



**Bayside Council**

Serving Our Community

# **Social Media Policy**

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Social Media Policy

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Social media has become an essential part of our personal and work lives. It has created a fundamental shift in how we communicate and relate to friends, colleagues, government, business and communities.
- 1.1.2 Given the importance of social media in modern communication, effectively using social media provides an unprecedented opportunity for Council to engage in conversations with our community in a professional and respectful manner.
- 1.1.3 Social media can:
  - increase resident's access to Council;
  - increase Council's access to residents and improve the accessibility of Council communication;
  - allow Council to be more active in its relationships with residents, partners and other stakeholders;
  - increase the level of trust in Council;
  - reach targeted audiences on specific issues, events and programs;
  - provide effective, fast communication channels during crises; and
  - provide insights into how Council is perceived.
- 1.1.4 Social media also presents a variety of risks and challenges such as:
  - the emergence of new, harmful forms of behaviour, such as cyber-bullying and trolling;
  - maintaining the accuracy, reliability and integrity of information disseminated from multiple sources;
  - organisations can be held liable for content uploaded onto their social media platforms by third parties;
  - content uploaded in a person's private capacity can adversely affect their employment and cause significant reputational damage to colleagues and employers; and
  - rapid innovation can make it difficult to keep pace with emerging technologies and trends.
- 1.1.5 In addition, potential corruption risks may arise due to social media use. These include:
  - customers, development proponents / objectors, tenderers, or other stakeholders grooming public officials by behaviours such as 'liking' specific posts, reposting content, or sending personal or private messages;
  - public officials disclosing confidential or sensitive information;
  - using social media for sponsorship opportunities, which may unfairly advantage one sponsor over another and lack transparency; and
  - public agencies or officials promoting certain businesses by behaviours such as 'following' them, 'liking' content, or making comments, which may result in those businesses being favoured over others.
- 1.1.6 Council embraces the use of social media as a form of corporate communication and an important community-building tool. It also recognises the need to have a policy to guide employees who use social media either as part of their job or in a personal capacity.

## 2 Application of policy

- 2.1.1 This policy applies to all users and Council Officials this includes Councillors, members of staff and delegates of the Council including members of committees that are delegates of the council who identify themselves as being associated with Council.
- 2.1.2 This policy does not apply to personal use of social media platforms where the user makes no reference to Council or any of Council's employees, contractors, other Council Officials, related entities, or other person providing services to or on behalf of Council.
- 2.1.3 This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment. Nor does it form part of any others user's contract of service. However, Council Officials must not conduct themselves in a manner that is contrary to a Council's policies. As outlined in clause 14.3, a breach of this policy will be a breach of the Council's code of conduct.

## 3 Definitions

Social media can be broadly defined as online platforms and applications - such as social networking sites, wikis, blogs, applications, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites, and message boards - that allow people to easily publish, share and discuss content.

In this Social Media Policy, the following terms have the following meanings:

### **Authorised user**

Members of council staff who are authorised by the General Manager or SMC to upload content and engage on the Council's social media platforms on the Council's behalf.

### **Council official**

Councillors, members of staff and delegates of the council (including members of committees that are delegates of the council);

### **Minor**

For the purposes of clause 9.1.4(b) of this policy, is a person under the age of 18 years.

### **Personal information**

Information or an opinion (including information or an opinion forming part of a database and whether or not recorded in a material form) about an individual whose identity is apparent or can reasonably be ascertained from the information or opinion.

### **SMC**

A council's social media coordinator appointed under clause 7.3.1 of this policy.

### **Social media**

Online platforms and applications - such as but not limited to social networking sites, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites, and message boards - that allow people to easily publish, share and discuss content. Examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Yammer, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and Wikipedia.

## 4 Policy statement

- 4.1.1 Council is committed to providing guidance to all employees for social media use, where it is about Council, its business units and services, its people, its Councillors and/or other business-related individuals or organisations.

## 5 Scope of policy

- 5.1.1 This policy is intended to align with existing Council policies, such as the Code of Conduct, Electronic Communications Policy, Communications Strategy, and policies on acceptable use of information technology.
- 5.1.2 The policy applies to:
- Councillors, staff, and other officials of Bayside Council who may be using social media on behalf of council; and
  - Councillors, staff, and other officials of Bayside Council who may be using social media for personal use.

## 6 Principles

- 6.1.1 The Mayor, Councillors, staff, and other officials of Bayside Council are committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of social media engagement:
- **Openness**  
Council's social media platforms are places where anyone can share and discuss issues that are relevant to our Council and the community we represent and serve.
  - **Relevance**  
Council officials will ensure that Council's social media platforms are kept up to date with informative content about the Council and its community.
  - **Accuracy**  
The content Council uploads onto its social media platforms and any other social media platform will be a source of truth for the Council and community and Council will prioritise the need to correct inaccuracies when they occur.
  - **Respect**  
Council's social media platforms are safe spaces. Council will uphold and promote the behavioural standards contained in this policy and Council's code of conduct when using Council's social media platforms and any other social media platform.

## **7 Administrative Framework**

### **7.1 Platforms and Applications**

- 7.1.1 Council will maintain a presence on the following social media platforms and applications: LinkedIn; Facebook; Instagram; Waste App; and YouTube.
- 7.1.2 Council's social media platforms must specify or provide a clearly accessible link to the 'House Rules' for engaging on the platform.

### **7.2 Establishment and deletion of Council social media platforms**

- 7.2.1 A new council social media platform, or a social media platform proposed by a council related entity (for example, a council committee), can only be established or deleted with the written approval of the General Manager or their delegate.
- 7.2.2 Where a council social media platform is established or deleted in accordance with clause 7.2.1, the General Manager or their delegate may amend clause 7.1.1 of this policy without the need for endorsement by the council's governing body.

### **7.3 Appointment and the role of the Social Media Coordinator**

- 7.3.1 The General Manager will appoint a member of council staff to be the council's Social Media Coordinator (SMC). The SMC should be a senior and suitably qualified member of staff.
- 7.3.2 The General Manager may appoint more than one SMC.
- 7.3.3 The SMC's role is to:
  - Approve and revoke a staff member's status as an authorised user
  - develop and/or approve the training and/or induction to be provided to authorised users
  - maintain a register of authorised users
  - maintain effective oversight of authorised users
  - moderate the Council's social media platforms in accordance with Part 5 of this policy
  - ensure the council complies with its record keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998 in relation to social media (see clause 12 of this policy).
  - Ensure the council adheres to the rules of the social media platform(s)
  - coordinate with the Council's staff to ensure the Council's social media platforms are set up and maintained in a way that maximises user friendliness and any technical problems are resolved promptly.
- 7.3.4 The SMC may delegate their functions under clause 7.3.3 to authorised users.
- 7.3.5 The SMC is an authorised user for the purposes of this policy.

### **7.4 Authorised Users**

- 7.4.1 Authorised users are members of council staff who are authorised by the SMC to upload content and engage on social media on the Council's behalf.
- 7.4.2 Authorised users should be members of council staff that are responsible for managing, or have expertise in, the events, initiatives, programs or policies that are the subject of the social media content.
- 7.4.3 The SMC will appoint authorised users when required.

- 7.4.4 An authorised user must receive a copy of this policy and induction training on social media use by the SMC and Council's obligations before uploading content on Council's behalf.
- 7.4.5 If a user was an active user of a Council application or social media account prior to the implementation of this policy, they will be subject to clause 7.4.3 and 7.4.4 when this policy is implemented.
- 7.4.6 The role of an authorised user is to:
- ensure, to the best of their ability, that the content they upload onto social media platforms is accurate;
  - correct inaccuracies in Council generated content;
  - engage in discussions and answer questions on Council's behalf on social media platforms;
  - keep the Council's social media platforms and applications up to date; and
  - where authorised to do so by the SMC:
  - moderate the Council's social media platforms and applications in accordance with Part 5 of this policy; and
  - ensure the Council complies with its record keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998 in relation to social media (see clause 12 of this policy).
- 7.4.7 When engaging on social media on Council's behalf (such as, but not limited to, on a community social media page), an authorised user must identify themselves as a member of Council staff but they are not obliged to disclose their name or position within the Council.
- 7.4.8 Authorised users must not use Council's social media platforms for personal reasons.

## **7.5 Content and tone of social media posts and interactions**

- 7.5.1 Authorised users must follow the content and tone guidelines set out by the SMC, and all posts are subject to approval by the SMC where requested.
- 7.5.2 Authorised users upload content and engage on social media on the Council's behalf. Authorised users must use language consistent with that function and avoid expressing or appearing to express their personal views when undertaking their role.

## **7.6 Register of Authorised Users**

- 7.6.1 The SMC will maintain a register of authorised users. This register is to be reviewed annually to ensure it is fit-for-purpose.

## **7.7 Ceasing to be an authorised user**

- 7.7.1 The SMC may revoke a staff member's status as an authorised user, if:
- a) the staff member makes such a request;
  - b) the staff member has not uploaded content onto any of the Council's social media platforms in the last 6 months;
  - c) the staff member has failed to comply with this policy; and
  - d) the SMC is of the reasonable opinion that the staff member is no longer suitable to be an authorised user.



## 8 Administrative framework for Councillors' social media platforms

### 8.1 Councillor social media guidelines

- 8.1.1 For the purposes of this policy, Councillor social platforms are not council social media platforms. Section 7 of this policy does not apply to Councillors' social media platforms.
- 8.1.2 Councillors are responsible for the administration and moderation of their own social media platforms (in accordance with Parts 3 and 5 of this policy), and ensuring they comply with the record keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998 (see clause 12 of this policy) and council's records management policy in relation to social media.
- 8.1.3 Clause 8.1.2 also applies to Councillors in circumstances where another person administers, moderates, or uploads content onto their social media platform.
- 8.1.4 Councillors must comply with the rules of the platform when engaging on social media.

### 8.2 Induction and training

- 8.2.1 Councillors who engage, or intend to engage, on social media must receive induction training on social media use. Induction training can be undertaken either as part of the councillor's induction program or as part of their ongoing professional development program.

### 8.3 Identifying as a Councillor

- 8.3.1 Councillors must identify themselves on their social media platforms in the following format:
  - Councillor "First Name and Last Name",
  - Cr "First Name and Last Name" or
  - Clr "First Name and Last Name".
- 8.3.2 A Councillor's social media platform must include a profile photo which is a clearly identifiable image of the Councillor.
- 8.3.3 If a Councillor becomes or ceases to be the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, or the holder of another position (for example, chairperson of a committee), this must be clearly stated on the Councillor's social media platforms and updated **within seven days** of a change in circumstances.

### 8.4 Other general requirements for Councillors' social media platforms

- 8.4.1 Councillor social media platforms must specify or provide a clearly accessible link to the 'House Rules' for engaging on the platform.
- 8.4.2 A Councillor's social media platform must include a disclaimer to the following effect:

"The views expressed, and comments made on this social media platform, are my own and not that of the Council".
- 8.4.3 Despite clause 8.4.2, Mayoral or Councillor media releases and other content that has been authorised according to the Council's media and communications protocols may be uploaded onto a Councillor's social media platform.

- 8.4.4 Councillors may upload publicly available Council information onto their social media platforms.
- 8.4.5 Councillors may use more personal, informal language when engaging on their social media platforms.
- 8.4.6 Councillors are not to engage in social media activity while in the Chamber in accordance with the Code of Meeting Practice.

## **8.5 Councillor queries relating to social media platforms**

- 8.5.1 Questions from Councillors relating to their obligations under this policy, technical queries relating to the operation of their social media platforms or managing records on social media may be directed to the General Manager or SMC in the first instance, in accordance with Council's Councillor requests protocols.

## **8.6 Other social media platforms administered by Councillors**

- 8.6.1 A Councillor must advise the General Manager/SMC of any social media platforms they administer on which content relating to the Council or Council officials is, or is expected to be, uploaded. The Councillor must do so within:
  - a) 21 days of becoming a Councillor, or
  - b) 5 working days of becoming the administrator.

# **9 Standards of conduct on social media**

## **9.1 Council Official social media guidelines**

- 9.1.1 This policy only applies to Council officials' use of social media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a council official. The policy does not apply to personal use of social media that is not connected with a person's role as a council official.
- 9.1.2 Council officials must comply with the Council's code of conduct when using social media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a council official.
- 9.1.3 Council officials must not use social media to post or share comments, photos, videos, electronic recordings or other information that:
  - a) is defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening or intimidating to other council officials or members of the public;
  - b) contains profane language or is sexual in nature;
  - c) constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW, or is unlawfully discriminatory;
  - d) is contrary to their duties under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by the Council to ensure workplace health and safety;
  - e) contains content about the Council, council officials or members of the public that is not factually accurate, misleading or deceptive;
  - f) divulges confidential Council information or information that is not yet publicly available.
  - g) Discloses personal information or breaches the privacy of other council officials or members of the public;
  - h) contains allegations of suspected breaches of the Council's code of conduct or information about the consideration of a matter under the

Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW;

- i) could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment;
- j) commits the Council to any action;
- k) violates an order made by a court;
- l) breaches copyright;
- m) advertises, endorses or solicits commercial products or business;
- n) constitutes spam; and is in breach of the rules of the social media platform;
- o) implies the collective council's decisions are from any one individual; and/or
- p) has not previously been communicated through Council's official channels.

9.1.4 Council officials must:

- a) attribute work to the original author, creator or source when uploading or linking to content produced by a third party; and
- b) obtain written permission from a minor's parent or legal guardian before uploading content in which the minor can be identified.

9.1.5 Council officials must exercise caution when sharing, liking, retweeting content as this can be regarded as an endorsement and/or publication of the content.

9.1.6 Council officials must not incite or encourage other persons to act in a way that is contrary to the requirements of this Section.

9.1.7 Councillors must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council's governing body but may explain why they voted on a matter in the way that they did (see section 232(1)(f) of the Local Government Act 1993 – the role of a councillor).

## 10 Moderation of social media platforms

Council officials (including Councillors) may be considered a 'publisher' of any content uploaded onto a social media platform they administer or have admin permissions on, including content that:

- is uploaded by a third party; and/or
- appears on their social media platform because they have 'liked', 'shared', or 'retweeted' the content, or similar.

### 10.1 Content moderation guidelines

10.1.1 Council officials who are responsible for the moderation of the Council's or Councillors' social media platforms may remove content and 'block' or ban a person from those platforms. Such actions must be undertaken in accordance with this Part.

10.1.2 For the purposes of this Part, 'social media platform' and 'platform' means both the Council's and Councillors' social media platforms.

### 10.2 House Rules

10.2.1 Social media platforms must state or provide an accessible link to the 'House Rules' for engaging on the platform.

10.2.2 At a minimum, the House Rules should specify:

- a) the principles of social media engagement referred to in clause 6 of this policy;
- b) the type of behaviour or content that will result in that content being removed or 'hidden', or a person being blocked or banned from the platform;
- c) the process by which a person can be blocked or banned from the platform and rights of review;
- d) a statement relating to privacy and personal information (see clause 12 of this policy);
- e) when the platform will be monitored (for example weekdays 9am – 5pm, during the Council's business hours); and
- f) that the social media platform is not to be used for making complaints about the Council or council officials. House Rules will include information about, or a link to, Council's complaints handling policy.

10.2.3 For the purposes of clause 10.2.2(b), third parties engaging on social media platforms must not post or share comments, photos, videos, electronic recordings, or other information that:

- a) is defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening or intimidating to council officials or members of the public;
- b) contains profane language or is sexual in nature;
- c) constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW, or is unlawfully discriminatory;
- d) contains content about the Council, council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive;
- e) breaches the privacy of council officials or members of the public;
- f) contains allegations of suspected breaches of the Council's code of conduct or information about the consideration of a matter under the Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW;
- g) violates an order made by a court;
- h) breaches copyright;
- i) advertises, endorses or solicits commercial products or business;
- j) constitutes spam; or
- k) would be in breach of the rules of the social media platform.

### **10.3 Removal or 'hiding' of content**

10.3.1 Where a person uploads content onto a social media platform that, in the reasonable opinion of the moderator, is of a kind specified under clause 10.2, the moderator may remove or 'hide' that content.

10.3.2 Prior to removing or 'hiding' the content, the moderator must make a record of it (for example, a screenshot).

### **10.4 Blocking or banning**

10.4.1 If a person uploads content that is removed or 'hidden' under clause 10.3 of this policy on three occasions, that person may be blocked or banned from the social media platform/all social media platforms.

10.4.2 A person may only be blocked or banned from a Council social media platform with the approval of the SMC. This clause does not apply to blocking or banning a person from a Councillor's social media platform.

10.4.3 A person may request a review of a decision to block or ban then from a social media platform. The request must be made in writing to the General Manager and state the grounds on which the request is being made.

- 10.4.4 Where a review request is made under clause 10.4.3, the review is to be undertaken by the General Manager or a member of staff nominated by the General Manager who is suitably qualified and who was not involved in the decision to block or ban the person. Where the decision to block or ban the person was made by the General Manager, the review must be undertaken by another senior and suitably qualified member of staff who was not involved in the decision.
- 10.4.5 Where a person that is the subject of a block or ban continues to engage on a social media platform(s) using an alternative social media account, profile, avatar, etc., a moderator may block or ban the person from the platform(s) immediately.

## **11 Use of social media during emergencies**

### **11.1 Engagement protocols during emergencies**

- 11.1.1 During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the Social Media Coordinator will be responsible for the management of content on the Council's social media platforms.
- 11.1.2 To ensure consistent messaging both during and after an emergency, authorised users and council officials must not upload content onto the Council's or their own social media platforms which contradicts advice issued by the agency coordinating the emergency response, or agencies supporting recovery efforts.
- 11.1.3 Training on social media use during emergencies should be included in training and/or induction provided to authorised users and Councillors.

## **12 Records management and privacy requirements**

### **12.1 Records management**

- 12.1.1 Social media content created, sent and received by council officials (including Councillors) acting in their official capacity is a council record and may constitute open access information or be subject to an information access application made under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009. These records must be managed in accordance with the requirements of the State Records Act 1998 and the Council's approved records management policies and practices.
- 12.1.2 You must not destroy, alter, or remove social media content unless authorised to do so. If you need to alter or remove social media content, you must do so in accordance with this policy, and consult with the Council's records manager and comply with the requirements of the State Records Act 1998.
- 12.1.3 When/if a Councillor's term of office concludes, the Councillor must contact the Council's records manager and SMC to manage/transfer records of social media content created during their term of office and comply with the requirements of the State Records Act 1998.
- 12.1.4 In fulfilling their obligations under clauses 12.1.1 to 12.1.3, council officials should refer to any guidance issued by the State Archives and Records Authority of NSW relating to retention requirements for councils' and Councillors' social media content.

## **12.2 Privacy considerations and requirement**

- 12.2.1 Social media communications are in the public domain. Council officials should exercise caution about what personal information, if any, they upload onto social media.
- 12.2.2 The Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 applies to the use of social media platforms by the Council and Councillors. To mitigate potential privacy risks, council officials will:
- a) advise people not to provide personal information on social media platforms;
  - b) inform people if any personal information they may provide on social media platforms is to be used for official purposes;
  - c) moderate comments to ensure they do not contain any personal information; and
  - d) advise people to contact the Council or Councillors through alternative channels if they have personal information they do not want to disclose in a public forum.
- 12.2.3 Council officials must ensure they comply with the Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 when engaging on and/or moderating social media platforms. In fulfilling their obligations, council officials should refer to any guidance issued by the Information and Privacy Commission of NSW, such as, but not limited to, the Health Privacy Principles.

## **13 Private use of social media**

### **13.1 What constitutes 'private'**

- 13.1.1 For the purposes of this policy, a council official's social media engagement will be considered 'private use' when the content they upload:
- a) is not associated with, or does not refer to, the Council, any other council officials, contractors, related entities or any other person or organisation providing services to or on behalf of the Council in their official or professional capacities; and
  - b) is not related to or does not contain information acquired by virtue of their employment or role as a council official.
- 13.1.2 If a council official chooses to identify themselves as a council official, either directly or indirectly (such as in their user profile), then they will not be deemed to be acting in their private capacity for the purposes of this policy.

### **13.2 Private use of social media outside work hours**

- 13.2.1 Employees who are residents, ratepayers or customers of Council services are not precluded from participating in community debate about an issue that personally affects them.
- 13.2.2 Where an employee's personal use of social media relates to the business of Council, its operations, or other council related information, that use is governed by Council's Code of Conduct. Employees must make it clear that they are commenting as a resident / ratepayer, not as a Council employee. It is important that readers of posts do not misconstrue personal comments as representing an official Council position.

### **13.3 Use of social media during work hours**

- 13.3.1 Council staff may only access and engage on social media in their private capacity while at work during breaks in accordance with the Electronic Communications Policy.

## **14 Policy implementation**

### **14.1 Policy responsibilities**

- 14.1.1 The General Manager has overall responsibility for the Policy.
- 14.1.2 The SMC, appointed by the General Manager, is responsible for the development, implementation and maintenance of the Policy and associated training.

### **14.2 Procedures**

- 14.2.1 The General Manager, the Manager Communications & Engagement in consultation with the Social Media Coordinator may approve procedures that outline process including but not limited to the following:
- a) social media guidelines;
  - b) social media content requirements;
  - c) social media strategy;
  - d) training for authorised social media users;
  - e) requesting to become an authorised social media user; and
  - f) creating or change 'house rules' for social media.

### **14.3 Breaches**

- 14.3.1 Council employees must act in accordance with Council's values, the Code of Conduct and the Electronic Communications Policy.
- 14.3.2 A breach of this policy may be treated as a breach of the Code of Conduct. The model procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct will apply.

## **15 Concerns or complaints**

### **15.1 Process of expressing concern or making a complaint**

- 15.1.1 Council employees must act in accordance with Council's values, the Code of Conduct and the Electronic Communications Policy. Concerns or complaints about the administration of a council's social media platforms should be made to the council's General Manager/SMC in the first instance.
- 15.1.2 Complaints about the conduct of council officials (including Councillors) on social media platforms may be directed to the General Manager.
- 15.1.3 Complaints about a General Manager's conduct on social media platforms may be directed to the Mayor.

## 16 Document control

### 16.1 Review

The Policy should be reviewed every 4 years, however it may be required to be reviewed earlier due to changes to relevant legislation, the Model Code of Conduct and/or guidance or advice from the NSW Office of Local Government.

The General Manager or Manager Governance & Risk may approve non-significant and/or minor editorial amendments that do not change the policy substance (including authorised changes under clause 7.2.1 of this policy).

### 16.2 Related documents

Relevant legislation:

- Workplace Surveillance Act
- Local Government Act 1993
- Copyright Act 1968
- State Records Act 1998
- Private & Personal Information Protection Act 1998
- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009

Reference Material

- Office of Local Government's Model Social Media Policy
- NSW Ombudsman's Publication "Public Sector use of social media"

Relevant Council Policies:

- Code of Conduct
- Electronic Communications Policy
- Code of Meeting Practice
- Media Policy

### 16.3 Version history

Version	Release Date	Author	Reason for Change
1.0	12/04/2017	Liz Rog	New document
2.0	24/07/2024 (Council)	Manager Communications & Engagement	Required policy review and update to reflect the changing nature of social media