

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Approved By: Council
Doc Controller: General Manager
File: 126

Document Code: DVC-POL-033
Version: 2
Approved Date: 22/01/2022
Next Review Date: December 2024

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to build an understanding of what is an appropriate and productive use of social media and to minimise miscommunication and prevent its misuse by ensuring councillors and staff understand their respective responsibilities when using any social media platform.

The primary purpose of Council using social media is as a communication tool.

2. SCOPE

Social media is strongly embedded in the Australian culture as a personal tool for networking and communication and is now being used as an integral part of marketing and communication strategies at all levels of governments.

Social media expands upon those traditional media methods used previously by the Council to provide information to the community. Social media is a channel for the community to ask questions, share ideas and give feedback, as well as learn about Council projects, initiatives and events.

Council may use social media to engage with the community and provide information in a timely and focused manner. Targeted social media activity by Council will usually be used in conjunction with some form of:

- communications strategy/plan.
- media strategy/plan.
- marketing or promotions strategy/plan.
- community engagement/consultation strategy/plan.
- attraction and engagement strategy/plan.

The engaging interactive nature of social media empowers the community to talk to Council about what matters to them in an open, consultative, and constructive way.

Effective use of social media enables Council to improve performance by listening to the community, engaging with them, and responding in a timely manner.

3. LEGISLATION

There are no specific social media references in the *Local Government Act 1993*. However, more generally the Act provides that a Council is to communicate with its community in an open and transparent manner. Using social media is one tool which allows Council to meet its obligations.

The following State and Federal legislation may be deemed relevant to this Policy:

- Online Safety Act 2021
- E-Safety Practices
- Defamation Act 2005
- Right to Information Act 2009
- Public Interest Disclosures Act 2002

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- Personal Information Protection Act 2004
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1998
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Age Discrimination Act 2004
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975

4. POLICY

Purpose	Detail
Intent	<p>This Policy applies to all councillors, the general manager and staff as it directly relates to the Council’s managed social media presence and the representation of the Council on social media platforms.</p> <p>The intent of the Policy is to provide an understanding of, and guidance for, the appropriate use of social media by councillors and staff when conducting Council business.</p>
Objectives	<p>The objectives of this Policy are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance communication and community engagement through effective use of social media to build trust and confidence in Council information; • make councillors and staff aware of the risks and their obligations when using social media; and • protect and enhance the reputation of Council in the use of social media.
Council’s involvement in social media	<p>There is a large range of social media platforms available on which Council may have a presence, however, to ensure it is achieving best value from its social media efforts the focus will be on platforms that have the greatest reach for targeted audiences.</p> <p>Social media allows Council to be open and engaging, transparent and accountable, and to provide better and faster service and communications to the community.</p> <p>Council will use social media to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assist in the delivery of efficient and effective services. • promote, inform and educate the community on policies, projects, services and activities of Council. • develop stronger relationships with the community. • provide an informal, timely and accessible way for the community to contact and communicate with Council. • support traditional media methods by broadening Council’s reach and supporting key messages.

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Purpose	Detail
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seek input into Council’s decision-making processes. • provide essential updates during a crisis or emergency.
Management of social media	Council will efficiently manage and monitor its social media presence during normal office hours.
Responsibility of all Council social media users	<p>Social media users have the following responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure any information is developed, approved and shared in accordance with this Policy. • ensure any information about Council is accurate and factual. • reference only publicly available information such as information that is already found on Council’s website or authorised publications. • ensure any information about Council is not disparaging of the organisation, its councillors, staff, or others. • ensure material that is obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, discriminatory or hateful to another person or entity is not posted, or is removed if posted by a user. • be polite, professional and ethical in all social media interactions. • be respectful when there are differences of opinion. • be accountable for what you say and do when using social media. • If, becoming aware of social media activities that breach this policy, report this activity to the immediate supervisor.
Councillors engaging on social media	<p>Councillors have the responsibility to ensure that their use of social media is appropriate. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making it clear they are expressing their personal opinion and not purporting to represent the position of Council. • not using Council presences as a forum for political debate or making comments that may impact on Council’s reputation. • actively sharing Council posts for the purposes of promoting initiatives and projects. • not releasing information before the Council has distributed it through official channels. <p>The Council’s Code of Conduct requires that <i>‘the actions of a councillor must not bring the Council or the office of councillor into disrepute’</i>. Councillors can be held accountable through the Code of Conduct process for any inappropriate comments they make on any form of social media.</p>
Staff engaging on social media	Staff representing Council on social media are required to have the appropriate authority to do so.

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	<p>Council recognises that staff may wish to use social media in a personal capacity. Staff are personally responsible for content they publish on any form of social media.</p> <p>All staff should take measures to ensure their personal comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cannot be mistaken for the official view of Council, • does not impact Council’s reputation, • do not offer views on councillors or other staff members, or • affect a staff member performing their role with Council.
Posting	<p>Content on Council’s social media sites will where appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be available on Council’s website, • include links directing users back to the Council website for in depth information, documents, forms or online services necessary to conduct business with Council. • Council may decide to post to third party sites for information, promotion, or service delivery activity or to provide factual clarification in response to third party information as it relates to the Council. <p>For reasons of transparency, it must be clear to the reader the person is posting on behalf of the Council. This is to protect both the person posting and the Council.</p> <p>Users must not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • represent themselves as another Council employee or councillor. • damage the reputation of Council, its councillors or staff. • disclose any confidential information.
Promoting external content	<p>Information shared from another source is to be clearly linked to the purpose of the social media account or it has been determined to be in the community’s interest. This may include, but is not limited to posts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relating to emergency events, • from Council partners, • by local, state or federal government bodies, • about community events and initiatives, • recognised national events, and • other items as directed or approved by the General Manager.
Responding	<p>Council will monitor all posts on its social media sites and respond where it determines it is appropriate to do so. It is acknowledged that not all posts on</p>

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	<p>Council’s social media sites are a direct enquiry to Council or necessarily seeking a response.</p> <p>Complaints will be managed in accordance with Council’s Customer Service Charter and the Complaints Management Policy.</p>
Moderation	<p>Council will not tolerate content that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, breaches a court suppression order or is otherwise unlawful. Such content will be removed immediately.</p> <p>Posts that make specific mention of confidential material about Council or individuals or mention staff by name on Council’s social media sites will be removed.</p>
Privacy and confidentiality	<p>Social media users are legally required to respect the privacy of residents, for example by refraining from publishing personal details.</p> <p>Users should not publish or report on conversations or information that is deemed confidential or commercial in confidence.</p> <p>Council will monitor its social media sites for the publication of potentially private or confidential information by visitors.</p>
Defamation	<p>Social media users should not publish material which may cause injury to another person/s, organisation/s, association/s or company/s reputations.</p> <p>Any potential defamatory comments will be removed immediately.</p>
Copyright	<p>Council will respect copyright, privacy and other applicable laws when publishing on social media platforms. Social media users should attribute work to the original author/source wherever possible.</p>

Responsibility

Role	Responsibilities
Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand and comply with the provisions in this policy. • Seek training and development for using social media. • Seek advice from the General Manager if unsure about applying the provisions of this policy. • Seek approval before using any Council branding on social media.
General Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures that the Council’s use of social media complies with the intent and requirements of this policy. • Educate councillors and staff about this policy and their responsibilities when using social media.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek legal advice as appropriate where an issue is likely to be contentious or may create legal risk for Council.
Executive Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide advice and assist with the development of communication strategies/plans using social media. Approve any business strategies/plans which incorporates the use of social media. Ensure staff consult and obtain appropriate approvals for their planned use of social media. Offer regular training and updates for staff who are using social media. Monitor social media accounts/tools/sites registered for conducting Council business.
Staff and Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek advice and approval from relevant Executive Manager to incorporate social media in communication strategies/plans. Understand and comply with the requirements of this policy. Maintain records of use of social media related to Council activities to the extent practicable. Seek advice from the General Manager or an Executive Manager if unsure about applying any of the provisions of this policy. Be familiar with the End User Licence Agreements of any external social media tools being used.
IT Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the Council IT Network remains secure. Regularly back up and archive internally hosted social media sites.
Records Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise appropriate precautions e.g. disclaimers. Assist staff to retain some record which explains the context or purpose of social media, and a sample of posts where it is impractical to retain large volumes of screen grabs.

5. RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Councillor Code of Conduct Policy
- Community Engagement Policy
- Complaints Management Policy
- Customer Service Charter
- Privacy Policy
- Public Interest Disclosure Policy and Procedure