

<b>POLICY:</b>	Social Media Policy – Councillors
<b>DATE ADOPTED:</b>	Director Corporate Services & Finance Report #8.3.5 Ordinary Council Meeting 19 July 2023 Resolution No. ORD2023-196
	Director Corporate Services & Finance Report # 1 Extraordinary Meeting of Council 24 February 2021
<b>ORIGINAL ADOPTION:</b>	Director Corporate Services' Report #1 Extraordinary Meeting of Council 24 February 2021 Resolution number ORD2021-56
<b>FILE REFERENCE:</b>	11.00050
<b>RESOLUTION NUMBER:</b>	ORD2021-56
<b>OBJECTIVE:</b>	To provide guidance to Councillors on the use of Social Media platforms.

## INTRODUCTION

Social media can:

- Increase residents' access to Council
- Increase Council's access to residents and improve the accessibility of Council communication
- Allow Council to be more active in its relationship 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

To provide guidelines to Councillors on business and personal use of Social Media in order to minimise the potential for negative impacts to Council's reputation.

## 1. SCOPE

This policy applies to the official, personal and professional use of social media by all Councillors. It applies to all activities undertaken in their capacity as councillors, administrators, council committee members and delegates of Council.

As a Councillor, it is your responsibility to ensure that your actions or communications on your personal or Council-owned social media account do not bring Council into disrepute.

## 2. PRINCIPLES

In support of the Code of Conduct principles, social media usage on behalf of Council must:

- Strengthen the public's trust and confidence in the integrity of Council. (Leadership)
- Be made in the public interest and not in order to gain financial or other benefits for yourself, your family, friends or business interests. (Selflessness)
- Be credible, accurate, fair and transparent. (Impartiality)
- Apply appropriate record keeping to ensure accountability for decisions and actions made. (Accountability)
- Be respectful, cordial, thorough and professional at all times. Including when referencing and dealing with Council staff. (Respect)
- Demonstrate honesty and integrity, ensuring any actual or potential conflict of interests relating to your social media interactions are declared and taking steps to resolve any conflicts in such a way that protects the public interest and Council's. (Honesty)

## 3. COMPLIANCE

Depending on the circumstances, non-compliance with this policy (and any other related policy) may constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct, misconduct, harassment, discrimination, or some other contravention of the Council's Policies and applicable laws. Failure to comply with this policy may result in proceedings under the Code of Conduct, disciplinary action and, in serious cases, civil or criminal proceedings in a court of law.

## 4. DEFINITIONS

<b>Council committee</b>	Committee established by a Council comprising of Councillors, staff or other persons that the Council has delegated functions to and includes the Council's Audit, and Risk Management Committee.
<b>Councillor</b>	Any person elected or appointed to Civic Centre Office, including the Mayor and includes members or chairperson of County Councils and voting representatives of the boards of joint organisations and chairperson of joint organisations.
<b>Official Use</b>	Official use refers to when a Councillor creates/comments on an official Bathurst Regional Council social media site as a representative of the Council. Or comments on a non-Council social media site as a representative of the Council.

**Person Use** Personal use is when a Councillor comments in their personal capacity on either their own or another person's/company's social media platform. Councillors should be aware that their personal commentary via social media may have implications as an official of Bathurst Regional Council.

**Social Media** Social media are online services and tools used for collaborating, publishing, sharing and discussing information. Social media services and tools can involve a combination of technology, telecommunications and social interaction. They can use a variety of different formats, including text, pictures, video and audio.

Social Media may include (but is not limited to): Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, What's App Messenger, Google+, LinkedIn, Yammer, Instagram, Snapchat, Flickr and Blogs)

## **5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **COUNCILLORS AND MAYOR**

The Mayor and Councillors are personally responsible for the content they publish on social media. Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important that Councillors and the Mayor ensure they are confident of the nature of the information they publish and are aware that any social media activity, either official or personal, is permanent, traceable and easily distributed. Government tribunals have found that it is not possible to distinguish between a Councillor's official use and their private use.

Councillors and the Mayor are advised to make use of stringent privacy settings to avoid their personal social media accounts being accessed by the press or public.

#### **The Mayor and Councillors**

The Mayor is Council's official spokesperson on all policy matters and key decisions made by Council. The Mayor may nominate another Councillor to speak on a particular matter.

In their capacity as a Council official, the Mayor and Councillors:

- May express their personal view on social media on matters relating to Council policy and other matters of public interest, however this should be clearly identified as the personal view of a Councillor and not an official Council position or policy and must not bring the Council, Council decisions or the civic office into disrepute
- May issue official media releases on his/her personal social media sites.
- Must not publish content or interact in a way that compromises their capacity to perform their official duties in an unbiased manner.
- Should understand that 'shares', 'likes' or 'retweets' may be viewed as an endorsement of the original post
- Must not make comments or speak on behalf of Council, commit to any actions or communicate materials that are obscene, pornographic, threatening, harassing, abusive or defamatory.

- Must not post confidential unauthorised information, or release misleading information or pre-empt Council announcements that may be deceptive and impact Council or damage Council's reputation.
- Maintain responsibility for the preparation, posting and management of their own content on their personal social media channels.
- Must not breach the privacy of Council, its officials and staff.

Councillors should also be mindful of their obligations under Council's Code of Conduct and that they are responsible for all content they publish on any form of social media. Any breaches may be referred to the General Manager and may be dealt with under Council's Code of Conduct.

## **6. OFFICIAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AT BATHURST REGIONAL COUNCIL**

As an Authorised Council representative you must be aware that you are personally responsible for the content of your social media posts and blogs, even though you are an approved representative of the Council. You can be held personally liable for any content deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary or libellous. For these reasons, you must always exercise caution.

### **As an Authorised Council representative you must:**

- Be mindful you are representing the Council.
- Disclose and comment only on information already within the public domain (unless you are specifically given permission to reveal confidential information)
- Ensure that all content published is accurate and not misleading.
- Cite and link to resources when you can.
- Be responsive to questions and comments.
- Correct mistakes promptly.
- Ensure comments are respectful of the community with which you are interacting.
- Adhere to the Terms of Use of the relevant social media platform/website, as well as copyright, privacy, defamation, contempt of court, discrimination, harassment, other applicable laws, and all relevant Council policies

### **As an Authorised Council representative you must not:**

- Post material that is obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, or is otherwise unlawful.
- Use or disclose any confidential or secure information (unless required to do so).
- Post photos, videos, or other media without the consent of all participants (this includes tagging photos and names) the exception is at "public events" where image release approval is not required.
- Make any comment or post any material that might otherwise cause damage to the Council's reputation or bring it into disrepute.
- Link the site/page with your personal social media sites/pages.

## **7. RECORD KEEPING**

Social Media content is subject to various legislation which governs retention, storage and publication. You must keep official Council social media records. Online comments can be held to the same legal standards as traditional media communications.