
 - Must refer all media enquiries to the Communications Unit.
 - In terms of our employees code of conduct, an employee must at all times, act in the best interest of a municipality and in such a way that the credibility and integrity of the municipality is not compromised.

- (d) The Code of Conduct for employees applies when using social media and the following protocols must be adhered to:
- May not use municipal logos and branding for personal social media posts without permission.
 - Can be held legally responsible for comments posted on personal social media platforms.
 - Must respect those computers and resources are reserved for municipal related business.
 - Must ensure that personal online activities do not interfere with work duties and performance.
 - Must note that authorised officials have the right to access material on official computers at any time.
 - Must not use social media in such a manner that is to the detriment of the municipality or any project that the municipality is undertaking.
 - That the use of the social media be in a professional manner and not portray any unprofessional or socially unacceptable behaviour as a Municipal official

10.3 POLICY FOR BRANDING AND CORPORATE IDENTITY

There are many elements to corporate identity, which encompasses published material (print, online, packaging, signboard etc.), the functional items (vehicles, uniforms, building and equipment) and the performance of an organisation. A strong corporate identity rests on consists branding of all elements. The following protocols apply to the Municipality's corporate identity:

- (a) The Directorate Cooperate Services and the Communication Unit are the custodians of the Municipality's corporate identity.
- (b) The Communications Unit must maintain a corporate identity manual with examples of all approved applications- this must be available in hard and electronic copies.
 - ✓ This includes the type of communication material used by the Municipality i.e. folders, letterheads, business cards, marketing material such as banners, posters etc.
 - ✓ The way in which communication material is used and produces i.e. the use of logos and corporate identity.
 - ✓ The official municipal logo used as prescribed in the corporate identity manual.
- (c) Branding and corporate identity material must be budgeted and procured for all line departments;
- (d) The Communications Unit may source a branding agency to provide the branding and corporate identity;
- (e) As a guideline, use of branding elements (logos, vision, and mission statements, etc) should be used consistently for all communication channels- print and online, email signatures, PowerPoint presentations, memorandums, and letterheads, for example the Communication Unit can provide input in this regard.

10.4 POLICY FOR COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS SITUATIONS INCLUDING SERVICE DELIVERY

In the event of a crisis, the following process must be adhered to:

- (a) The manager whose area of responsibility is involved informs her/his executive director and copies the manager of the Communication Unit.
- (b) The executive Mayor and the Municipal Manager are informed immediately.

- (c) Subject to the level of the crisis, a crisis committee is formed comprising of the Municipal Manager, and/or relevant director, Communications Manager/Media liaison officer and any other relevant officials
- (d) The crisis committee drafts a plan of action, manages the issue and communicates about the issue, and releases the necessary statements with the involvement of the Executive Mayor.
- (e) The Executive Mayor and Municipal Manager act as the official spokespersons.
- (f) No media statement from or interview with any other officials is allowed.
- (g) Staff members are kept informed of the situation via the office of the Municipal Manager or Communications Unit.

10.5 POLICY FOR COMMUNICATION DURING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Active citizen participation rests on the effective dissemination of information as well as access to information that enables informed participation. The following protocols apply to communication responsibilities for public participation processes and are mandated by the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000:

- (a) To provide clear sufficient and timely information concerning community participation to communities.
- (b) To communicate public notices of meetings to communities in a manner that promotes optimal public participation.
- (c) *The Speaker* must give notice of Council meetings in a manner determined by the Council. A notice must be published in the local media.
- (d) Council agendas/minutes are public documents and should be available on request.
- (e) The Municipality must communicate to its community information concerning the available mechanisms, processes and procedures to encourage and facilitate community participation.

- (f) When communicating the information a municipality must take into account the language preference and usage in the municipality and the special needs of people who cannot read or write.
- (g) When anything must be notified by a municipality through the media to the local community in terms of this Act or any applicable legislation it must be done in any of the following mediums:
 - In the local newspaper or newspapers of the Municipality;
 - By means of radio broadcasts covering the area of the Municipality (community radios);
 - Through notices displayed on all official notice boards;
 - Through notices displayed on the official notice boards of the municipality.

Public participation process

The following outlines the mandated steps to be taken for any public participation process. The Communications Unit will provide departments with guidance regarding these steps and assistance in terms of design and editorial services for published material. **Note that the implementing directorate remains responsible for budgeting, distributing and displaying media print materials.**

- (a) Subject to budget, advertise in the local newspapers
- (b) Use community radio stations, use weekly half an hour slot and/or 30-second radio adverts, jingles, audio clips as scheduled by the Communications Unit.
- (c) Supply the Communications Unit with the relevant details to upload to the municipal website under News and Events calendar.
- (d) Supply the Communications Unit with the relevant details to upload to the municipal facebook page and twitter.
- (e) If required, request the Communication Unit to assist with design and in-house printing of posters to be displayed in public libraries, tourism

offices and on official municipal notice boards and visible public entrances to the municipal building.

- (f) If required, request the Communication Unit to assist with design of flyers/leaflets.

12. RULES OF COUNCIL FOR MEDIA

The rules of order, established in terms of the Municipal Act 117 (1998), aims to allow free and constructive debate during Council meetings. The Council must conduct its business in an open manner and may close its meetings only when it is reasonable to do so. However, the members of the public and media are subject to the authority of the Speaker and may not at any time:

- Address the meeting unless s/he is a member of a deputation
- Obstruct the business of the meeting
- Make any interjections
- Make unwelcome suggestions, innuendos, remarks or advances of a sexual nature.
- Use threatening, abusive or insulting language or display such signs.
- Make unwelcome or obscene gestures.
- Request permission from the Speaker prior to recording, videoing, or photographing any events during the Council session. The Speaker to ensure that all Councillors are aware that they are being recorded, videotaped, or photographed.
- In the event of the above occurring, the Speaker may request the removal of the member of the public or media.

13. COPYRIGHT

The Municipality owns all publicity material and information it has paid for or created. Consequently, the reproduction of any such material requires the Municipality's approval. The fact that copyright belongs to the Municipality gives the Municipality the freedom to allow others to use such material without

paying fees to the original producer. It also gives the Municipality the authority to prevent the misuse of the material by the producer or anyone else.

14. POLICY REVIEW

This policy must be reviewed as and when required.