



Social Media for Councillors **Policy**

June 2020

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Purpose

1. The purpose of this policy is to:
 - a. Guide Councillors on the use of social media sites;
 - b. Protect the reputation of Central Coast Council; and
 - c. Provide an effective platform for community engagement and public debate.
2. This policy informs Central Coast Councillors of processes, guidelines and issues relating to the use of social media.

Scope

3. This policy applies to Central Coast Councillors and informs them of their responsibilities in relation to the use of social media in an official or individual capacity which reflects on their position as a Council official.
4. This policy will be supported by guidelines to assist Councillors in how to navigate social media in practice. These guidelines can be reviewed as required.

Background

5. Central Coast Council recognises that social media is an essential communication, engagement and customer service channel.
6. Central Coast Council recognises that Councillors are elected representatives and as such are required to represent and communicate with their community as part of a robust local democracy, including through public debate and engaging with their constituents online.
7. Social media provides a platform to encourage dialogue between Councillors and the community, and enables Councillors to gain insight into the community and its needs via public feedback.
8. Clear and consistent guidelines are required to ensure the appropriate use of social media by Councillors. This policy enables Councillors to speak on social media while protecting the interests of Council and complying with the Code of Conduct.
9. Council's Code of Conduct states that Council officials, including Councillors must not conduct themselves in a manner that is likely to bring Council or holders of civic office into disrepute and this applies to the use of social media.

General

10. Councillors should be aware that any social media activity or interaction, either official or personal, is public, permanently available, traceable and able to be reproduced elsewhere.
11. Councillors should also be aware that whether they intend it or not, what they post online in a private capacity may reflect on Central Coast Council and their role as a Councillor, and they should therefore behave in a way that upholds the values and reputation of Council, consistent with the Code of Conduct and other policies.
12. Councillors are reminded that 'shares', 'likes' or 'retweets' may be viewed as an endorsement of the original post. In the spirit of a respectful democratic environment, constructive criticism or negative comments/commenters should not be blocked or removed, unless they are overtly offensive and defamatory, incite hatred and violence or are criminal in nature.
13. Councillors must also be aware of posts by others to their social media pages and consider if the post and its comment/s are offensive or may incite hatred, violence and/or criminal acts. Any post/comments made to a Councillor's social media page/site should be monitored by the Councillor to ensure that it meets the standard of socially acceptable behaviour/commentary. Councillors should remove any post/comment that does not meet the required standard of this policy.
14. In the event of an emergency, publishing Council information on social media sites will be the responsibility of the Communications team with approval from the Chief Executive Officer or their delegate.
15. Inappropriate behaviours may include, but are not limited to:
 - Using social media to ridicule, vilify, harass, cyberbully, discriminate against or bring into disrepute the Council, or other Council officials, including Councillors or community members;
 - Posting content that is deemed to be offensive, including obscene or sexually explicit language; and
 - Using social media channels to post/provide confidential, personal or sensitive information relating to Council.

Review

Compliance, monitoring and review

16. Suspected breaches or misuse of this policy are to be reported to the Chief Executive Officer. Alleged breaches of this policy shall be dealt with by the processes outlined for breaches of the Code of Conduct, as detailed in the Code of Conduct and in the Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct.
17. Breaches of this policy by Councillors may result in an investigation of the alleged breach in line with Council's complaint handling policy, the Local Government Guidelines on Investigations and the Code of Conduct. Any alleged criminal offence or allegation of corrupt conduct will be referred to the relevant external agency.
18. This Policy will be reviewed every four years following the conduct of the Local Government Election.

Records management

19. Staff must maintain all records relevant to administering this policy in a recognised Council recordkeeping system.

Definitions

20. In this policy:

Social Media: facilitates the creation and sharing of information and ideas via virtual communities and online networks. It invites communication, collaboration, discussion and debate. It also enables the development of social and professional networks, groups, followers and contacts. This policy relates and applies to social media platforms, including but not limited to:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Google+
- Snapchat

- Council's Intranet
- Blogs; and
- Video podcasts.

Council's official social media platforms are administered by Council's Communications team to ensure consistency of content, tone and style.

Related resources

21. Legislation:

- [Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Government Information \(Public Access\) Act 2009 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Local Government Act 1993 \(NSW\)](#)
- [Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 \(NSW\)](#)

22. Associated/Internal documents:

- Code of Conduct (found on the Intranet)
- Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct (found on the Intranet)
- Public Interest Disclosures Policy (found on the Intranet)

History of revisions

Amendment history	Details
Original approval authority details	Central Coast Council <hr/> 22/06/2020 Minute Number 533/20 <hr/> To inform Central Coast Councillors of processes, guidelines and issues relating to the use of social media.