



WAVERLEY
COUNCIL

Social Media Policy

Policy owner	Communications and Engagement
Approved by	Adam Hassan, Executive Manager, Customer Service and Communications
Date approved	November 2023
Commencement date	November 2023
TRIM Reference	November 2027
Next revision date	November 2027
Relevant legislation/codes	Local Government Act
Related policies/procedures/guidelines	Council's Code of Conduct D13 31469 Social media policy 2013 Social Media Policy 2019 Council's Records Management Policy
Related forms	Social Media Policy 2023

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1. Background

Social media is a tool used in both business and personal contexts. It presents opportunities to provide information, engage residents and community members, listening to their views and understanding their sentiment. It is also a customer service communication tool.

Social media allows Council to directly connect with customers and community members, to present an open and direct platform for dialogue and to respond in real time.

Using social media also presents risks and challenges to Council and this policy aims to address some areas of concern such as inappropriate use and resourcing.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to:

- provide Council staff (including temporary staff and contractors) and Councillors with guidance when using social media.
- ensure responses to issues raised through Council's social media channels are addressed in a consistent and timely manner and referred to the correct business area.

The aim of this Policy is to respect everyone's right to free speech; while also recognising that Council staff and Councillors have obligations in their personal use of social media in order to avoid the potential to directly or indirectly cause damage to Council's reputation, create conflicts of interest or undermine the ability to carry out its role effectively.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all Council staff (including temporary staff and contractors) and outlines their responsibilities when using social media. There is also a specific section relevant to Councillors.

Any act that breaches this policy can result in action under the Council's relevant Code of Conduct.

It applies to all social media platforms.

4. Policy Content

4.1 Council's use of social media

Council has official social media accounts used to share information with the public and answer general queries. Only authorised staff can respond to the public on Council's behalf on social media.

Additional pages created for business units or projects of Council may be established with approval from Communications and Engagement. If approved, Communications and Engagement will remain an administrator of any pages created to ensure appropriate management.

Council's Code of Conduct applies in the management of social media. A writing style guide and social media training will be provided to all delegated Council employees to aid consistency of communications and adherence to Council's brand.

To be most effective, social media should be used within the framework of a communications or consultation plan or strategy. Assistance in the development of a plan or strategy is available through communications partners.

Publishing is at the discretion and editorial judgement of communications partners.

4.2 The Role of the Publisher

Council and Council staff may be considered a publisher of any content uploaded onto a social media platform they administer, including content that is uploaded by a third party, and/or appears on their social media platform because they have liked, shared, or retweeted the content, or similar.

Posts, even deleted posts, are considered publication and are subject to the same defamation laws as any other media.

Staff responsible for the moderation of Council's social media platforms may remove content and 'block' or ban a person from those platforms.

4.3 Council staff using social media

Staff representing Council on social media are required to have the appropriate authority and delegations in accordance with Council's delegations register.

Should a staff member be given authorisation to comment on behalf of Council, the following guidelines must be adhered to:

- only publish content that is public information.

- content must not disclose confidential, private or personal information or any information that may infringe privacy or copyright.
- content should be unbiased and unambiguous
- major announcements should be made in conjunction with or by Communications and Engagement.
- comments will be respectful of the community and portray Council in a positive way.
- All posts and links will be Council-related. Council may post to third party sources for information, promotion, or service delivery activity or to provide factual clarification.
- all content is politically impartial and/or representative of a formal Council position.
- Members of the Communications and Engagement team will approve content requests

4.4 Posting

Content on Council's social media platforms should, where appropriate include links directing users back to Council's website for more detailed information, relevant documents, forms or online services necessary to conduct business with Council.

4.5 Responding

Where a response is required, every reasonable effort will be made to acknowledge the post within one business day, or sooner in an urgent or crisis situation.

4.6 Monitoring Council's social media

The Communications and Engagement team will supervise content posted on all official social media platforms to ensure adherence to the Social Media Policy for appropriate use, message and consistency in branding. Council may delete comments that are:

- knowingly false, mischievous or vexatious complaints or statements about individuals, companies or Council.
- misleading, obscene, off-topic, sexist, racist or spam.
- promotional or commercial in nature.
- unlawful or incite others to break the law.
- defamatory or harassing of our employees, volunteers or the participants in our programs.
- information that may compromise the safety or security of the public.

- repetitive posts copied and pasted or duplicated by single or multiple users.
- any other inappropriate content or comments as determined by Council officers in consultation with the General Manager.

4.7 Personal use of social media by staff

The right of staff to use social media in their private lives is respected. In doing so, staff must conduct themselves in a way that does not call into question their capacity to act impartially in their work.

Members of staff, particularly those with a public profile, must take active steps to ensure that their views cannot be interpreted as views of Council, for example by stating that any political views or comments are made solely in their private capacity and do not represent views of Council.

It is also important that staff do not risk Council's reputation with posts or comments they make online. Staff can generally make public comment in a personal or private capacity if the comment is lawful, and a reasonable person couldn't perceive it to be:

- made on behalf of Council.
- affecting their ability to fulfil their duties in an impartial manner.
- so harsh or extreme in its criticism or endorsement of Council, State or Federal Government, a Councillor from any political party, or their respective policies, that they are no longer able to work professionally or impartially.
- damaging to the integrity or reputation of Council.
- so strong in its criticism of Council's administration that it could seriously disrupt the workplace.
- a gratuitous personal attack that connects them to Council.
- compromising public confidence in Council.

When staff are using social media, it is not acceptable at any time to:

- promote a brand or business on social media when identified as a Council employee, such as wearing a uniform or mentioning Council in that post. This also includes with an identifiable Council building in view, even if not in uniform. Council cannot be seen to endorse or promote one brand or business over another.
- post comments or images that are obscene, offensive, threatening, harassing or discriminatory in relation to work, another staff member, a stakeholder or Council.
- create a social media page to protest policies that staff are responsible for implementing or

promoting.

- comment on policy matters that Council is involved with.
- post inappropriate images that reference or involve Council in some way. This could be photos taken of employees engaging in conduct that breaches the Code of Conduct, or otherwise damages Council's reputation.
- engage in comments that breach anti-discrimination legislation.
- release sensitive, personal or confidential information without proper authority.
- use an official work email address, or anything else that connects the post to Council, when making public comment.
- post any material that might otherwise cause damage to Council's reputation.

4.8 Use of social media by Councillors

The obligations of Councillors with respect to their presence on social media, whether made in a personal capacity or in their capacity as a Councillor, must be factual and/or a Councillor's opinion, and lawful, including avoiding infringement of copyright, privacy, defamation or harassment laws.

Councillors are responsible for the administration and moderation of their own social media platforms including in circumstances where another person administers, moderates, or uploads content onto their social media platform.

Councillors must identify themselves on their social media platforms in the following format:

Councillor "First Name and Last Name". A Councillor's social media platform must include a profile photo which is a clearly identifiable image of the Councillor.

A Councillor's social media platform must include a disclaimer to the following effect:

"The views expressed and comments made on this social media platform are my own and not that of Waverley Council".

If a Councillor becomes or ceases to be the mayor, deputy mayor, or the holder of another position (for example, chairperson of a committee), this must be clearly stated on the Councillor's social media platforms and updated within two weeks of a change in circumstances.

Media releases and other content that has been authorised according to the Council's media and communications protocols and publicly available may be uploaded onto a Councillor's social media platform.

4.9 Recording of information

Council will collect and retain social media content in line with the State Records Act 1998 and Council's Records Management Policy.

4.10 Grievances

Any grievances in relation to this Policy or its application should be forwarded in writing to the General Manager.

Non-compliance with the Social Media Policy by will be managed through the relevant Code of Conduct and related processes.

5. Review of Policy

- 5.1. This policy will be reviewed every four years or as required in the event of legislative changes or requirements. The policy may also be changed as a result of other amendments. Any amendments to a community facing policy must be way of a Council resolution, and any amendments to an organisational facing policy must be approved by the General Manager.
- 5.2. Council staff and members of the public may provide feedback about this document by emailing communications@waverley.nsw.gov.au.

6. Definitions

Term	Definition
Council	Waverley Council
Post	Any item (image, written content, event) shared through a social media platform.
Platform	A social media channel such as Facebook is a platform.
Page	Council's owned asset eg Waverley Council Facebook's Page.
Social Media	The use of online tools for communication, promotion and conversation. Blogs, Microblogs (e.g. Twitter), Social Networks (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn), Podcasts and Video (e.g. YouTube) are all types of Social Media.