
POLICY TITLE:	SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR COUNCILLORS	
FOLDER NUMBER:	F2007/00307	
POLICY OWNER / DIVISION:	Office of the General Manager	
POLICY OWNER / BRANCH:	Strategy and Place	
FUNCTION:	Communications and Engagement	
RELEVANT LEGISLATION:	Local Government Act 1993 NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988 NSW The Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 NSW The Privacy Act 1988 Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 NSW Work Health and Safety Act 2011 NSW Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW 2015 Australian Constitution Copyright Act 1968 Cth Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000 Cth	
POLICY ADOPTION/AMENDMENT DATE:	11 May 2022	REPORT NUMBER: CS4/22
REVIEW YEAR:	2024	
AMENDMENT HISTORY:	8 July 2020 – GM14/20	
RELATED POLICIES:	Media Policy Code of Conduct for Staff Code of Conduct for Councillors Draft Crisis Communications Policy Social Media Determination Electronic Communication Security Determination	

INTRODUCTION

The role of social media

Hornsby Shire Council is committed to building open, transparent and active relationships with our community.

Our goal through social media is to create healthy two-way conversations between Council and our community to inform and shape the services we provide.

The better we communicate and engage with our stakeholders, the better our Council and its services will be for Hornsby Shire. A strong social media presence positions Council to be where its stakeholders are. This improves our ability to share conversations with the community and to listen to feedback.

When used effectively, social media can inform and update stakeholders about Council news, services, programs, events and engagement opportunities. Strategic social media use can position the Council positively in the community and help people to become aware and engaged in our work.

Representing Council

As an elected Councillor, it is your responsibility to ensure your actions or communications on your personal and Council-owned social media do not bring Council into disrepute.

Whether you're commenting, replying, tagging, sharing or reacting to a post on Council social media, or posting and engaging on your Councillor or personal account, it's important you understand how to best represent Council and the many stakeholders in our community.

See page 6 for more details about appropriate engagement on your personal and Councillor social media accounts.

PURPOSE OF POLICY

This policy acts as a guide for Councillors who communicate and engage with the community through personal, Councillor and Council-owned social media profiles. Our foremost priorities when using social media are to protect Council's reputation and to provide an effective platform for community engagement and public debate.

This policy should be read together with the [Electronic Communication Security Determination](#) and the [Code of Conduct](#). Any social media activity that breaches Council policy or code will be subject to investigation.

COUNCIL-OWNED SOCIAL MEDIA

Communication and engagement purposes

- ✓ To engage with residents and stakeholders
- ✓ To engage with partner organisations
- ✓ To participate in peer, professional and community networks
- ✓ To provide access to content related to our core business and services

Approved platforms

✓ Platforms for Council communications are approved by the Communications and Engagement Manager. Contact the Communications and Engagement Manager for the latest list of approved platforms.

✓ Notify the Communications and Engagement Manager when you create a new social media account representing your Councillor role.

Content creation for Council platforms

✓ Authorised Communications and Engagement team members develop and publish social media content on behalf of Council on Council-owned media.

✓ The Communications and Engagement team manages the overall design of content for Council-owned social media.

✓ It is the Communications Coordinators' responsibility to review and edit content for Council-owned social media for style, appropriateness and clarity of messaging.

Official communications

✓ Publish official public statements and media releases

✓ Never publish an embargoed statement before the approved date and time

✓ Never publish or distribute internal communications between staff or trusted partners on social media

✓ Never speak on Council's behalf or commit Council to any action

MANAGING YOUR COUNCILLOR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

If your Councillor social media accounts are public, it's likely they will be accessed by stakeholders within and outside the Hornsby Shire community. The following guide will help you manage your social media accounts to best represent Council and the broader community.

Social media management

✓ Use your Council email address and job title on your Councillor profiles.

✓ Specify your ownership and responsibility for social media accounts in profile descriptions.

✓ Display a professional portrait photo in the profile image on all social media accounts.

✓ Link posts back to the Council website where appropriate and helpful to the community.

Title

Specify your title, ownership and responsibility for social media accounts in profile descriptions.

For example: John Smith – Hornsby Shire Councillor

Content

Style

When using social media, people tend to skim—looking for key words and quickly moving on. Keep your posts and comments concise and avoid using jargon or technical language where possible.

Tone

Very few public figures and individuals adopt a strictly formal tone on social media. As a Councillor, you have an opportunity to insert your professional personality into the content you share and engage with. This means finding an appropriate balance between the informal nature of the channel and your responsibilities within the community.

- Friendly
- Approachable
- Professional
- Informed
- Fair

Images and video

Ensure you have the appropriate permissions from people and organisations when sharing images and videos on your social media accounts. Always complete a detailed check of every piece of media before you share—scanning for inappropriate or offensive gestures, messages, symbols or references.

Timely

Stay in the loop with the latest community and Council developments. Keep your stakeholders up to date with the latest news and events by sharing posts from Council and reliable news outlets. Post, comment and respond to news and updates within 12 hours of the original publishing time.

Relevant

Ensure the information you choose to share with the community is relevant to their needs and interests. Remember your audience is varied and diverse: They want to hear about a broad range of issues, projects, events and developments as they happen in the community.

Accurate

As an owner of a social media page, it is also your responsibility to ensure that content and commentary on your page—in a post or comment—is appropriate and accurate. Always fact check your work and refer to Council's official and approved messaging.

Important information

Always treat embargoed, confidential or sensitive information with care. Unless you are confident the information is not already publicly available, consult the Communications and Engagement Manager about appropriate messaging and strategic release timing. This includes:

- a) information or draft plans of Council, including matters under discussion in informal Councillor workshops, unless express permission has been provided by the General Manager, and
- b) any photo of staff without the express permission of the employee and their divisional manager.

Personal opinion

When expressing a personal opinion, always provide a disclaimer in your post, comment or communication.

For example: The views and opinions expressed in this post are mine and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Hornsby Shire Council.

Unacceptable behaviour

As an owner of a social media page, it is your responsibility to remove or hide information that is misleading or false, slanderous, abusive, derogatory or defamatory. Inappropriate behaviour on social media includes:

X abusive language

X harassment

X threats

X sexist, racist or derogatory language that is intended to cause concern or harm

X defamatory or libellous statements

X anything stated in contempt of court

X anything stated to break the law (hate crime) or to incite others to break the law

X spam

X inappropriate material or links to inappropriate content

X trolling or users who post misleading or false information about Council.

YOUR PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Potential conflict

All residents—including Councillors—have the right to express their opinion through their personal social media accounts. You are encouraged to engage with Council content while remaining cognisant of your connection with Council (i.e., if you have listed Council as your place of work on your personal Facebook page).

Whether you intend to or not, what you post online is traceable, permanently available, reproduceable and can negatively reflect on Council and your position as a Councillor. If you want to share your opinion, always consider the best channel for your feedback, comment or question.

Always endeavour to ensure your personal engagement or comments about Council are appropriate—not incendiary, abusive, libellous or derogatory. It is your responsibility to ensure your personal social media activity doesn't conflict with your duties and obligations as a Councillor. If it does, then we may investigate the issue further.

Your guide to appropriate engagement on Council channels

Whether you are using social media for private or professional purposes, Council's Code of Conduct details the parameters of acceptable behaviour when engaging with Council social channels.

You must not use social media to post or share comments, photos, videos, electronic recordings or other information that:

- a) is offensive, humiliating, threatening or intimidating to other Council officials or those who deal with the Council
- b) contains content about or concerning the Council that is false, misleading or deceptive
- c) divulges confidential Council information
- d) breaches the privacy of other Council officials or those who deal with Council
- e) contains allegations of suspected breaches of this code or information about the consideration of a matter under the Procedures
- f) could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where you have not been authorised to make such comment.

BREACHES OF THE POLICY

The Communications and Engagement team monitors social media and manages our reputation online. Where necessary, the Communications and Engagement Manager will discuss online behaviour and will advise Councillors on best practice.

The Communications and Engagement team will elevate online behaviour that breaches this policy or the Code of Conduct to the Communications and Engagement Manager, and if necessary, the General Manager for further investigation.

MORE INFORMATION

If you have further questions or need more information about our social media policy for Councillors, please get in touch with our Communications and Engagement Manager.

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