



Policy 44 – Social Media

CM10 Ref:	DOC/24/1927
Adopted:	20 May 2013 Minute 66/13
Version:	4
Reviewed Date:	18 March 2024 Minute 50/24
Author	Executive Assistant
Responsible Officer	Executive Assistant

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of the Policy is to define the objectives and obligations that govern Council’s use of social media as an effective external communication resource.

SCOPE

This Policy applies to:

- Council employees who have a role in administering and moderating social media sites on behalf of Council;
- Council employees, volunteers and other people communicating using social media for or on behalf of Council; and
- elected members of Council.

DEFINITIONS

The definitions of terms used in this Policy are set out below.

Term	Definition
Administrator	The person authorised to oversee the creation and management of Council’s social media sites. Unless otherwise stated, the primary Administrator will be the Executive Assistant.
Moderator	A person who has been given permission to post on behalf of Council and to moderate the content on that Council site. It is the responsibility of the Executive Assistant to act as the primary Moderator for the Council (or a business unit of Council e.g. Scottsdale Aquatic Centre, Bridport Seaside Caravan Park, etc.).
Moderate	To monitor content by removing posts or responding to posts, when appropriate, on behalf of Council (or a business unit of Council e.g. Scottsdale Aquatic Centre, Bridport Seaside Caravan Park, etc.).
Social Media	Social media is a collection of internet based tools which facilitate conversations through the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. Social media sites are platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, You Tube and X (formally Twitter).
User	A member of the general public who may communicate with any of Council’s social media sites by viewing and / or posting to that site.
Post	A post is to place information on a social media site.

POLICY

1 KEY PRINCIPLES

Open	Use social media to share and promote access to information, services and community events (where appropriate) whilst also being transparent and accountable.
Collaborative	Use social media in conjunction with other communication methods, including traditional media, to deliver key messages and important information and create opportunities to listen and engage with the general public.
Appropriate	In developing, posting and responding to content, Council employees and elected members will uphold the values of the Council by acting with honesty, integrity, courtesy and professionalism and will not be defamatory, discriminatory, harassing or encourage law breaking.
Responsive	Council employees will utilise social media to respond quickly to the general public and emerging issues.
Reliable	Maintain a consistent and quality social media presence and ensure that all information disseminated through social media is accurate, authorised and aligned with Council.

2 USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

2.1 Roles and Responsibilities

Mayor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Should seek advice from the General Manager and / or the Executive Assistant regarding tools available and should be communicating in their role as outline in Section 27(1)(b) of the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> (i.e. act as the spokesperson of the Council).▪ Should clearly clarify when communicating that a view is their own, when not speaking on behalf of Council.▪ Understand and comply with the provisions of this Policy.▪ Seek training and development for using social media, if applicable.▪ 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">▪ Should ensure responsibilities / delegations in relation to social media are clearly defined and act as a source of advice to the Mayor.▪ Ensures that Council's use of social media complies with the intent and requirements of this Policy.▪ Educate elected members and employees about this Policy and their responsibilities when using social media.▪ Should approve the use of Council branding.▪ Should ensure compliance with social media provider conditions.▪ Should act as the spokesperson on operational issues or issues of fact.▪ Should clearly clarify when communicating that a view is their own, when not speaking on behalf of Council.▪ Seek legal advice, as appropriate, where an issue is likely to be contentious or may create legal risk for Council.

Elected Members¹

- Should seek advice from the Mayor or General Manager and be sure not to speak on behalf of Council as this is the role of the Mayor.
- A person authorised to comment on behalf of Council may be limited to a particular topic or specific types of social media, or both.
- Comment only on topics within their area of expertise and authority.
- Should clearly clarify when communicating that a view is their own, when not speaking on behalf of Council.
- Elected members must not post or respond to material that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist or infringes copyright.
- Must ensure their social media interactions comply with relevant legislation (as listed in this document) and the Councillors Code of Conduct.
- Acknowledge that the use of social media is an elected members' personal responsibility regardless of whether the social media is undertaken during the course of Council business or out of hours, and irrespective of whether a Council device is used or personal technology.
- Elected members must not establish fictitious names or identities when communicating through social media.
- Understand and comply with the provisions of this Policy.
- Seek training and development for using social media, if applicable.
- 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.

Directors / Managers

- Provide advice and assist with the development of content for social media.
- Ensure relevant employees consult and obtain appropriate approvals for their planned use of social media.
- Offer regular training and updates for staff who are using social media.

Social Media Administrators and Moderators

- Undertake the role of administrator, and moderator for Council's social media accounts.
- Only post on behalf of Council from the authorised administrative profiles set up for Dorset Council.
- Maintain records in accordance with Council's Customer Service Charter.
- A person authorised to comment on behalf of Council may be limited to a particular topic or specific types of social media, or both.
- Should clearly clarify when communicating that a view is their own, when not speaking on behalf of Council.
- Apply principles of moderating according to the established house rules (see 2.2) and operational policy and risk assessment.

¹ Refer Appendix A for elected member self-assessment designed by Tasmanian Integrity Commission which may assist in decision making (page 9).

Employees and Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seek advice and approval from relevant Director / Manager for any planned social media posts. ▪ 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 direct report if unsure about applying any of the provisions of this Policy.
IT Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure the Council IT network remains secure. ▪ Regularly back up and archive any internally hosted social media sites.

2.2 House Rules

- Do not harass, abuse or threaten other visitors, people or organisations.
- Do not post comments that are likely to offend others, particularly in reference to an individual's race, gender, sexuality, political leaning, religion or disability.
- Do not use obscene or offensive language.
- Do not post repeat comments continuously.
- Do not promote anything that may constitute spam, such as commercial interests, solicitations, advertisements or endorsements of any non-governmental agency.

2.3 Content

Council will provide an established operational policy as to who will write and post content, who will moderate and approve content, and who will respond to negative and positive posts, and how. Council know that social media is a 24/7 medium, however Council's moderation capabilities are not. Council's page will be monitored closely, however there may be some posts which have commenting capabilities turned off or user contributions restricted.

Any social media accounts for Council (or a business unit of Council) must not be established without consent from either the General Manager or the relevant Director.

Posting Content	<p>Content on Council's social media sites will, where appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ also 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. ▪ Include posts 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. ▪ Posts will only disclose information which is classified as suitable for the public domain.
Promoting External Content	<p>Information shared from another source is to be clearly linked to the purpose of Council's social media account or it has been determined to be in the community's interest. This may include, but not limited to posts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ relating to emergency events, ▪ from Council partners,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ by local, state or federal government bodies, ▪ about community events or initiatives, ▪ recognised state or national events, and ▪ other items as directed or approved by the General Manager or the Mayor.
Monitoring / Moderating Content	<p>As a minimum requirement, Council will monitor social media content and exchanges at least once daily, during regular business hours and establish whether:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ comments need replies (where appropriate), noting that not all comments on posts are a direct enquiry to Council or necessarily seeking a response. ▪ comments need to be hidden or removed. It is acknowledged that posts or material that is reasonably critical of Council will not be deleted. ▪ current content is factual, accurate and up to date. ▪ costs are relevant. ▪ new information needs uploading. <p>Posts that make specific mention of confidential material about Council or individuals, or mention employees by name on Council's social media sites will be removed.</p>
Response	<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 comments on posts 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.</p>
Removing Content	<p>Council reserves the right to remove certain content such as illegal or offensive material. Council also reserves the right to remove a person from their site if that person repeatedly posts illegal and / or offensive material or operates outside of the 'house rules' listed on Council's social media sites and in this Policy. Council will, when possible, state why a post of content was removed regardless of who posted it.</p> <p>Disputes will be managed in accordance with Council's Customer Service Charter.</p>
Branding	<p>The brand is the corporate identity of Council and can take many forms (name, sign, symbol, colour combination, slogan, etc.). A clear brand is an essential tool in online communications and subsequently Council's Municipal Logo Policy including Council's Style Guide must be adhered to when posting content. The Dorset Council logo should always be attached to corporate content.</p> <p>Social media sites belonging to business units of Council that have their own branding must always carry their relevant logo, such as the Bridport Seaside Caravan Park.</p>
Copyright	<p>Material which is copyrighted will not be used unless prior written consent is obtained from the creator or copyright owner and the original author or source of the material is acknowledged.</p> <p>Moderators will be diligent in their consideration of brand, copyright, fair use and trademarks.</p>
Information Management	<p>With regard to social media sites, Council will make all reasonable endeavours to comply with the requirements of the <i>Archives Act 1983</i> and Dorset Council's Customer Service Charter.</p>

2.4 Use of Social Media by Council Employees and Elected Members

Council supports the use of social media for professional purposes such as communicating with fellow employees, elected members or professional colleagues, acquiring or sharing information, and use for educational or professional development activities.

Incidental use of social media by employees during work time is permissible, provided the use of equipment and consumption of space on the network is kept to a minimum and does not compromise, pre-empt or impact adversely upon Council business. Such use should not interfere with productivity, effectiveness and legitimate work activities and the time spent on personal use must be kept to a minimum. Excessive use will not be tolerated.

Personal Use of Social Media	Council will not require employees or elected members to hand over credentials to a personal social media account, however personal use must comply with this Policy.
Use of Council Email for Social Media	Council employees and elected members are not permitted to use a Council email address (e.g. xxxxxxxx@dorset.tas.gov.au) as the contact address for a personal social media site.
Considering a Post	<p>The following questions provide an employee or elected member with an effective litmus test for whether a post is appropriate or not. When commenting, consideration should be given to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Could what you are doing, harm the reputation of your Council?▪ Are you disclosing Council material that you are not authorised to disclose?▪ Have you made it clear when your contribution is as a private individual, not an employee or elected member of Council?▪ Are you willing to defend your post to your colleagues or fellow elected members?▪ Are you behaving with integrity, respect and accountability? <p>A simple guide for elected members is provided in Appendix A.</p>

2.5 Penalties for Breach of Policy

An elected member breaching this Policy may be subject to a Code of Conduct complaint (as per *the Local Government Act 1993*) and the *Local Government (General) Regulations 2015*.

Employees breaching this Policy may be subject to disciplinary action as per the operational Employee Conduct Policy.

3 LEGAL ISSUES AND LIABILITIES

Defamation / Offensive or Obscene Material	<p>Social media can blur private and public domains and activities on social media platforms should be considered public activities. Despite the availability of privacy functions on social media platforms, the possibility exists for content to be shared beyond intended recipients. Additionally, it should be noted that the terms and conditions of use for most social media sites state that all content becomes the property of the site on which it is posted.</p> <p>Online content is essentially permanent and should NEVER be considered private.</p>
Privacy and Confidentiality	In using social media, moderators and elected members will be cognisant of requirements under the <i>Personal Information Protection Act 2004</i> and the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> .

Personal and sensitive information cannot be published without permission of the person to which that information belongs.

Moderators and elected members will not disclose confidential Council information, including but not limited to matters relating to closed meetings of Council, unless this has been approved in writing by the General Manager.

Risk Management

An operational risk assessment will be undertaken for each new planned aspect of social media use. Such assessment will consider things like lack of followers, blurring of professional and personal communications, online activism and negative comments, expectation of instant responses, breaches of law or codes of conduct, unauthorised posts, etc.

The liabilities section of this policy covers off on some specific risks but legal advice should be sought where appropriate.

4 RESOURCING / TRAINING

Council will ensure that social media activities are adequately resourced to allow for content development, monitoring, interpreting the volume and content of messages and responding, as required.

Training will be provided to Administrators and Moderators on an ongoing basis (and on request). Where appropriate, Council may engage external providers to provide social media training.

RELEVANT 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:

Archives Act 1983

Defamation Act 2005

Personal Information Protection Act 2004

Local Government Act 1993

Copyright Act 1968

Work Health and Safety Act 2012

Anti-Discrimination Act 1998

Right to Information Act 2009

Public Interest Disclosures Act 2002

Online Safety Act 2021

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Electronic Communications Policy
- Communications Policy
- Customer Service Charter
- Community Consultation Policy and Guidelines
- Personal Information Protection Policy
- Operational Social Media Policy and Risk Assessment Matrix
- Operational Disciplinary Policy
- Operational Employee Conduct Policy

REVIEW

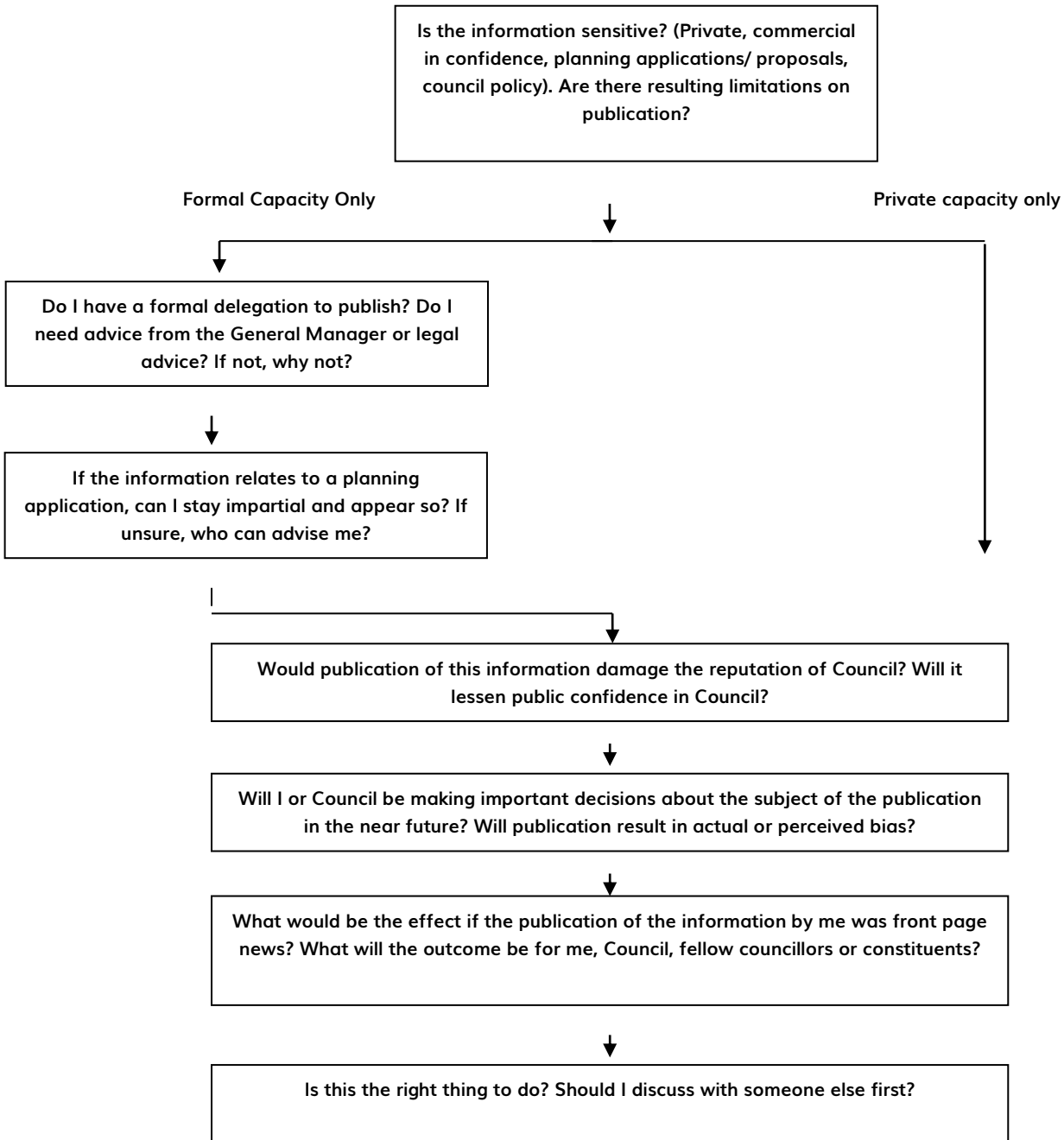
This Policy will be reviewed every 5 years, or earlier if required.

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Version	Doc Ref	Date Reviewed	Author	Comments
V1	13/4720	20 May 2013	Guy Jetson	Policy established based on LGAT model template
V2	16/2258	21 March 2016	Guy Jetson	Updates as recommended based on NSW Model Template
V3	16/2258[v2]	21 January 2019	Sarah Forsyth	Minor changes to officers, rules and grammatical errors
V4	DOC/24/1927	February 2024	Sarah Forsyth	Comprehensive review of Policy

APPENDIX A

1. Questions for consideration by elected members.



Howard A.E (2012), Connecting with Communities: How Local Government is Using Social Media to Engage with Citizens, ANZOG Institute for Governance at the University of Canberra and Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government,