

## Social Media

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### Scope

This policy outlines what is expected of Councillors and staff in relation to using social media to protect the reputation and legitimate interests of Council.

The aim of the policy is to build an understanding across the organisation of what is appropriate and productive use of social media. It also aims to minimise miscommunication and prevent misuse of social media tools that could undermine Council's brand.

In describing what appropriate activity, this Policy recognises that the use of social media in a private capacity during work hours is not acceptable. Social media refers to the internet based applications that allow interaction amongst people in which they can create, exchange and modify information and ideas in virtual communities and networks.

### Background

Using social media is not without risks and challenges and this policy aims to address some areas of concern such as inappropriate use, record keeping and resourcing. Some other issues are best covered in other policies and plans as per below:

- Computer Use
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Privacy
- Emergency Management Plan
- Communications Strategy
- Community Engagement Strategy

These policies have been reviewed to ensure alignment with this Social Media Policy. Social media is a collection of internet based tools which facilitate conversations.

Social media is now strongly embedded in Australian culture as a personal tool for networking and communication and is increasingly being used as core component of government marketing, engagement and communications strategies.

The desire to connect with governments using social media is increasing along with an expectation that this form of communication will be available. Combined with the redevelopment of a new website, it is timely to introduce social media as part of Council's communication strategy.

## **Approach**

The key principles of social media are:

1. Social media will be used as a communication tool and to facilitate online collaboration and engagement.
2. Only representatives authorised by the CEO will post to Council's official social media platforms.
3. Social media posts on behalf of Council will be made only via the official Council accounts.
4. Information disseminated through social media will be accurate, timely and aligned with Council strategies, policies and decisions.
5. Use of social media will always follow clear identification of objectives and the right tools to meet those objectives.
6. Private information will be protected and copyright, privacy and other applicable laws will be taken into account when interacting with social media.
7. There will continue to be appropriate record keeping of information disseminated or collected via social media.
8. The use of social media in a private or work capacity is a personal responsibility and staff should be mindful of the content that they post, what potential risks it may have and who may see it.
9. In developing, posting and responding to content, authorised representatives will uphold the values of the Council by acting with honesty, integrity, courtesy and professionalism and will not be discriminatory, defamatory, harassing or encourage law breaking.
10. All Councillors and employees are responsible for being familiar with this policy.

Council selectively uses social media to meet the following communications objectives:

1. Enhance the reputation of Council and develop stronger relationships with the community;
2. Provide an informal and accessible way for the community to communicate with Council;
3. Support traditional media by broadening its reach and scope;
4. Promote selected services, events, projects, policies and activities;
5. Expand community engagement;
6. Provide essential updates during an emergency.

## **Deployment**

Only authorised representatives will write and post content, approve/moderate incoming content, and respond to negative and positive posts. The use of social media is a tactical component of Council's communications strategy.

Uploaded content will only disclose information which is classified as suitable for the public domain. Authorised representatives will ensure the information posted is accurate and not misleading in any way.

In developing, posting and responding to content, authorised representatives will:

- Uphold the values of the Council by acting with honesty, integrity, courtesy and professionalism;
- Ensure that all relevant legislation has been complied with and that there is adherence to Council codes, policies and procedures;
- Avoid political bias;
- Act in a timely manner; and
- Take steps to avoid real or potential conflicts of interest.

When developing or posting content, authorised representatives must not:

- Use abusive, profane or sexually explicit language;
- Undertake commercial solicitations or transactions;
- Use copyright or ownership protected materials without appropriate approvals;
- Be discriminatory, defamatory, or encourage law breaking;
- Compromise council, employee or system safety;
- Spam; or
- Air personal campaigns.

Council will regularly monitor social media content and exchanges to establish whether:

- Comments need a response or removal.
- Current content is factual, accurate and up-to-date.
- Posts are relevant.
- New information needs uploading.

Towong Shire Council welcomes the use of our social media accounts as a place for the public to ask questions and engage in discussion. However, we expect all contributors to be respectful. Authorised representatives will respond to constructive feedback while remarks of a derogatory nature will not be responded to. Material that is reasonably critical of Council will not be deleted. If content is removed, Council will state why a post or content is removed regardless of who posted it.

All of our social media accounts have the highest profanity blocker. People may be blocked or unfollowed if they continue to disrespect these simple rules. Comments which include inappropriate language or personal abuse will be removed. We retain the right to determine which comments violate these rules. We also reserve the right to remove violations.

A risk analysis will be undertaken for each new planned use of a social media tool. Such analysis 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.

Social media posts that relate to Council business are deemed to be public records. In determining which posts need to be kept, an assessment of the risk associated with the post will need to be made. If deemed to be a risk then a record will need to be kept of the comment, who made it, where it was made and its context.

Councillors and staff must:

- Not post or respond to material that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist or infringes copyright.
- Not establish fictitious names or identities deliberately intended to deceive, mislead or lie.
- Not bring Council's integrity into disrepute, or harm the operations or reputation of Council.
- Separate personal opinions from professional ones.
- Avoid the use of business email addresses for personal social media logins.

Council will not require Councillors or staff to hand over credentials to a personal social media account. However, personal use must comply with this policy.

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

In using social media for personal communication, staff and councillors must not purport to represent the Council. It is permissible to mention where you work, but you must make it clear you don't speak on behalf of Council. Staff and councillors can post public information about Council – that is, information which can be found on Council's website.

In using social media for personal communications, staff must not:

- Damage the reputation of Council,
- Use Council's intellectual property or copyrighted materials,
- Disclose sensitive or confidential information, or
- Post offensive or defamatory comments – particularly about the Council, council staff or elected members.

Consideration should be given to the following:

1. Could what you are doing harm the reputation of your Council?
2. Are you disclosing Council material that you are not authorised to disclose?
3. Have you made it clear to others when your contribution is as a private individual, not an employee of Council?
4. Are you willing to defend your post to your Manager?
5. Are you behaving with integrity, respect and accountability?

Councillors and staff must comply fully with the policy at all times. If you are not sure if an activity complies, speak to your Manager. Non compliance is serious matter and appropriate action will be taken.

Nothing in this policy should be interpreted as diminishing or attempting to diminish an employee's right to engage in lawful industrial activities. A Councillor or staff member breaching this policy may be subject to a Code of Conduct complaint.

### **Relevant Legislation**

Social media can appear to blur private and public spheres but activities on social media websites should be considered public activities. Despite the availability of privacy functions on social media websites, 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.

Online content is essentially permanent and should NEVER be considered private. Staff and elected members will not post offensive, obscene or defamatory content. Use of offensive, obscene or defamatory content may breach a number of Federal and State Laws.

In using social media, staff and elected members will be cognisant of requirements under the *Information Privacy Act 2000, the Freedom of Information Act 1982, the Public Records Act 1973* and the *Local Government Act 1989*.

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

Councillors and staff will not disclose confidential Council information, including but not limited to matters relating to closed meetings of Council.

Councillors and staff will be cognisant of security risks to Council through the use of social media and will comply with the Computer Use Policy in relation to use of equipment.

Councillors and staff will also give consideration to security risks in relation to uploading of content.

Disputes will be managed in accordance with Council's Issue Resolution Policy.

## **Results**

The deployment of this policy will be reviewed annually in light of changing practises and legislative requirements.