

# SOCIAL MEDIA SITES POLICY



**Responsible Department:** Development and Economic Growth  
**Responsible Section:** Economic Development  
**Responsible Officer:** Economic Development Manager

## Purpose

The purpose of this Social Media Sites Policy is to provide a position and protocols for Council Officers and elected members when implementing and engaging in social media in an official capacity.

## Scope

This policy outlines what is expected of elected members and Council Officers in relation to using social media in order to protect the reputation and legitimate interests of Council.

The aim of the policy is to build an understanding of what is an appropriate and productive use of social media, to minimise miscommunication and prevent misuse of social media tools that will undermine Council's brand.

## Objective

Narrabri Shire Council is strongly committed to improving customer service and communication with the Narrabri Shire community. Council recognises that social media tools enable Council to engage in real time with local residents, business owners and visitors. The usage of social media is expanding rapidly throughout the community and it is recognised as an effective and inexpensive method to disseminate information. Social media is expected to be used by Council as a medium to update the community on Council projects and Council and community events and news.

## Definitions

Social media is a term that describes internet-based technology communication tools with a focus on immediacy, interactivity, user participation and information sharing in multiple ways. Social media refers to content such as blogs, video/photo posting sites, social networks and forums. The social media world changes rapidly but some of the current more popular platforms include but are not limited to the following:

- Social networking sites – Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, Google+.
- Video and photosharing sites – Pinterest, YouTube, Flickr, Instagram.
- Activity stream/microblogging sites – Twitter.

## **Policy**

### **How Council should use social media**

Council should selectively use approved social media sites to:

- Enhance Council's reputation.
- Develop stronger relationships with community members.
- Provide an informal and accessible way for the public to communicate with Council.
- Support traditional media by broadening its reach and scope.
- Advertise and promote Council services, events, projects, policies and activities.
- Expand Council's community engagement opportunities.
- Provide essential updates to the community during crisis or emergency.

### **Who should publish social media at Council?**

A minimal number of staff should have access to updating Council's social media pages to ensure consistent standards are maintained. Only approved site authors may post content on behalf of Narrabri Shire Council. Approved site authors include staff from Economic Development, Tourism and The Crossing Theatre. Staff in other sections may be included in special circumstances such as a flooding event when information is required to be posted frequently and outside regular office hours.

### **New Council Social Media Sites**

Council should aim to avoid the creation of multiple organisational social media profiles. However, individual programmes or events if deemed substantial enough could establish their own social media presence.

All new Council social media sites must be approved through the General Manager and must be informed prior to any work starting to create them. Any section seeking to initiate a social media site must provide evidence that the site is needed, its purpose and how it will be administered. Advice must be provided about the overall management of the sections social media site.

The use of all Council social media sites will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to ensure they remain relevant and useful.

### **Managing Council's Official Social Media Sites**

#### **Content**

While social media is often perceived to be more casual than other communication tools, it still represents the views and image of Council. At all times, site authors should ensure they:

- Use only approved social media sites.
- Behave with caution, courtesy, honesty and respect, just like as would with any other Council related communication.
- Comply with relevant laws and regulations, including the Local Government Act and Privacy Act prohibiting the disclosure of personal and confidential information, the Copyright Act and the Defamation Act.
- Reinforce the integrity, reputation and values of Narrabri Shire Council.

- Use correct spelling and grammar.
- Keep messages short and simple.
- Link to Council's websites for more details when necessary.
- Engage in conversations when appropriate.
- Ask questions to help engage users, when appropriate.
- Include photos and videos where possible to help engage users.
- Think about what the community wants to know and provide where possible.

The following content is **not** permitted on Council's social media sites at any time:

- Abusive, profane or sexual language.
- Content not relating to the subject matter of that site.
- Content which is false or misleading.
- Confidential information about Council or third parties.
- Copyright or Trademark protected materials.
- Discriminatory material in relation to a person or group based on age, colour, creed, disability, family status, gender, nationality, marital status, parental status, political, opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, race or social origin, religious, beliefs/activity, responsibilities, sex or sexual orientation.
- Illegal material or materials designed to encourage law breaking.
- Material that could compromise Council, employee or system safety.
- Materials that would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks).
- Material that would offend contemporary standards of taste and decency.
- Material that would bring Council into disrepute.
- Personal details or references to Councillors, Council staff or third parties, which may breach privacy laws.
- Spam, meaning the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages.
- Statements that might be considered to be bullying or harassment.

Comments or posts that are not Council related will be removed. This includes promotion of commercial services, products or entities.

### **Responsibility**

The Director Planning and Development is responsible for Council's corporate social media sites. Other staff members must only administer approved sites that relate to their areas of responsibility and must have the prior authorisation of the Director Planning and Development. Staff must ensure compliance with this procedure.

### **Content approval**

Content for social media sites will comprise a mixture of existing communications re-worked for the appropriate medium, and content produced exclusively for social media.

**Existing communication** – Items that don't require additional approval for publication on social media include published media releases, information from public notices and Local Government notices, event promotion and leveraging website updates. These items will have had prior approval from the Manager, Director or the General Manager.

Depending on subject matter and length, press releases and other communication forms might be paraphrased to lighten or humanise the tone.

**Exclusive communication** – For all other content, including responding to questions or comments, the site author must exercise sound judgement and commonsense to ensure posts are appropriate, accurate and comply with relevant legislation.

Site authors should only post, respond and engage in conversation on issues where they are comfortable and knowledgeable about the topic. If they are unclear on facts, they should seek advice and approval from relevant Managers, Directors or the General Manager.

For issues that could present legal concerns or for those that are politically sensitive in nature, the site author should seek the advice and approval of their Director or the General Manager. Guidance can also be provided by relevant line managers.

### **Frequency**

Social media sites must be updated regularly to engage with users and to remain effective and relevant. Council's corporate sites should aim to have at least one post per business day.

### **Monitoring**

Sites must be monitored by their site authors to ensure posts that require a reply receive one in an appropriate timeframe, usually within 24 hours.

Inappropriate comments should be removed immediately.

It is appropriate to note on the site, if possible, the hours during which it is monitored. For example: *"Council staff will monitor this page during business hours, Monday to Friday from 8.35am until 5pm (excluding public holidays)."* Comments received outside of normal business hours (e.g. after hours, weekends, public holidays) will be responded to on the following day.

### **Comment management**

Site authors should ensure they:

- Answer questions as soon as possible.
- Correct any incorrect information as soon as possible.
- Respond accurately at all times and if a mistake is made, they should acknowledge it and correct it as soon as possible.
- Exercise sound judgment and commonsense when responding.
- Do not enter or start arguments.
- If they are unclear on facts, seek advice and approval from relevant Managers, Directors or the General Manager.

Any inappropriate comment posted on social media should be addressed as soon as possible by staff. Staff should clarify any misunderstanding and seek to ensure the facts are understood. An invitation for such a user to contact Council directly should be offered if seen as appropriate to address the matter. This can take the matter into a private communication

If offensive comment is received on a Council's social media page, the site author should alert the section line manager or escalate to Director or General Manager level to discuss action depending on severity of remark.

Council reserves the right to moderate content from individuals who seek to monopolise and dominate Council's social media sites for their own purposes.

Staff should always act within the guidelines of the Code of Conduct when providing information on social media pages.

General principles to respond to comments of concern are as follows:

**Straight problem** – always respond, either privately or on the public forum. Take action to address the problem.

**Constructive criticism** – always respond. Acknowledge the matter and forward to relevant Manager or section for consideration. Depending on the outcome a further response at a later date might be appropriate.

**Warranted criticism** – always respond, the quicker the better. Be positive, empathetic. Alert the Manager or section and communicate any response to the problem/issue if appropriate.

**Trolling** – do not respond and if necessary, remove it from the page. (Trolling is when posts are inflammatory or off-topic with the main purpose being to provoke an emotional response or to disrupt the normal, relevant conversation.)

It is appropriate to note on the site, if possible, that content deemed unsuitable could be removed. For example: *"Narrabri Shire Council reserves the right to remove content that does not comply with its official Social Media Sites Policy or any associated policies. To view the policy, visit [narrabri.nsw.gov.au](http://narrabri.nsw.gov.au)."*

## **Promotion**

Council's social media sites should be promoted using social media buttons to link from Council's main website and other program websites.

Social media sites should be promoted in Council communications like staff and community newsletters, email groups, advertisements and media releases.

Sites should all be linked (for example, liking each other on Facebook, and following each other on twitter).

Staff are encouraged to link to social media sites by using social media buttons on their email signatures.

## **Staff guidelines for using social media**

Only staff authorised by the Director Planning and Development can administer Council social media sites and content.

The Director Planning and Development is responsible for Council's corporate social media sites. Any officer who would like their programme or event included on Council's corporate social media sites should in the first instance contact the site author.

When representing Council on social media sites, all staff are required to comply with the statutory requirements contained in the Privacy Act and Local Government Act, which prohibit the disclosure of personal and confidential information, and act within the guidelines of the staff Code of Conduct.

Posts must accurately reflect Council's position on the topic and in accordance with its strategies and policies.

Staff should also be aware that defamation law covers them as it does everyone else. It could be considered defamatory to harm another person's reputation through social media sites.

Non-compliance with the Social Media Sites Policy by Council representatives could result in action under Council's Code of Conduct Policy.

### **Personal Use by Staff of Social Media**

Council recognises that staff may wish to use social media in a personal capacity. A member of staff is personally responsible for content they publish on any form of social media. They should take measures to ensure their personal comments cannot be mistaken for the official view of Council or impact on other staff members performing their role within Council.

### **Emergency situations**

In the case of an emergency situation such as a flooding event, additional staff may be required to add content to Council's social media sites.

### **Councillor guidelines for using social media**

The Mayor is the official spokesperson for Council, and can work with the General Manager to establish official social media sites and profiles to represent Council.

Councillors with their own social media sites and profiles should ensure they state that comments and posts are being made in their role as an individual and are not necessarily the views of the Council.

Councillors must seek guidance from the Mayor or General Manager prior to posting on Council's official social media sites, especially relating to issues of a legally or politically sensitive nature.

All posts about Council issues should be accurate. If Councillors are uncertain, they should seek the advice of General Manager or relevant Director.

Councillors are required to comply with the statutory requirements contained in the Privacy Act, Local Government Act and Councillor Code of Conduct, which prohibit the disclosure of personal and confidential information. Defamation law also covers the use of social media.

Matters raised in closed sessions of Council/Committee Meetings are confidential and cannot be mentioned in any way on social media sites.

## Social media during caretaker mode

Council's social media sites should not be used for election campaigning.

Any publication on official Council social media sites during caretaker mode requires certification by the General Manager. This excludes publications relating to standard operational requirements, for example, posts promoting community events.

During caretaker mode it is especially important that Councillors ensure their social media sites state that comments and posts are being made in their role as an individual, and that views expressed are not necessarily the views of the Council.

## Record keeping of social media posts and comment

Due to the nature of social media it is difficult to keep official records of all posts and comments. Where topical information is sought or inappropriate content is published and details should be copied into Council's Records Management System. Staff should use their discretion when choosing items to be saved into Councils Records Management System.

## References

- Social Media Policy.
- Code of Conduct Policy.
- Internet, Email and Computer Use Policy.

## Measure of Success

- Adherence to the Policy.

## History

MINUTE NUMBER	MEETING DATE	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
359/2014	3 June 2014	Adopted