

ELECTED MEMBER – USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINE



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Reference Number	750805
Responsible Business Unit	Office of Chief Executive Officer
Responsible Officer	Chief Executive Officer
Legislation	Local Government Act 1999 Local Government (Elections) Act 1999 State Records Act 1997
Relevant Delegations	Chief Executive Officer
Related Policies Management Guidelines Frameworks	Behavioural Management Framework for Elected Members Behavioural Management Policy for Elected Members Elected Member Allowances and Benefits Policy Elected Member Training & Development Policy Caretaker Policy Good Governance Framework Risk Management Framework Elected Members – IT Use Acceptable Use Guideline
Link To Strategic Plan	Our Commitment
Date Adopted	11 April 2023, item 103.5
Review Date	Every Council term
Revision	11 November 2019, item 190.6 14 September 2015, item 217.1

PURPOSE

To provide Elected Members with a guide when using social media in their role.

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

On-line communications and social media are now accepted practice. Such has been the rise of social media, through smart phones and mobile communication technology, in the last few years, with new forms of social media being developed continuously that it is no longer possible to provide a definitive list of all, or even the most significant social media.

However the use of social media is not without risks. Publishing something online means that everything that is published can potentially be seen by anybody; content posted online can never be entirely removed and all content posted online can be traced back to its originator.

One of the roles of Elected Members is to facilitate communications between the community and Council. Electronic communication means that our community has come to expect instant responses from its elected officials at the same time as holding them, as public officers, to a higher standard of behavior than the general public. Where social media encourages short and attention grabbing statements, the community expects thoughtful, well-reasoned and responsible communications from its representatives.

These sometimes conflicting expectations can result in missteps and ambiguity, weakening community trust in individual Members and Council as a whole.

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These guidelines provide Elected Members with a resource for decision making should they elect to use social media, and to;

- assist Elected Members to respond positively and to make the most of the opportunities of social media and the expectations of the community
- assist Elected Members to use social media to communicate effectively with the community and encourage discussion of issues in an informed and responsible manner
- support Elected Members to use social media as part of their role while minimising the risk to them of loss of personal reputation; legal sanction and/or breach of the Elected Member Code of Conduct
- reduce the chance of possible ambiguities, particularly where confusion may occur between official comments and personal and private views by ensuring that social media comments are clearly identified as personal statements and not misconstrued as representing Council as a whole, Elected Members or staff
- ensure that social media comments do not contain errors of fact
- help ensure that social media comments are of a moderate and respectful tone that reflects well on Council as a whole and encourages Elected Members to consider the impact their social media posts may have on the reader, whoever that reader may be
- are not intended to be prescriptive or to inhibit an open exchange of views

Elected Members are also reminded of their responsibilities under the State Records Act 1997 and that information may be discoverable through various pieces of Legislation.

As part of Elected Members induction into Council, a training session will be convened to provide advice to all Elected Members on the best practice use of Social Media and Records Management responsibilities in their role.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Behavioural Management Framework and Policy for Elected Members and form part of Council's policies, codes and decisions. A breach of these guidelines may be considered a breach of the Behavioural Management Framework

OBJECTIVES

The following will assist Elected Members when drafting social media comments. When in doubt, Elected Members should take a conservative or moderate approach to social media content and/or seek guidance.

- remember that only the Chief Executive Officer and the Mayor (or a Member specifically appointed by Council) can make official comments on behalf of Council
- make sure any comments are clearly labelled personal in a manner appropriate to the individual media used. A statement such as *'As an Elected Member for the Rural City of Murray Bridge the views expressed here are mine alone and should not be taken to represent the decisions and opinions of either the Council as a whole or its staff'* will remove any ambiguity
- ensure that content is accurate, is not misleading and complies with relevant policies
- remember that Council decision making is by majority. There may be decisions you disagree with, but once a decision is made, it is important that any alternative views are communicated in a respectful manner
- avoid language which could offend
- check facts (contact the Office of the CEO for assistance)
- ensure that comments are respectful of the community and any other potential reader
- avoid making personal comments about other Elected Members, staff and members of the community

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- adhere to Council's policies and codes
- adhere to copyright, privacy, defamation, contempt of court, discrimination, harassment and other applicable laws – ask the Office of the CEO to help if you have concerns
- observe the rules governing confidentiality
- maintain a positive tone

SCOPE

Applies to all Elected Members

DEFINITIONS

Social media includes all of the means by which information in the form of text, still and video images, sound files, data or preferences are communicated to an audience of more than one via the internet. Some examples of popular social media are:

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+)
- Twitter
- Blog posts including video and podcasts
- Video hosts (e.g. Youtube, Vimeo)
- Image sharing sites (e.g. Flickr, Instagram and Pinterest)
- Text or voice chat
- Forums or discussion groups
- Geolocation based media (e.g. Foursquare)
- Wikis and online collaborations (e.g. Wikipedia)

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

During a Local Government election period Social Media may fall into the category of 'election material'. Election material is any material which is published in any format which is intended to affect the result of the election. All election material must contain the name and the address of the person who authorises the material. Therefore any social media which may in some way comment on candidates or Council during an election campaign must meet the requirements of the Local Government (Elections) Act 1999 and associated Regulations. Members should familiarise themselves with these requirements. If in doubt, act on the side of caution and refrain from using social media to make comment. Advice can be obtained from the Office of the CEO or Electoral Commissioner's delegate.