

GM Communication's Policy, V2

A communication policy guides institutional arrangements regarding communication by an institution. It assigns responsibilities for communicating, delineates channels of communication and provides guidelines on how, when and who should communicate.

This policy provides an overarching institutional framework for communication externally and internally for George Municipality, including communication in crisis situations, protocols around social media usage and the application of a corporate identity. The policy is a set of rules that guide decision-making in this organisation and provides the blueprint for how the organisation will communicate. The policy has been developed to ensure that processes, procedures and deliverables in terms of communication are consistent and professionally dealt with across the organisation.

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Contents

Definition	3
Acronyms used.....	7
1. INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Internal Communications	8
1.2 External Communications.....	8
1.3 Legislative Framework.....	8
1.4 Objectives	9
1.5 Key communicators	10
1.6 Policy application.....	11
1.7 Communication protocols	11
2. COMMUNICATION CHANNELS	12
2.1 Internal Communication Channels	12
2.2 External Communication Channels.....	12
3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.....	13
3.1 Political Principles, Municipal Manager, Directors, and Officials.....	13
3.2 Portfolio Councillors, Ward Councillors and Ward Committees.....	14
3.3 Communications and IGR Manager.....	15
3.4 Communications Department.....	16
3.4.1 Photographs and Videography	16
3.4.2 Local Government Website	17
3.4.3 Mobile Applications	17
3.4.4 Artificial Intelligence (AI).....	17

3.4.5	Social Media Channels	18
3.4.6	Events and Branding	19
3.4.7	Corporate Identity and Use of Municipal Logo.....	19
3.4.8	Standards and Style	20
3.4.9	Complaints about Media Coverage or Behaviour.....	20
4.	POLICY APPLICATIONS	21
4.1	Policy for media interaction	21
4.2	Policy on use of social media.....	23
4.3	Policy for dealing with communication in a crisis situations including service delivery issues	25
4.4	Policy for branding and corporate identity	27
5.	Copyright	28
6.	Language policy	28
7.	Rules of Council for media.....	29
7.1	Extracted from the Rules of Order regulating the Conduct of Meetings of the Municipal Council of the George Municipality :	Error! Bookmark not defined.
8.	Public Disclosure, Right to Information (PAIA), Popi Act and Classified Information	Error! Bookmark not defined.
9.	Policy review	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Definition

Account	This refers to a valid profile using a social media platform for official social media use. Without an account, one cannot create a profile.
Blogger	A blogger is someone who writes regularly for an online journal or website. A political blogger might provide weekly commentary on current events. A personal blogger keeps a website which may include diary-like entries, photographs, and links to other sites.
Citizen	Any individual that resides in the country.
Communication Action Plan	The annual master (action) plan on rolling out the strategy and a framework for developing programmes and campaigns.
Communication Campaign	Once-off, multiple, or cyclical communication activities with strategic stakeholders. These are time-bound and planned. They normally focus on an immediate objective.
Communication Policy	Provides the institutional framework in which the communication plan is implemented. It covers the division of responsibilities and general guidelines for communicating with various target groups and who can act as spokespeople for the municipality.
Communication Programmes	The continuous communication activities with strategic stakeholders, including internal and external newsletters.
Communications Strategy	The strategy determines the path and/or actions that must be taken for the organization to be able to reach its goals. Several different strategies can be employed to achieve organizational goals. The framework for communication planning allows the communication

	manager to establish a profile/framework against which to test communication decisions. It identifies the right problems to solve and prioritizes areas or issues for which to develop communication plans. It determines what should be communicated to support the municipality's overall objectives and may be aligned to local and national government objectives.
GCIS	Government Communication and Information System
George Municipality	Any area within the municipal boundaries.
Incident	Incident: A relatively minor occurrence or event (that may lead to a public crisis).
IP	Internet Protocol
Incident Commander	The Incident Commander is the person responsible for all aspects of an emergency response; including quickly developing incident objectives, managing all incident operations, application of resources as well as responsibility for all persons involved.
JOC	Joint Operational Centre
Link/Hyperlink	A segment of text or a graphic that a user can click on, which takes you to different parts of a webpage or between two different websites.
Media Representative	This is a collective term that includes, but is not limited to, recognized and/or accredited reporters, editors, writers, and researchers for newspapers, magazines, scientific journals and trade publications, radio or television stations or networks and online news services, bloggers and any other electronic or print media related to news distribution that could serve as an information outlet.
Media Channels	The methods used to communicate a message, including spoken words, print, radio, television, or the internet.
Network	Interconnected paths of communication between various social media platforms, people, businesses, and groups.

Official Channels	A means of communication through which any content passes is conveyed or disseminated, relating to an office and its administration approved by, recognized by, or issued from authority.
Online Community	A group of people using social media tools as a means of sharing content and communicating with each other.
Platform	A framework upon which tools of communication such as social media operate.
Post	This is a piece of content that is shared on a social media platform.
Posted	The act of having shared a piece of content that is shared on a social media platform.
Profile	A profile is a description a registered user or organization inputs about themselves on a social media platform. This may include basic information about the user or organization, a picture, a description, and links.
Public Space	In the context of social media, this refers to areas online where the general public partakes in various forms of engagement in a personal and professional capacity.
Redirect	Webserver function that sends a user from one URL to another, usually via a link.
Sharing	The act of passing on the content to and from individuals, groups, and organizations across social media platforms.
Social media	A collection of interactive online platforms and tools that individuals, groups, and other organizations use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and media itself. It allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Google+, blogs, comments facilities on third party websites, mobile and tablet apps, and any other form of electronic communication to which it is possible to post messages that are visible to the public.

Social media Communications Officer	A professional Communications Officer that specializes in using social media channels as a communication medium for local government audiences.
Social media Monthly Action Plan	Operational Social Media plans are developed every month for the municipality in line with the annual communication action plan.
Social Media Platforms	The tools or mechanisms that are used to facilitate the creation and exchange of content generated for and by users.
Social Media Presence	When an individual, group, or organization creates an account on any social media platform.
Tools	These tools include access to social media platforms, budget and/or cellphone allowance to manage municipal social media platforms remotely (i.e., airtime and/or data to manage social media via smartphone).
User-Generated Content	This term is used to describe any form of content such as video, blogs, images, audio files, and other forms of media that are created by users online and is accessible to other users.
Username	A sequence of characters is used as identification and is required when logging on to a computer and or social media platform.
Users	An individual or organization that partakes in any type of engagement or information sharing on a social media platform.
URL	Uniform Resource Locator - technical term for the web address of an internet site.

Acronyms used

GCIS: Government Communication and Information System

GM: George Municipality



COMMUNICATION POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

A communication policy guides institutional arrangements regarding communication by a municipality. It assigns communication responsibilities, delineates communication channels, and provides guidelines on how, when, and who should communicate. It provides an overarching institutional framework for communication from and within George Municipality.

1.1 Internal Communications

Provide communication guidelines to Councillors and officials of the municipality to equip them with the requisite knowledge to perform their functions effectively and professionally.

1.1.1 To establish clear communication channels for internal support.

1.1.2 To establish an interactive relationship with relevant line managers, directors and administrative officials on key communication matters.

1.2 External Communications

To ensure that all inhabitants and other stakeholders of the municipal area become active and conscious participants in local government processes.

1.2.1 To strengthen inter-governmental relations.

1.2.2 To improve and encourage good media relations.

1.2.3 To establish an interactive local government structure to support community concerns.

1.2.4 To promote the corporate identity and image of the municipality.

1.3 Legislative Framework

The following legislation and policy outline the legislative framework that guides municipal communication.

1.3.1 Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (1998)

1.3.2 Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (2000)

1.3.3 Media Development and Diversity Agency Act (2002)

- 1.3.4 Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act (2005).
- 1.3.5 GCIS Communication Policy, 2022
- 1.3.6 Code of Conduct for Municipal Staff Members
- 1.3.7 **The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa:** The Constitution of South Africa guarantees freedom of the press, which includes the right to freedom of expression, the right to access information, and the right to receive and impart information.
- 1.3.8 **Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA):** This law was enacted to promote transparency and accountability in government and public bodies. It allows journalists and members of the public to access information held by public bodies.
- 1.3.9 **Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA):** This law regulates the processing of personal information by public and private bodies. It aims to protect the privacy of individuals while also ensuring that journalists have access to information that is in the public interest.
- 1.3.10 **Press Code:** The Press Council of South Africa adopted the Code for print and online medium and the Press Code is a set of ethical guidelines that journalists in South Africa are expected to follow. It covers areas such as accuracy, fairness, and impartiality in reporting.
- 1.3.11 **Protected Disclosures Act:** This law provides protection for whistleblowers who disclose information about illegal or unethical conduct in the workplace, including in the media industry.

1.4 Objectives

- 1.4.1 The objective of a communication policy is to ensure that the municipality communicates in an effective, standard, transparent, coordinated and professional manner, which increases public confidence in the municipality and participation in the municipal processes.
- 1.4.2 This policy provides the set of rules that ensure consistency for communication and outlines media protocols, roles and responsibilities, authorisation of media statements and other communication matters.

1.5 Key communicators

- 1.5.1 Everyone at the municipality is effectively a communicator, however, those holding positions as the Executive Mayor, Executive Deputy Mayor, Municipal Manager, Directors, and the Communications & IGR Manager and designated Communications Officers, can be considered key communicators.
- 1.5.2 Therefore, it is important that they communicate the same perspective on various issues and promote the same strategic vision and objectives. A communication policy facilitates this process.

1.6 Policy application

This policy thus applies to the key stakeholders identified above, as well as all councillors, ward committee members, municipal officials, and appointed stakeholders/service providers.

1.7 Communication protocols

- 1.7.1 Communication, as a function, should be embedded at a strategic level in the decision and policy-making structures.
- 1.7.2 The Communications Department should be based within, and report administratively to the Office of the Municipal Manager.
- 1.7.3 Communication with other spheres of government should take place via the office of the Mayor or the Municipal Manager and/or Directorates subject to the purpose of the communication.
- 1.7.4 All media responses, generated by officials and/or councillors, must be sent to the Municipal Manager for final approval before being issued.
- 1.7.5 All media responses and releases must be copied to post@george.gov.za for archive purposes.
- 1.7.6 Adequate resources should be allocated to the communication function, based on the strategic plan and size of the institution, as per the Government Communication Policy adopted April 2024; 1 - 5% of the institutional budget must be allocated to the communication function.
- 1.7.7 The Communication department's budget should include funding for adequate staff to fulfil the strategic communications function; training and the internal communication function.

Communication is a professional function and should be seen as permanent, consistent and stable within the organisation, regardless of the political environment.

- 1.7.8 The communication policy should be available on the municipal website and/or on request (www.george.gov.za)
- 1.7.9 This policy must be reviewed and amended as and when amendments to legislation and/or policies necessitate.

2. COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Communication channels are the methods by which messages are communicated. The audiences determine the channel, and these can vary depending on factors such as language, literacy, education levels, age, gender and access to technology.

2.1 Internal Communication Channels

*The channels for **internal communication** include, but are not limited to the following:*

WhatsApp (Directorates, Council, Ward Committee Members, MM and Directors groups), e-mails (ALL Users), presentations, reports, memorandums, posters, flyers, workshops, staff information sessions, noticeboards, video clips, gifs etc.

2.2 External Communication Channels

*The channels for **external communication** include, but are not limited to the following:*

Banners, billboards, information signs, brochures, posters, By-laws, email, email mailers, exhibitions, external Newsletters and newspapers, invitations, notice boards, pamphlets, presentations, programmes, reports, radio broadcasts and adverts, television broadcasts and adverts, Social media (WhatsApp, GM WhatsApp Channel, Facebook, X, George Municipal App), www.george.gov.za, surveys, loud hailing, WhatsApp Broadcast Groups (Council, Ward Committee Members, Media, Neighborhood Watch groups, Estate Managers, CPF, Ratepayers Associations)

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. Should external funding not be forthcoming, the Communications Unit must implement the most effective communication channel available within the budget.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Political Principles, Municipal Manager, Directors, and Officials

This policy delineates the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders as well as those working in the Communications Department. All media responses issued must follow the approval protocol as set out by this policy.

- 3.1.1 The **Executive Mayor, or Executive Deputy Mayor** in his/her absence, is the official spokesperson on any official political matters. The Executive Mayor is responsible for annual communication priorities, objectives and requirements contained in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and annual budget, as well as matters of a political nature.
- 3.1.2 The **Speaker** is the official spokesperson for any official Council Meetings. Media queries relating to Council rules of order and procedures must be sent to the Office of the Speaker for a response. The approved media response will always be issued by the Communications Department to ensure consistency.
- 3.1.3 The **Chief Whip** is the official spokesperson on any human resources issues related to the Portfolio Councillors and other Councillors and any media query must be sent to the Office of the Chief Whip for a response. The approved media response be issued by the Communications Department so as to ensure consistency.
- 3.1.4 The **Municipal Manager, or Acting Municipal Manager** in her/his absence, is the spokesperson for strategic or operational matters. S/he must ensure that the annual communication strategy is in line with municipal communication objectives and reflects the municipality's priorities. The Municipal Manager is responsible for integrating the communication function with the decision-making process and for communicating matters of an administrative nature. This responsibility may be delegated to the Communications and IGR Manager or another competent, knowledgeable senior official as and when required.
- 3.1.5 **Directors or Acting Directors** are responsible for ensuring compliance with the communication policy and to ensure, in consultation with the Communications department, that their projects/programmes have communication plans in place as part of their strategies. Each **Director** is a spokesperson on matters of a technical or specialist nature in relation to his or her directorate. Media queries will be sent to the relevant Director and the approved media response and or comments will at all times be issued by the Communications Department so as to ensure consistency. The authority for responding to a

media query may be delegated to a person standing in officially for the Director. The comment will go out in the name of the Director or Acting Director unless otherwise stipulated by the Municipal Manager.

- 3.1.6 **Local government employees (officials)** communicating in their private capacity (blogs, social media posts, letters to the editor) must subscribe to the George Municipal Employee Code of Conduct. Information acquired while on duty may not be used when voicing personal opinions and inappropriate media engagement is prohibited.

Inappropriate media engagement refers to any engagement that brings the municipality, its departments or stakeholders into disrepute; presents a personal viewpoint as a position that is held by the department; discloses sensitive/classified departmental information without proper authority; comments on pending or current legal issues relating to a department and/or where political alignment is indicated.

Any media communication (blogs, social media posts, letters to the editor) representing the official's personal opinion as a private citizen, must be done in such a way as to ensure that the media is aware that the writing is in their personal capacity and that the views represent their personal opinion and not that of the George Municipality.

3.2 Portfolio Councillors, Ward Councillors and Ward Committees

- 3.2.1 Each **Portfolio councillor**, with the assistance of their relevant Director can be a spokesperson on matters of a **strategic nature** in relation to his or her directorate. The media response and or comments made by the Portfolio Councillor will follow the standard approval process and will at all times be issued by the Communications Department so as to ensure consistency.
- 3.2.2 **Portfolio and other councillors** are entitled to express their views or those of the political party they represent through the media, subject to the codes of conduct for 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.
- 3.2.3 **Non-portfolio councillors** must refrain from corresponding with the media or public on matters of a municipal administrative nature.
- 3.2.4 **Ward councillors** play an important role in facilitating communication and promoting access to local government. The Code of Conduct for Councillors stipulates that ward councillors

must report back at least quarterly to communities on council matters. Through regular ward committee meetings, Councillors can assist in the dissemination of Council decisions and policies.

- 3.2.5 **Ward committees** can assist in the sharing of information with citizens, provided they are briefed on relevant national, provincial and local government programmes and projects. Due to the network and membership of ward committees, it is an effective way of communicating the intentions of the Council to a wider audience and for that reason, ward committees and ward councillors are regarded as an official communication channel used by the George Municipality Communications Department.

3.3 Communications and IGR Manager

The Manager is responsible for overseeing and implementing the communication strategy. The Communications & IGR Manager will manage the planning, review and execution of the communication strategy of the George Municipality:

- 3.3.1 Communicate the services and functions of the George Municipality to all stakeholders through a range of communication functions including media liaison, information and content development, and other related communication mechanisms.
- 3.3.2 Apply and manage multi-disciplined and multi-faceted approaches in collaboration with the Executive Mayor, Municipal Manager and senior management to promote service delivery and attend to matters of public interest.
- 3.3.3 Manage, promote and encourage communication of all issues in line with council's Strategic Goals between the Council and various role players including Councillors, ward committee members, members of public, Ratepayers associations, commerce, management and employees (officials).
- 3.3.4 Address issues affecting the George Municipality's image and reputation with timeous communication interventions through research and conveying factual information in media releases, media responses and other relevant platforms.
- 3.3.5 Independently liaise with the media to ensure and maintain a professional working relationship between media and Council and/or the administration to promote balanced reporting and a free flow of municipal information to residents; develop and maintain an email press list; Manage the coordination and implementation of the communication response to unplanned and urgent communication, including a crisis.

3.4 Communications Department

The Communications Department is responsible for a number of functions within prescribed parameters, subject to budget and capacity:

- Implementing the communication strategy and ensuring that the communication policy is adhered to.
- Dealing with all media enquiries, media briefings, press statements timeously within the guidelines as set out by this policy, and using standard formats.
- Act as frontline spokesperson on media-related issues and/or identify relevant officials to be interviewed.
- Media evaluation and monitoring of coverage received by the George Municipality.
- Communication campaign management.
- Assist departments with advertising and bulk media buying, excluding the administrative processes for procurement.
- Develop suitable content for, enable translation thereof and facilitate the design of publications, posters, brochures and flyers as and when required.
- Digital Marketing, as and when required.
- Represent George Municipality on National, Provincial and District Communicators Forums as and when required.
- Internal communication to keep all employees informed and mobilised around the implementation of projects; to create a conducive working environment to encourage the sharing of knowledge and best practices; to build a professional public service.
- Implement ongoing communications research to create awareness of current affairs and other issues arising in the public arena that need to be addressed and/or responded to; to improve and build on future communication campaigns, initiatives and activities

3.4.1 Photographs and Videography

- Developing and maintaining a gallery of photographs of municipal services.
- Setting a standard for photographs taken of municipal services, officials and councillors.
- Photographs of officials and/or councillors and/or ward committee members (as referenced in Point 1.6) taken at administrative projects/events to exclude them wearing /carrying/holding or trying to include any item containing party political insignia.

- This applies to officials at all times during and after work hours at municipal events/functions.
- Videography and or photography of government property is limited and/or not permissible at certain key sites. If authorised by the Municipal Manager, media representatives will only be allowed into local government facilities under supervision for photographic and/or video filming that is required for recording interviews, documentaries, news releases or other approved applications.

3.4.2 Local Government Website

- Local government websites must provide current, factual and official information to the public. The Communications department is responsible for ensuring that the content of the municipal website www.george.gov.za is up to date, including notices and press releases.
- Only information suitable for the public must be posted on the website. Classified information and/or information intended for departmental officials must not be posted.
- To monitor and provide assistance to departmental website champions who are responsible for updating their departmental documentation as prescribed by legislation.
- Paid advertising, endorsement or advertising of commercial products is not allowed on a local government website.
- The Communications Manager to decide whether the logos of organisations that sponsor government events may be displayed on a website.
- The communications department must review the website annually to ensure that it accurately reflects branding obligations, carries accurate messaging and complies with all governmental requirements.
- The backend maintenance, ongoing development and functionality of the website remain the mandate of the IT Support division.

3.4.3 Mobile Applications

- Mobile applications are internet services that run on mobile devices such as smartphones.
- The rules that govern website development and use, also apply to mobile applications.

3.4.4 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly being utilised across various platforms. Tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Co-Pilot, and the visual platform MidJourney can assist users with tasks such as

editing, language use, and producing images and other audio-visual material. While AI can be a valuable resource, it relies on vast amounts of data collected from the web, and as with all forms of public information, the accuracy of AI-generated content can vary.

Given the potential risks associated with AI, the following guidelines are suggested:

Responsible and Ethical Use of AI:

- No material that could harm the reputation or safety of employees or the organisation should be uploaded to any AI system.
- No material that violates the Code of Conduct for employees of the George Municipality (GM) should be uploaded to any AI system.
- All documents containing personal information must comply with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and George Municipality's own POPIA Policy.
- No material containing confidential information should be uploaded to any AI system.
- All AI-generated material requires thorough editing and verification by the user before it is disseminated.

These guidelines ensure that the use of AI aligns with our commitment to ethical standards and the protection of both individual and organisational integrity.

3.4.5 Social Media Channels

- Manage social media channels such as Facebook, X, Municipal Mobile Application, LinkedIn, Instagram, WhatsApp and You Tube accounts as communication tools for the George Municipality, always within the relevant and appropriate parameters of the GM Social Media Policy, Appendix 2.
- Ensure that George Municipality has a corporate presence on Instagram and LinkedIn, and any other social media platforms which are developed, with a view to possible incorporation as a formal communication channel at a later date, or as and when required.
- Maintain and monitor WhatsApp groups and/or other suitable similar platforms such as WhatsApp Channels for instant and urgent notifications to various stakeholders.
- *Refer to Page 24, and Appendix 2, George Municipal Social Media Policy for further detail.*

3.4.6 Events and Branding

- In terms of events, assist with setting up a communication action plan for events/directorate projects which includes the use of all communication channels including radio, media, social media in order to ensure attendance, coverage and dissemination of information to the media and residents of George.
- Branding at events is the responsibility of the organising directorate. The Communications Department can assist with the acquisition of marketing collateral in terms of the Corporate Identity Manual if requested timeously.
- The Communications Department will not be held responsible for the transportation, erection and removal of any such collateral.

3.4.7 Corporate Identity and Use of Municipal Logo

- Ensure that the municipal Corporate Identity is correctly applied in all instances i.e. use of the municipal logo on any promotional or branded material. Artwork for any item to be printed or designed by a directorate must be reviewed by the Manager of Communications for approval.
- The George Municipal Logo and Crest are registered as the intellectual property of the George Municipality, and as such can only be used by the George Municipality for official purposes, unless otherwise authorised by the Council.
- No business, organisation and/or individual has the right to use the George Municipal logo in any social or printed media, and or including any marketing items such as caps, t-shirts, banners, posters flyers etc.
- Where a business, organisation or individual is collaborating with a municipal department on a project, prior approval must always be requested before using the municipal logo in any format. In certain instances, the logo artwork will not be approved for use but the wording, *In collaboration with George Municipality* may be approved for use.
- This will be granted on condition that the project and/or event is endorsed by the municipality officially, and that the product or marketing material which is produced is in good taste, not offensive and adheres to the guidelines as set out by the George Municipal Corporate Identity Manual.
- *Refer to page 28, and Appendix 4, GM Corporate Identity Manual for further details.*

3.4.8 Standards and Style

- Media releases need to adhere to an agreed standard.
- All communication should be presented in plain language, without compromising the accuracy of the message.
- The municipal communications office decides on the language to be used when issuing the media release and/or statement taking into consideration resources, usage, practicality and the balance of the needs and preferences of the public.
- All email correspondence to the media, whether intended for publication or as a private note to the recipient, should be written in such a way that the correspondence does not bring the department into disrepute if published by the media.
- All email correspondence to the media i.e. media responses and/or releases must be copied to post@george.gov.za

3.4.9 Complaints about Media Coverage or Behaviour

- Any complaints from Councillors or the administration regarding the performance of the media i.e. content and or tone of media coverage or behaviour of a news reporter must be made to the Communications and IGR Manager.
- The Communications and IGR Manager will be responsible for any action taken in response to such a complaint. An official email will be sent to the media institution outlining the nature of the complaint and the recommended remedial action.
- Should the response from the media institution not be satisfactory, a complaint can be logged with the **Press Council of South Africa**, a print media or online media environment (www.presscouncil.org.za) and/or the Broadcast Complaints Commission of SA in a broadcasting environment (www.bccsa.co.za) or the **Independent Media Ombud** (www.independentmediaombud.co.za).
- Complaints about editors and the industry as a whole can also be directed to the South African National Editors Forum.
- The Municipal Manager together with the Communications and IGR Manager will consult with the municipal legal team to ascertain whether the complaint warrants further legal action. In cases where the media institution and/or journalist are not accredited or legitimate, the matter will be referred directly to the George Municipal Legal Department for further action.

4. POLICY APPLICATIONS

4.1 Policy for media interaction

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

- 4.1.1 All media enquiries received by a municipal official for a media interview must be referred to the Communication and IGR Manager, and/or the Municipal Manager immediately.
- 4.1.2 Any media enquiries to a municipal official who is not authorised to speak to the media or not authorised to speak on the subject of the media enquiry must refer the media to their immediate senior, who in turn would refer it to the Communication and IGR Manager, and/or the Municipal Manager immediately.
- 4.1.3 No municipal official will speak to the media “off the record”. The only exceptions are the Executive Mayor, Municipal Manager and/or Communications and IGR Manager (with approval of the Municipal Manager).
- 4.1.4 The Communications department will engage with relevant line functionaries prior to issuing a media response.
- 4.1.5 The media response to follow the standard approval protocol with final approval granted by the Municipal Manager for administrative matters and the Executive Mayor for political matters.
- 4.1.6 All media enquiries must be addressed where feasible within the stipulated deadlines applicable to the particular medium – whether print, broadcast or online and/or within 48 hours. 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.
- 4.1.7 Media enquiries will only be accepted in writing by email correspondence from recognized and/or accredited (<http://www.pdmedia.org.za/index.html>) journalists and/or media houses.
- 4.1.8 Media responses will be issued in writing by email correspondence with appropriate sound bites provided via WhatsApp for radio and/or television interviews.
- 4.1.9 The communications department will ensure to state “off the record” for any telephonic queries received and ensure that an emailed media query is requested at all times.
- 4.1.10 Bloggers and ex-journalists (retrenched, fired or retired) are not recognized as media and must therefore follow the same channels as the public for access to information.

- 4.1.11 Media enquiries are treated as high priority by the Communications department and are to be treated as such by the relevant directorate which is the subject of the media query.
- 4.1.12 The Communications department is authorised to negotiate with the editor and/or senior journalist for additional time for feedback and/or that a media matter stands over subject to a fair and transparent reasoning.
- 4.1.13 No employee information of a personal, financial, findings and/or disciplinary nature or determinations in relation to municipal internal enquiries, reviews or investigations irrespective as to whether such processes are ongoing or considered concluded will be divulged to the media as a matter of policy by the George Municipality Communications Department.
- 4.1.14 All media releases to be issued to the George Municipal press list by email, uploaded to the municipal website and/or shared to social media sites as and where appropriate.
- 4.1.15 All requests to have an event covered and/or a media release written and distributed about a municipal event, programme or achievement must be directed to the Communications and IGR Manager.
- 4.1.16 It is preferred not to pay the media for any form of editorial coverage. The policy is to achieve organic reputation-enhancing, earned media coverage through the newsworthiness of municipal activities and announcements.
- 4.1.17 The Communications and IGR Manager and the Municipal Manager are empowered to make the final decision regarding the newsworthiness of a potential media release and who/where/how extensively it must be released.
- 4.1.18 Scheduled radio broadcasts and interviews, paid for by the George Municipality must be scripted with questions on the topic provided to the communications department in advance.
- 4.1.19 If a broadcast media house requests an interview with a municipal representative, the subject matter and any other topics must be requested before the interview.
- 4.1.20 In terms of dealing with media representatives, the department must receive and respond timeously to media queries for that particular medium i.e. print, broadcast and/or online, with accuracy and efficiency and in context.
- 4.1.21 Ensure accuracy of response through interaction with the relevant directorate, Municipal Manager and the Executive Mayor, Speaker and/or Chief whip subject to the topic of the media query. Follow the required approval protocol for all media responses prior to dispatching.

- 4.1.22 Act as frontline spokesperson on media-related issues and/or identify relevant officials to be interviewed.
- 4.1.23 Assist Directorates by providing advice, editing press releases and checking on the correctness of language and consistency in compiled media releases.
- 4.1.24 To ensure that media issues are fully resourced and professionally dealt with and to ensure a balanced and informed flow of news to the residents and other stakeholders of George.
- 4.1.25 The Communications and IGR Manager and/or relevant secondee to attend Directors Meetings, Mayoral Planning, MAYCO and Council to advise on the communication of resolutions approved to the residents and other stakeholders of George and to identify and leverage any media interaction to the benefit of the George Municipality.
- 4.1.26 Regular press briefings, be they electronic and/or in person, or alternatively Council updates to be issued to the media as well as response to media queries generated by such items which are not of a confidential nature.

4.2 Policy on use of social media

- 4.2.1 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.
- 4.2.2 The **George Municipal Social Media Policy** as provided in Appendix 2 is based on the national government's social media guidelines as well as other local b-municipalities policies.
- 4.2.3 The use of social media is also governed by the municipality's Internet and email policies that set out unacceptable online behaviour (Refer to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy and Procedure Manual).
- 4.2.4 The George Municipal Social Media Policy and below guidelines apply to: Municipal employees (officials) using social media for official communication purposes. This would apply inter alia to the designated officials of the Communications Department, any officials assigned to access social media on behalf of the Communications Department as per the Manager Communications and the relevant officials of the Tourism Department; and Municipal employees (officials) and councillors, using social media for personal reasons.
- 4.2.5 All municipal *officials* using social media in an official capacity, must comply with the general communication policy regarding official spokespersons, as well as the **GM Social Media Policy**.

- 4.2.6 The communications department is the only department, other than the Tourism Department and selected officials of the Directorate Planning and Development, authorized to create and maintain official social media channels for the George Municipality.
- 4.2.7 Officials authorized to use social media should at all times be credible, respectful, honest and professional;
- a) May only make comments on behalf of the municipality with express approval or authority.
 - b) May not engage in online communication activities that could bring the municipality into disrepute.
 - c) Should not give out personal details, only official contact details.
 - d) May not post material protected by copyright.
 - e) May not use logos or vision and mission statements without formal permission.
 - f) Must only publish information online that can be verified and not personal opinion.
 - g) Must refer all media enquiries to the Communications department.
 - h) Assess and address queries from the public during work hours and after hours where possible and subject to capacity and resources available.
- 4.2.8 George Municipal officials will not be permitted to comment on private and/or other social media channels and/or create false accounts in order to comment anonymously on behalf of the institution.
- 4.2.9 In terms of Item 2 of the Code of Conduct for Municipal Staff Members, an employee must at all times, *inter alia*, act in the best interest of a municipality and in such a way that the credibility and integrity of the municipality is not compromised.
- 4.2.10 When using social media for personal use, the Code of Conduct for Municipal Staff Members (Annexure 5), Acceptable use of GM ICT Policy, the GM Communications Policy and the GM Social Media Policy applies and should be considered the guiding rule.
- 4.2.11 In addition, municipal officials and councillors:
- a) May not use municipal logos and branding for personal social media posts.
 - b) Can be held legally responsible for comments posted on personal social media platforms.
 - c) Must respect that computers and resources are reserved for municipal-related business.
 - d) Must ensure that personal online activities do not interfere with work duties and performance.

- e) Must note that authorised officials have the right to access material on official computers at any time.
- f) Must not use social media in such a manner that it is projected to be to the detriment of the municipality or any project that the municipality is undertaking.
- g) That the use of the social media be in a professional manner and not portray any unprofessional or socially unacceptable behaviour as an official of a government institution such as the use of bad language, racial or political and other unacceptable comments.

4.3 Policy for dealing with communication in a crisis situations including service delivery issues

- 4.3.1 In the event of a crisis and/ or disaster situation, the communication for the George Municipality is addressed in terms of **Appendix 3 GM Crisis Communications Policy** in line with the GM Corporate Disaster Management Plan 2021 – 2025 in accordance with the Disaster Management Act, Act 57 of 2002.
- 4.3.2 Crisis Communication is a communication and public relations programme that takes place during a disaster and/or crisis.
- 4.3.3 The communications department mobilizes all resources in a short space of time and for extended hours, to protect the reputation of the organization, or an individual, in order to manage the reputational risk of George Municipality.
- 4.3.4 The Communications and IGR Manager, and/or designated communications official, will form part of the Joint Operations Centre Committee and is responsible for the coordination and implementation of the communication response to unplanned and urgent communication, including a crisis.
- 4.3.5 The communications department is tasked with providing accurate, timely information to the media and the public about the incident and operations of the disaster, fire and emergency services with the Incident Command Structure (JOC) and where such verified information is obtained from the Incident Commander.
- 4.3.6 It is important that the communication perspective be represented when key crisis decisions are being made. In some situations, communications may be the only tool an organization may have in the early phases of a crisis.
- 4.3.7 The designated communications official is to be the single point of contact for the media.
- 4.3.8 The designated communications official is responsible for establishing a media area that does not impede operations and will filter all media requests for briefings, interview etc. via the Incident Commander.

- 4.3.9 The goal is to provide effective, regular communication updates to the public via the news media and municipal communication channels; where possible developing a positive perception of the emergency services but focusing on the dissemination of important safety messaging.
- 4.3.10 In a major incident, the designated communications official coordinates with other responding agencies to ensure consistent, accurate information dissemination and to avoid the release of potentially sensitive information.
- 4.3.11 The lead agency on the disaster will take the lead in terms of communication for example, Covid-19 resulted in a national state of disaster being declared in South Africa, and as such National Government and the National Department of Health as well as the Western Cape Government and the Western Cape Department of Health took the lead in terms of communications on this health disaster, with the George Municipality only disseminating information received where applicable.
- 4.3.12 The Executive Mayor and Municipal Manager are informed immediately in terms of the George Municipal Disaster Management Plan 2021 – 2025 (Appendix 3) policy protocols as set out by their standard operating procedure document.
- 4.3.13 Staff members are kept informed of the situation *via the Office of the Municipal Manager or Communications Department.*
- 4.3.14 A long-term crisis, such as a potential Eskom blackout or Covid-19 pandemic necessitates the implementation of a George Municipal Joint Operational Centre (JOC) and requires this policy to be amended where necessary to reflect the nature of the crisis.
- 4.3.15 *Please refer to Annexure 3 GM Crisis Communications Policy for further details.*

4.4 Policy for branding and corporate identity

- 4.3.16 A branding and corporate identity manual for George Municipality has been developed in 2019 and updated in 2021 and 2024 and is attached hereto as Appendix 4.
- 4.3.17 There are many elements to a corporate identity, which encompasses published materials (print, online, packaging, signboard, etc.), the functional items (vehicles, uniforms, buildings and equipment) and the performance of an organisation. A strong corporate identity rests on consistent branding of all elements.
- 4.3.18 The Communications Department must maintain a corporate identity manual with examples of all approved applications – this must be available in hard and electronic copies. This includes all of the correspondence material used by the Municipality i.e. folders, letterheads. Business cards, power point presentations, memo's, reports, policy documents as well as marketing material such as banners, posters etc
- 4.3.19 The Municipal Manager and the Communications and IGR Manager are custodians of the corporate identity.
- 4.3.20 The use of the official Municipal logo and/or crest is addressed in Appendix 4: Corporate Identity Manual.
- 4.3.21 The heraldic crest is registered to the George Municipality.
- 4.3.22 The marketing logo is identified as the intellectual property of the George Municipality in an Item to MAYCO, 17 September 2003 and has been trademarked to the George Municipality, 2022/05998 for a period of 10 years from 22 February 2022.
- 4.3.23 The Communications and IGR Manager must ensure that the municipal Corporate Identity is correctly applied in all instances i.e. use of the municipal logo on any promotional or branded material.
- 4.3.24 The artwork for any item to be printed or designed by a directorate must be reviewed by the Communications and IGR Manager for approval.
- 4.3.25 The George Municipal Logo and Crest can only be used by the George Municipality for official purposes, unless otherwise authorised by Council.
- 4.3.26 No business, organisation and/or individual has the right to use the George Municipal logo in any social or printed media, and or including any marketing items such as caps, t-shirts, banners, posters flyers etc.
- 4.3.27 Where a business, organisation or individual is collaborating with a municipal department on a project, prior approval must always be requested before using the municipal logo in any format.

- 4.3.28 This will be granted on condition that the project and/or event is endorsed by the municipality officially, and that the product or marketing material which is produced is in good taste, not offensive and adheres to the guidelines as set out by the George Municipal Corporate Identity Manual.
- 4.3.29 Advertising in terms of print, broadcast or online must align to the GM Corporate Identity Manual. All raw material should be routed via the communications department for proof reading, use of logo etc. prior to submission to a service provider
- 4.3.30 The George tourism department has its own corporate identity developed for George, Uniondale and Wilderness which is an appendix to the current GM Corporate Identity Manual.
- 4.3.31 GO GEORGE (George Integrated Public Transport Network) has its own corporate identity developed which is an appendix to the current GM Corporate Identity Manual.

5. Copyright

- 5.1 The Municipality owns all publicity material and information it has paid for or created.
- 5.2 Consequently, the reproduction of any such material requires the Municipality's approval.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 It also gives the Municipality the authority to prevent the misuse of the material by the producer or anyone else.

6. Language policy

- 6.1 The Constitution of South Africa provides that municipalities must take into account the language usage and preferences of the community.
- 6.2 The three primary languages spoken in George Municipal area are Afrikaans, isiXhosa and English.
- 6.3 All important and/or mandated communication should be published in all three languages where possible. The audience may determine the choice of language used in communications.
- 6.4 The cost implications of developing and implementing a language policy that encompasses all three languages are however often prohibitive.
- 6.5 General information intended for all residents and stakeholders will first be created in English, after which translation will be arranged according to available budget and resources.
- 6.6 All departments must consider the usage, practicality, resources, local circumstances and balance these with the needs and preferences of the target audience when deciding on the official language/s to use when communicating.

6.7 An addendum to this policy (See Annexure 1: The Minutes: Executive Mayor in Committee Meeting 21 July 2004) provides clarity on the decision to maintain current language practice.

7. Rules of Council for media

- The Rules of Order, established in terms of Municipal Act 117 (1998), aim 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.
- The GM Rules of Order for Conducting Virtual Meetings of Council and its Committees, also apply.
- Officials and councillors must take into consideration the streaming of Council Meetings via the official YouTube Account of the George Municipality and conduct themselves accordingly.

7.1 Extract from the RULES OF ORDER REGULATING THE CONDUCT OF MEETINGS OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF THE GEORGE MUNICIPALITY

“34. MEETINGS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

34.1 The Council must conduct its business in an open manner and may close its meetings only when it is reasonable to do so, having regard to the nature of the business transacted.

34.2 Notwithstanding the provisions of rule 33.1, the Council may not exclude the public, including the media, when considering or voting on any of the following matters:

34.2.1 a draft By-Law.

34.2.2 the budget.

34.2.3 the draft Integrated Development Plan, or any amendments of the Plan; and

34.2.4 the Municipality’s draft Performance Management System, or any amendment of the System.

34.2.5 disciplinary actions against a Councillor according to the Code of Conduct for Councillors;

34.2.6 any other circumstances according to which legislation cannot exclude the public and press.

30.1 MAINTENANCE OF ORDER

A member of the public or the media may not –

- 30.1.1 address the meeting at any time, unless he or she is a member of a deputation;*
 - 30.1.2 obstruct the business of the meeting;*
 - 30.1.3 make any interjections;*
 - 30.1.4 make unwelcome suggestions, innuendoes, remarks or hints of a sexual nature, sexual advances, comments with sexual overtones, sex-related jokes or insults or unwelcome graphic comments of another person's body*
 - 30.1.5 use threatening, abusive or insulting language towards a member or an employee or to display any writing, sign or other visible presentation which is threatening, defamatory or insulting and which causes that member or employee harassment, fear or distress.*
 - 30.1.6 make unwelcome or obscene gestures.*
- 30.2. Whenever a meeting resolves to close its session or a part thereof any member of the public and the media must leave the meeting immediately and not return to that meeting until it resumes as a public meeting.*
- 30.3 A member of the public or media attending a Council or committee meeting is subject to the authority of the Speaker.*
- 30.4 The Speaker may, at any time during a meeting, if he /she deems it necessary for the maintenance of order, instruct the Municipal Manager to an officer to remove or cause the removal of any person, excluding a member, from the Council Chamber, or order that the public gallery be vacated.*
- 30.5 The Speaker may request or order the removal of any person or persons who refuses to carry out any reasonable instruction given by him/her, or who willfully obstructs the carrying out of such instruction.*
- 30.6 A person who continuously makes himself/herself guilty to a breach of this Rule, can on instruction of the Speaker, be refused entrance to the Council Chambers for a period determined by the Speaker.”*

8. Public Disclosure, Right to Information (PAIA), POPI Act and Classified Information

- The promotion of the Access to Information Act (PAIA), (Act 2 Of 2000), provides for individuals to apply for the relevant information via the registration division, Directorate Corporate Services of the George Municipality by members of the media and/or public.
- The application forms, application fee and processes are explained on the George Municipal Website www.george.gov.za .
- Under certain circumstances members of the media will be referred to follow the PAIA process.
- Requests from non-media sources for information under the PAIA will be directed to the relevant Manager, Corporate Services.
- All personal information collected in the course of media engagement must be dealt with in terms of the POPI Act.
- Unauthorized disclosure of classified information to the public or the media will result in disciplinary action being taken against the official responsible.

9. Policy review

This policy must be reviewed and amended as and when amendments to legislation and/or policies necessitate.

