

Council Policy – Elected Member Social Media

Responsible Directorate	CEO
Responsible Business Unit/s	Chief Executive Officer Governance
Responsible Officer	Manager Corporate Performance
Affected Business Units	Governance and Council Support Executive Services

Objective

The Council is committed to engaging with the community who live, work and spend time in the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale (the Shire), and enhancing existing communication and information circulation. Social media is increasingly becoming a part of daily life and an accepted method of instant communication. The use of social media by the Shire and the Elected Members can improve communication, engagement and collaboration with our community, and share the positive and professional identity of our organisation.

Scope

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance and direction for the use of social media by Elected Members to meet the expectations of the community and their professional requirements, particularly when commenting or engaging with the community in both a private and public capacity.

Policy

Introduction

Social Media, in all of its various forms, now plays a huge role in the public forum and offers a public means for discussion around sensitive, council and community issues, particularly in the lead-up to decision making around high profile topical issues and Local Government Elections.

Social media can help remove barriers in engaging wide sectors of the community and enhance existing communications and information circulation. There are no new rules for social media, the existing expectations around professional conduct should apply, and it is important to remember that the use of social media is not without risk and the speed and reach of publishing online means content is available immediately to a wide audience. Anything posted can be difficult to delete and may be replicated endlessly. It may be sent to or seen by people the author never intended or expected would see it.

A person takes significant public obligations upon themselves when they become a member of the Council and make the required declaration of office in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1995* (the Act) that they will duly, faithfully, honestly, and with integrity, fulfil the duties of the office for the people in the local government's district according to the best of their judgment and

ability. These obligations cannot be separated from the position and this means Elected Members cannot divest themselves of the character of an Elected Member¹.

Elected Members must not make 'improper use of office' to cause detriment to the Shire or another person. It is important to ensure the language and approach used online is consistent with what the community would expect from an Elected Member and meets the requirements of the Shire's Code of Conduct.

The local community and the public in general are entitled to expect that the following general principles in the *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021* guide Elected Members in their behaviours, including:

- a. act with reasonable care and diligence;
- b. act with honesty and integrity;
- c. act lawfully;
- d. avoid damage to the reputation of the local government;
- e. be open and accountable to, and represent, the community in the district;
- f. treat others with respect, courtesy and fairness; and
- g. base decisions on relevant and factually correct information.

It is important that when an Elected Member is posting, commenting or liking posts/comments on social media that they think about the language and tone. When commenting, it is essential for Elected Members to communicate that their comment/s are their own personal opinion, not those of the Council.

Private Profiles and Private Groups

Nothing that is posted on-line is truly 'private'. Private profile settings and private groups bare no guarantee that information is only seen by the target audience. Posts may have been screenshot and distributed to individuals, groups and organisations that were never intended to see the content, even after the original post has been deleted.

Privacy settings are not enough to stop someone who disagrees with what has been posted from screen shotting and using it. Comments by Elected Members of the Council have the capacity to affect the Shire's reputation.

Guidelines

The following information is provided to guide Elected Members in the preparation of social media content and responses. Elected Members should:

- remember the Shire President and the CEO are the official spokespersons for the Shire; any statements on behalf of the Council should only be made with specific authority;
- clearly label content and responses as personal views and not those of the Shire or the Council;
- ensure content is accurate, relevant and complies with current policies, if in doubt check;

¹ Treby and Local Government Standards Panel [2010] WASAT 81 (Treby) at paragraphs [26]-[33]

- avoid offensive, defamatory, intimidating and provocative language, and avoid commenting on or liking posts that contain this type of language;
- avoid making personal comments about other Elected Members, staff or members of the community;
- maintain a positive and respectful tone;
- adhere to copyright, privacy, defamation, discrimination, harassment and other applicable laws;
- observe confidentiality;
- remember Council decision making is by majority, and whilst there may be decisions that are disagreed with, alternative points of view should be made respectfully and constructively;
- where requests for service or official feedback has been posted, comments should encourage direct contact with the Shire to enable the matter to be dealt with;
- where misinformation or factually incorrect information is posted, encourage the original poster to make contact with the Shire for clarification i.e. – Contact the Shire's Customer Service;
- liking, sharing or reacting to a post on Social Media is generally taken to be an endorsement of that material, as if you had created it yourself, and may be seen by a wider audience than intended;
- not to make public statements expressing their opinion on matters before the Council that would indicate a predetermined voting position.

The intent of this policy is not to stifle the use of social media, but rather to ensure that comments, likes, posts and the use of all forms of online and social media by Elected Members aligns with the adopted policies of the Council and are thoughtful, well-reasoned and responsible communications suited to their professional position and standing in the community.

Definitions

Council means the Elected body of the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale.

Social Media means any form of online technology through which individuals and organisations can engage in social media activity.

Social Media activity means the communication or sharing of information through social media and includes but is not limited to the posting, uploading, reviewing, downloading and/or forwarding of text, audio recordings, video recordings, photographs/images, symbols or hyperlinks.

Related Documents

- Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale Code of Conduct for Councillors, Committee Members and candidates.
- Business Operating Procedure - Elected Member Code of Conduct Complaints

Legislation / Local Law Requirements

- *Local Government Act 1995*

- *Local Government (Mode Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021*

Amendment Record

Relevant Delegations			
		Date	Resolution Number
Council Adoption		22 October 2018	OCM114/10/18
Version	Date	Resolution Number	Amendment Details
2	17 March 2025	OCM068/03/25	New template and updates to align with legislative change