

Social media

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Strategy	5.2.9 Ensure Council operations are supported by the most effective internal service provision and governance structures

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to provide a position in respect to the expectations of Council's representatives when engaging in social media in both an official and personal capacity.

This Policy will establish a standard approach with clear guidelines for using social media sites to ensure they are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that their use does not expose the Council to security risks or reputational damage.

2. Scope

Information technology has changed the way in which people communicate and share information. While the technologies encompassed by the term "social media" are fundamentally no different to other forms of communication, they are potentially revolutionary because they can connect large numbers of people with relative ease.

Australians are among the most prolific users of social media in the world, and expectations are growing on councils to engage, work openly, be more accountable and move quicker on issues. Social media represents opportunities to achieve real value by engaging residents, listening more and harnessing local energy.

Through social media we aim to:-

- Improve residents' access to Council
- Improve 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
- Provide insights into how Council is perceived

This Policy has been developed to assist Council employees and elected members who:-

- are authorised to administer, or contribute to, Council's official social media sites;
- propose to use a social media platform or online communication to promote the Council's policies, programs, events and services or to engage internally with staff to distribute content;
- are staff members using social media in a personal capacity.

3. Definitions

"Employees" – should be read to include people employed by Clarence Valley Council on an ongoing or temporary basis, volunteers, contractors and students undertaking work experience or work placement.

The term **"social media"** is used to describe a number of technologies which include:

- social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace
- professional networking sites such as LinkedIn
- video and photo sharing websites like Flickr and YouTube

- micro-blogging sites such as Twitter
- weblogs, including corporate blogs, personal blogs or blogs hosted by traditional media publications
- forums and discussion boards such as Whirlpool, Yahoo! Groups or Google Groups
- online encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia
- any other web sites and electronic forums that allow individual users or companies to use simple publishing tools.

“Confidential Information” - All Council information that is not publicly known.

4. General

All Council social media sites will be subject to approval by the Manager Information & Communication Services.

Approved social media platforms will be included in Council’s Social Media Plan and an appropriate protocol will be established to govern its use. For each social media tool approved for use the following documentation will be developed, adopted and included in the relevant protocol:

- Operational and use guidelines
- Standards and processes for managing accounts on social media sites
- Council branding standards
- Standards for the administration of social media sites

The Information Services team will maintain a list of social media tools which are approved for use by Council Sections and staff.

The Information Services team will maintain a list of all Council social media sites, including login and password information. Sections will inform the Information Services team of any new social media sites or administrative changes to existing sites.

The Council's websites will remain the Council's primary and predominant internet presence.

Wherever possible, content posted to Council social media sites will also be available on the Council's main web site.

Wherever possible, content posted to Council social media sites should contain links directing users back to the Council's official websites for in-depth information, forms, documents or online services necessary to conduct business.

Wherever possible, all Council social media sites shall comply with all appropriate Council policies, plans and procedures.

As is the case for Council websites, staff from within each Section will be responsible for the content and upkeep of any social media sites their Section may create. It is important to ensure that staff have appropriate delegation to perform this function (refer to Council Staff Delegations).

The Section maintaining the site is responsible for responding completely and accurately to any public queries or service requests on social media.

Content related to Council business shall be registered in Council's records management system (ECM) and so that it can be produced in response to a request (see social media plan and protocols).

Council records retention schedules apply to social media formats and social media content. Unless otherwise addressed in a specific social media protocol document, the Section maintaining a site shall preserve records required to be maintained in Council's ECM system.

Users and visitors to social media sites shall be notified that the intended purpose of the site is to serve as a mechanism for communication between Council and members of the public. Council social media site articles and comments containing any of the following forms of content shall not be allowed:

- Comments not topically related to the particular social medium article being commented upon;
- Comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures;
- Profane language or content;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, colour, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation;
- Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- Solicitations of commerce;
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or
- Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.

These guidelines must be displayed to users or made available by hyperlink. Any content removed based on these guidelines must be retained, including the time, date and identity of the poster when available.

Council reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this Social Media Policy or any applicable law.

5. Professional online activities

Council employees have the same right to freedom of expression as other members of the community. However, activities inside and outside of work that affect an employees job performance, the performance of others, or have a negative impact on Council's reputation are of concern to Council.

The general principles employees should consider before using social media sites are:

- Inappropriate public comment and/or posting of information online could put an employee at risk of disciplinary action which may include termination of employment
- Do not mix your professional and personal views and opinions in ways likely to bring the Council into disrepute
- Do not undermine your effectiveness at work through how you behave and what you say on social media sites (e.g. comments about co-workers or Council business)
- Do not imply Council endorsement of your personal views
- Do not disclose confidential information obtained through work
- The speed and reach of online communication means that comments posted online are available immediately to a wide audience. Material online effectively lasts forever, may be replicated endlessly, and may be sent to recipients who were never expected to see it, or who may view it out of context.
- Any information a Council employee posts online relating to their employment (such as naming their employer or describing their role) is able to be located easily and quickly by a search engine, and this information may be taken out of context
- Even if an employee doesn't identify themselves online as a Council employee (i.e. posting anonymously, or using an 'alias' or pseudonym) they can still be recognised
- Do not rely on a site's security settings for a guarantee of privacy, as material posted in a relatively secure setting can still be copied and reproduced elsewhere. Comments posted on one site can also be used on others under the terms and conditions of many social media sites.

5.1 Accessing social media using Council's facilities

In accordance with the Electronic Communication Protocol, access to web based facilities, including social media sites, for personal use, is limited to outside of working hours. The Electronic Communications Protocol also identifies a number of prohibited activities employees can not undertake using Council's email and web facilities within or outside working hours.

5.2 Social media for business purposes

An Employee may not represent Council on a social media site without the approval of his/her manager, which includes appropriate delegation to speak to the media. If an employee has approval to represent Council they are required to:

- disclose that they are a Council employee, be clear about which Section they are representing and role and accountabilities;
- disclose only publicly available information. An employee must not comment on or disclose confidential Council information (such as financial information, future business performance, business plans, imminent departure of key executives). If an employee requires clarification about what Council information is in the public domain, they should seek the advice of the Manager;
- ensure that any content published is factually accurate and complies with relevant Council protocols, particularly those relating to confidentiality and disclosure;
- not be the first to make a Council announcement unless they have received the appropriate internal clearances and approvals;

- only offer advice, support or comment on topics that fall within their area of responsibility at Council. For other matters, alert the relevant topic expert;
- ensure posted material is not obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, discriminatory or hateful to another person or entity, including Council, its employees, its contractors and/or other business related individuals or organisations;
- not disclose other employee's personal information and comply with the Privacy Management Procedures; and
- be polite and respectful of others' opinions, even in times of heated discussion and debate.

5.3 Social media for professional purposes

Some employees are subject matter experts in fields that may relate to their Council employment, or which may be wholly separate from it, and might make comment in that capacity. For example, a Council employee who is a horticulturalist might publish and give advice on online sites, in their own time and outside their Council role.

In such cases, the employee is required to notify their manager of any comment that they propose to make in their 'expert' role that might reasonably reflect on their Council employment.

Managers and employees need to manage situations where the relationship between the employee's professional interests and their Council employment may create ambiguity about the capacity in which the employee's comments are being made. In some circumstances a manager may need to direct the employee to avoid making comment.

When an employee is posting on social media sites in a professional capacity they are required to:

- identify themselves as a Council employee if referring to Council, its employees, programs, policies, products and services, its competitors and/or other business related individuals or organisations;
- not imply in any way that they are authorised to speak on Council's behalf;
- be mindful of the importance of not damaging Council's reputation, community and commercial interests and/or bringing Council into disrepute;
- not disclose confidential information. An employee must not comment on or disclose confidential Council information (such as financial information, future business performance, business plans, imminent departure of key executives). If an employee requires clarification about what Council information is in the public domain, they should seek the advice of the Manager;
- ensure posted material is not obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, discriminatory or hateful to another person or entity, including Council, its employees, its contractors and/or other business related individuals or organisations;
- not disclose other employee's personal information and comply with the Privacy Management Procedures; and

- be polite and respectful of others' opinions, even in times of heated discussion and debate.

5.4 Social media for private purposes

Council employees may generally make public comment in a private capacity on line as long as they make it clear they are expressing their own views.

When Council employees are making public comment in an unofficial capacity, it is not appropriate for them to make comment that:

- is or could be perceived to be made on behalf of Council, rather than an expression of a personal view;
- discloses and/or makes comment on confidential Council information (such as financial information, future business performance, business plans, imminent departure of key executives). If an employee requires clarification about what Council information is in the public domain, they should seek the advice of their Manager;
- is obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, discriminatory or hateful to another person or entity, including Council, its employees, its contractors and/or other business related individuals or organisations;
- damages Council's reputation, community and commercial interests and/or brings Council into disrepute; and
- discloses other employee's personal information; or
- conflicts with Council's Code of Conduct.

The safest approach is not to make any comment at all on social media about either Council business or what Council is doing.

6. Breaches of this protocol

Where a breach of this protocol by an employee is suspected, the matter must be referred to the General Manager who, following investigation, will determine if disciplinary measures are to be taken.

Where an employee has been found to have breached this Protocol, disciplinary action will be undertaken and may include termination of employment.

Examples of how a breach of this protocol could occur include an employee:

- making negative comment about Council's policies or programs to the extent that the employee compromises their ability to undertake their duties in an unbiased manner;
- criticizing the Council in a manner that raises questions about the employee's capacity to work professionally, efficiently or impartially. Such comment does not have to relate to the employee's area of work;
- making criticism of Council that could seriously disrupt the workplace. Employees are encouraged instead to resolve concerns by informal discussion with a manager or by using the grievance process and procedure;
- making a personal attack that might reasonably be perceived to be connected with the employee's employment;
- making unreasonable criticism of Council's clients and other stakeholders; and compromising public confidence in Council.