

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Social Media Policy is to provide guidance on the use of social media at work and at home. It is important that employees understand the difference between making representations on social media platforms on behalf of Coonamble Shire Council (Council) and the personal use of social media. The policy provides Council employees with standards of use as they engage in conversations or interactions using digital media. The intention of this policy is to ensure Council's use of social media platforms to communicate with various stakeholder groups is effective, informative, and appropriate.

The purpose of Council's utilisation of social media platforms is to:

- Provide an efficient method of delivering factual, up-to-date information about Council's policies, projects, services and activities, via online communication channels.
- Provide two-way communication with stakeholders through online feedback and correspondence mechanisms.
- Provide an informal, timely and accessible way for the public to communicate with Council.
- Encourage community interaction and develop stronger relationships with community.
- Utilise digital channels as powerful marketing tools for Coonamble Shire Council as an organisation, and the Coonamble LGA as a destination.
- Encourage advocacy through communication and engagement.
- Provide essential updates to the community during a crisis or emergency.

2. POLICY OBJECTIVE

2.1 Council representatives using social media must:

- Only disclose publicly available information. No comment will be made on social media sites regarding confidential, private, or legal matters.
- Ensure that no copyrighted or trademarked material is published without permission.
- Ensure that information and images posted online is not illegal, libellous, discriminatory, defamatory, sexist, racist, bullying, hateful, offensive, abusive, or obscene. Such content will be removed.
- Ensure that information posted online does not infringe Council's Code of Conduct or any other Council code or policy. At all times, use of social media by Council Officials should be done in a professional manner in accordance with the relevant policies and legislation, and consistent with Council's values.

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- Ensure messaging and content aligns with Social Media Procedures and Guidelines and Council's Brand Style Guidelines and is appropriate for the channel and purpose. For example, conversational language with a whimsical image is appropriate for posting on the Visit Coonamble channels, while the Coonamble Shire Council channels would be expected to present a more formal professional image.
- Include the Coonamble Shire Council logo on graphics as appropriate, to reinforce that the content being shared represents Council.

2.2 When using Council social media sites, employees authorised by the General Manager (or nominee) will:

- Only post content that is genuinely expected to be relevant and of interest to the community.
- Respond to enquiries within 24 hours (Monday to Friday) where possible. (Not all posts on Council's social media platforms are a direct inquiry to Council or seeking a response. If a response is required it could potentially take many forms and does not necessarily need to be a direct answer to a question, or a resolution of a problem.)
- Keep messages simple, and provide relevant, accurate, fair and thorough information.

2.3 Monitoring social media:

Council's authorised employees will monitor content posted on all official social media outlets to ensure adherence to the Social Media Policy for appropriate use, message, and consistency in branding.

Content relating to Council that is posted on the internet by elected members, employees, residents and other community members or organisations will be monitored by authorised employees. Comments from social media users will be monitored and moderated where possible.

Council may delete comments from Council's owned social media channels 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.

2.4 Personal use of social media:

Guidelines in this Policy do not apply to Council staff personal use of social media, where staff make no reference to Coonamble Shire Council and do not identify themselves as an employee of Coonamble Shire Council or provide information that would enable them to be reasonably identified as a Council employee.

However, staff and Councillors that do comment via social media on issues regarding Council are therefore linked to Council. With this understanding, staff and Councillors should be aware that comments made via social media are in the public domain and use of such should be aligned to Council's media policy, Internet Email and Computer Use Policy and Code of Conduct. Defamatory, disrespectful, or deliberately misleading commentary provided on these platforms may bring staff or Councillors in breach of Council's Code of Conduct.

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.
- 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 or actions 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 misconduct that breaches the Code of Conduct, or otherwise damages Council's reputation. Staff concerns over matters of this nature should be pursued via appropriate internal channels.
- 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.

There is no such thing as a 'private' social media site. Posting information online is a public activity and no different from publishing information in a newspaper.

For Councillors it is advisable not post anything to social media they would not want published and/or attributed to them in the media.

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

2.5 Non compliance with the Social Media Policy by Council representatives will be managed through the relevant Code of Conduct and disciplinary systems.

Employers can be held legally responsible for acts of discrimination or harassment that occur in the workplace or in connection with a person's employment. This can include posts and comments made or circulated on social media.

2.6 Developing new social media platforms

Council's General Manager must authorise the use of online marketing tools such as additional Council websites and social media channels that are branded or deemed to be associated with Coonamble Shire Council.

3. LEGISLATION

- NSW Local Government Act 1993
- Copyright Act 1968
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW) (PPIP Act)
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Regulation 2014 (NSW) (PPIP Regulation)
- Defamation Act 2005

Related documents

- Coonamble Shire Council Code of Conduct
- Social Media Procedure
- Communications with the Media Policy
- Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace Policy
- Work Health and Safety Policy
- Internet Email and Computer Use Policy

4. APPLICATION/SCOPE

This Social Media Policy applies to all people who work, volunteer, or represent Council.

Title: Social Media Policy		
Department: Economic Development and Growth		
Version	Date	Author
4	16 June 2021	P Goldsmith
<p>This policy may be amended or revoked at any time and must be reviewed at least three (3) years since its adoption (or latest amendment). Review of this policy will incorporate relevant legislation, documentation released from relevant state agencies and best practice guidelines.</p> <p>Review Date: May 2024</p>		
Amendments in the release:		
Amendment History	Date	Details
Policy updated	16 June 2021	Resolution:2021/121
Annexure Attached:		
Hein Basson General Manager		22-6-2021.