



## GLEN INNES SEVERN COUNCIL

### Social Media Policy

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| <p><b>RESOLUTION NUMBER:</b> 6.07/20<br/>5.03/19<br/>9.04/18<br/>11.11/15<br/>22.09/13</p> | <p><b>MEETING:</b> 23 July 2020<br/>28 March 2019<br/>26 April 2018<br/>26 November 2015<br/>26 September 2013</p> |
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## INTRODUCTION

Social media is a digital communication tool that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts and information through the building of virtual networks. Local government can utilise this tool to interact with the public for a variety of purposes such as for crisis communication, community engagement, building public trust, gauging public opinion and providing factual information. It is particularly optimal for communicating with Council's audience where information needs to be communicated quickly and broadly, and where a combination of written and visual messaging is of advantage. Council recognises that social media is a less formal means of communicating with the community than various other means of communication that Council uses.

This policy outlines the types of social media available and usage guidelines for Council officials. It also outlines the requirement to meet Council's Code of Conduct when using social media for personal use. Many Councillors and Council officials (employees) use social media sites in a private capacity. The policy does not intend to restrict, discourage or unduly limit the personal use of social media by council officials but to protect such officials as well as Council as a public organisation. It recognises the potential for damage to Council's reputation and seeks to minimise this risk.

Social media can be a useful tool to promote Council activities and events, but must be used professionally, in order to portray a positive image of Council.

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|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Reference Number:  | Version Number: 5<br>Date: 23/07/2020 | Review Date:<br>July 2023 | Responsible Officer:<br>MCO |
| Related Documents: Social Media Procedures, Communication Policy, Media Policy, Computer Usage Policy, Code of Conduct for Council Staff, Code of Conduct for Councillors. |                                       |                           |                             |

## AIMS

The aims of the Social Media Policy are to:

- provide guidelines about the personal and professional use of social media sites;
- manage risks associated with social media use, in order to protect the interests of Council;
- ensure that high quality messaging and content is issued through social media, consistent with Council's brand and formal position on strategic and operational matters.

## APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all staff, Councillors, work experience students, contractors, contractor staff and volunteers who access social media.

## DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is the term used for internet-based tools for sharing and discussing information among people. It refers to user-generated information, opinion and other content shared over open digital networks.

Social media may include (although is not limited to) the following:

- social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn);
- video and photo sharing websites (e.g. YouTube, Pinterest, Flickr);
- blogs, including corporate blogs, personal blogs and blogs hosted by media outlets;
- micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter);
- wikis and online collaborations (e.g. Wikipedia);
- forums, discussion boards and groups (e.g. Google groups);
- vod and podcasting;
- instant messaging (including SMS).

It is important to note that any website can become a "social media space" with the addition of functionality such as comments, likes and discussion areas. This also applies to other digital platforms such as e-news which have a participatory capacity for comments, likes and discussion areas.

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## LEGISLATION

- *Anti-Discrimination Act 1997 (NSW)*;
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)*;
- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)*;
- *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW)*.

## USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR OFFICIAL PURPOSES

### Rationale

Online communication and new media tools are important communication channels that provide an opportunity for Council to engage with residents directly.

Approved social media sites may be used to:

- develop stronger relationships with community members;
- provide an informal and accessible way for the public to communicate with Council;
- support traditional media by broadening its reach and scope;
- promote selected services, events, projects, policies and activities; and
- expand community engagement opportunities.

### General Guidelines for Use of Social Media by Council Officials

When engaging with social media for official purposes, Council officials must:

- be expressly authorised by their Director to do so (in the instance of employees);
- ensure they act in a way that enhances public confidence in the integrity of local government;
- not support, elicit or encourage adverse or disparaging comments about other councillors, employees, contactors or any other person or organisation providing services to or on behalf of Council;
- not disparage or make any adverse comment about Council, any policy or decision of Council or any of Council's related entities, employees, contractors and other Council officials, or any other person or organisation providing services to or on behalf of Council;

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- publish material which is informed and factually accurate and complies with relevant policies of Council;
- act in accordance with Council's Social Media Procedures, all Council policies and the Code of Conduct for Staff and the Code of Conduct for Councillors;
- only comment on topics that fall within their area of responsibility, authority or delegation at Council;
- not breach copyright, privacy, financial disclosure, work health and safety, employment and other applicable laws (such as court orders, etc);
- not disclose or cause to be disclosed any confidential information or personal information;
- not post any material that is, or could be considered to be, obscene, derogatory, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory or hateful to another person or entity;
- not send, post or otherwise publish any racially or sexually harassing messages or any sexually explicit material;
- not create any legal or contractual obligations on behalf of Council;
- ensure they are not the first to make an announcement (unless specifically given permission to do so);
- not express personal opinions on any matter related to Council, the publishing of the content of which is in breach of Council's Code of Conduct and all other relevant Council codes, policies or procedures, or which in any manner compromises Council's responsibilities and obligations under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2017* (NSW);
- not use social media to transmit or send Council documents, emails or text messages (in any format) that are not in the public forum to any external parties or organisations, unless expressly authorised to do so;
- take steps to correct any mistakes in any social media that has been authored or posted by them.

## PRIVATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

### General Guidelines

Use of social media outside the course of council business is a private matter. However, Council officials should be aware of and understand the potential risks of damage to Council's reputation that can arise, either directly or indirectly, from their personal use of social media.

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Council's Code of Conduct for Staff and Code of Conduct for Councillors state that Council officials are expected to "act in a way that enhances public confidence in the integrity of local government." This may extend to private online behaviour. If Council officials choose to identify themselves as employees they are no longer commenting in a private capacity and can only comment if authorised to do so in accordance with the Use of Social Media for Official Purposes.

Council officials are personally responsible for the content that is published in a personal capacity on any form of social media platform.

Council officials must:

- only disclose and discuss publicly available information, which is information that has been approved by Council for release to the general public;
- not post material that is, or might be construed as, threatening, harassing, bullying, obscene, derogatory, defamatory or discriminatory towards another Council official/contractor/volunteer;
- not imply that they are authorised to speak as a representative of Council;
- not give the impression that the personal views they express are those of Council if publicly identifiable as an employee of Council. If so, Council officials must use a disclaimer when expressing personal opinions or views when referring to Council or a related entity of the Council or a Council official. Such a disclaimer is "the views expressed in this post are mine only and do not necessarily reflect the views of Council";
- not use Council email addresses, Council logos or Council insignia, which may give the impression of official support of their comments;
- not disclose any confidential or personal information in respect of any Council official obtained in the course of carrying out Council duties;
- not post photos or images of work-related activities on social media without prior permission from the people in the photo;
- not provide online endorsements, recommendations or referrals for friends or associates via a social media space, which may be directly or indirectly associated with their Council position if publicly identifiable as an employee of Council. If so, Council officials must use a disclaimer when expressing personal endorsements, recommendations or referrals when referring to Council or a related entity of the Council or a Council official. Such a disclaimer is "the endorsements, recommendations or referrals expressed in this post are mine only and do not necessarily reflect the views of Council".

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**Reasonable and unreasonable personal use of social media by Council employees during working hours**

It is unacceptable for employees to access social media that is not related to work duties, unless it occurs in their own time (e.g. during lunch breaks). Employees using social media at Council worksites for personal purposes during their own time must still adhere to Council’s Computer Usage Policy, Code of Conduct for Council Staff and Work Health and Safety requirements.

**ENFORCEMENT**

Council officials should be aware that inappropriate use of social media on internal and external sites can have adverse consequences for a user in terms of future career prospects, as the material remains widely and permanently accessible to other site users.

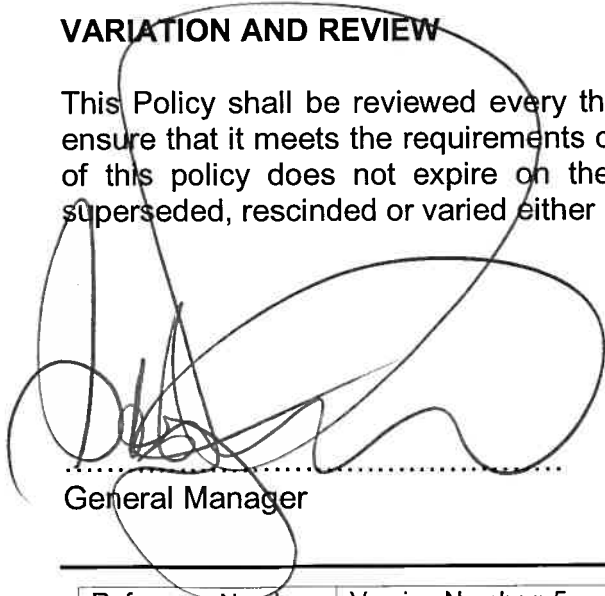
Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action which may include termination of employment, or where relevant, to termination or non-renewal of contractual arrangements. Other disciplinary action that may be taken includes, but is not limited to, issuing a warning, suspension or disconnection of access to all or part of Council’s computer network whether permanently or on a temporary basis.

**IMPLEMENTATION / COMMUNICATION**

This Policy will be communicated to all new employees as part of their induction. Revised versions of the Policy that contain significant changes will be communicated to all relevant staff by the Media and Communications Officer. New versions that only contain minor or inconsequential changes will be distributed to managers for highlighting at team meetings.

**VARIATION AND REVIEW**

This Policy shall be reviewed every three (3) years, or earlier if deemed necessary to ensure that it meets the requirements of legislation and the needs of Council. The term of this policy does not expire on the review date, but shall continue in force until superseded, rescinded or varied either by legislation or a new resolution of Council.



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General Manager

6/8/20  
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Date

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