Social Media Guidelines

Prepared by position	**Manager Governance**
Approved by position	**Director Corporate Services**
Functional area	**Governance & Civic Support**
Date adopted	**28 March 2018**
Review date	**1 July 2026**

Purpose

These guidelines are intended to help individuals who are authorised to use social media for **business** purposes, as well as provide guidance to all persons covered by the *Social Media Policy* in relation to general expectations about **personal** social media use.

The guidelines are interactive and provide flow charts to help establish how and when social media can be used in a work capacity, as well as tips about responding on social media.

Why we use social media

Our social media accounts are not our primary communication methods, but they supplement and enhance our views to members, stakeholders, the media, governments and the general public.

The principles that underpin our social media engagement parallel the approaches that apply to other Council communication channels including email, internet, website, media and public presentations. Most of what we say and do on social media is in the public domain.

Our use of social media allows the Council to communicate directly and simultaneously with multiple 'followers' and observers. Our views can be circulated and shared on social media by others within very short time frames, allowing our messages to spread via a multiplier effect.

However, there will also be times when the organisation is involved in sensitive political negotiations, and certain Council-initiated social media activities may need to be restricted at times as an act of good faith to avoid undermining government discussions that could achieve a favourable outcome for local government

In addition, there is scope and opportunity for staff and contractors to participate in social media discussions that engage with members, colleagues and the world at large. This should be undertaken in a respectful manner that enhances the reputation of the Northern Grampians Shire Council.

Personal Social Media Use

All persons covered by this policy must maintain **separate personal and business social media accounts** to help maintain a clear line between professional and personal use.

The exception to this rule is any person acting as an administrator on council's social media platforms where a personal account is required in order to perform that role, for example LinkedIn and Facebook. The administrators are the Manager Human Resources, Coordinator Human Resources and Media and Communications Officer.

Access to personal social media accounts by the public has the potential to impact on the Council (either directly or indirectly). Even if you do not identify yourself as a Council employee or contractor, you may still be connected to your co-workers and the organisation.

Stakeholders must not disclose on personal social media any confidential information or significantly damage the reputation or interests of Council or where the activity constitutes discrimination, bullying or harassment as outlined in Council's codes and policies.

There is a shared responsibility to use common sense when sharing personal views with friends, their followers and potentially the public. Content associated with you should be consistent with Council policies and guidelines. This can generally be summarised as 'don't do anything stupid' and 'if in doubt, do not post'.

Be thoughtful and consider appropriate content for social media, such as avoiding material that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, confidential, or is otherwise unlawful.

Adding a disclaimer on your personal account(s) can clarify that published statements are your own views and opinions, are not endorsed and do not represent the views of your employer.

Council does not engage in politically biased public commentary. We represent our community interests by commenting on the merits of specific policy. This is critical for us in maintaining productive working relationships with all levels of government, and all political parties. Any personal social media use that could connect you to the Council (such as profiles that are publicly accessible and use your full name and/or pictures) should be mindful of this.

Three simple rules for personal social media use:

- Use common sense and be thoughtful about how you present yourself – if you wouldn't say it in public, you probably shouldn't say it online
- Respect your audience and your co-workers, as well as the privacy of others
- Use a disclaimer to identify that you are writing as yourself and not as a representative or on behalf of the Northern Grampians Shire Council

Check your privacy settings so you clearly understand who will have access to content you publish on your personal social media accounts. This should inform and influence both the tone and content of what you share. However, be aware that there are limitations to privacy settings. What you post can easily become public, including when a social media site changes its default privacy setting, or when others share your post or screenshot it.

Check with your manager for guidance on acceptable levels of personal use of social media during work hours.

Examples of reasonable personal use include:

- Re-tweeting or sharing content on your personal accounts from official Council accounts
- Updating Facebook status and posting messages during lunch breaks.

Remember when you no longer work for Northern Grampians Shire Council to update your status, eg remove reference to current employment with Council.

Scope

These guidelines apply to all councillors, employees, contractors, agents and volunteers of Northern Grampians Shire Council who purport to use social media on behalf of Council. These guidelines will also apply to agencies and individuals who provide services to Council and will be included in all relevant external supplier contracts.

The guidelines outline requirements for compliance with confidentiality, governance, legal, privacy and regulatory parameters when using social media to conduct council business. They aim to:

- Inform appropriate use of social media tools for Northern Grampians Shire Council
- Promote effective and productive community engagement through social media
- Minimise miscommunication or mischievous communications
- Help Council manage the inherent challenges of speed and immediacy

The guidelines apply to those digital spaces where people may comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload and share content, including:

- Blogs
- Bulletin boards
- Citizen journalism and news sites
- Forums and discussion boards
- Instant messaging facilities
- Microblogging sites (eg Twitter)
- Online encyclopaedias (eg Wikipedia)
- Podcasts
- Social networking sites (eg Facebook, Snapchat, LinkedIn)
- Video and photo sharing sites (eg TikTok, Instagram, YouTube)
- Video podcasts
- Wikis
- Any other websites that allow individuals to use simple publishing tools or new technologies emerging from the digital environment.

Social media technology is constantly evolving. As it is not possible to expressly refer to or list all of the specific sites or kinds of social media outlets, the absence of a reference to a particular site or kind of social media activity does not limit the application of this policy.

The guidelines are not intended to cover personal use of social media where:
- the author publishes information in their personal capacity and not on behalf of, or in association with Council; and
- no reference is made to Council, its councillors, staff, policies and services, suppliers or other stakeholders or council related issues.

The guidelines should be read in conjunction with relevant Council policies and procedures.

Business Social Media Use
Council has a number of official social media accounts:

NGSC on Twitter: https://twitter.com/ngshire
NGSC on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ngshire
NGSC on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/9586137/
NGSC on Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/northerngrampiansshire/
NGSC on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRUWYr_FtDmZ3O2JCb-bH3A

Getting involved
The type of content that we encourage on our official social media accounts broadly falls into the following categories:

- **Contribute to current policy debates:** in line with the views of Councillors. This may include Council positions; views endorsed by Council; and content from our submissions to inquiries, reviews and consultation processes.
- **Media commentary**: in line with authorised positions developed by the media and communications team for use by Council spokespersons.
- **Advocacy and campaigning**: in line with authorised key messaging developed as part of our advocacy and campaign activities.
- **Showcase innovation**: share the services, case studies and innovative solutions being implemented by council to promote the diverse and important roles of local government within local communities.
- **Showcase our services**: promote our events, share our roles in supporting good governance, environmental leadership, collaborative procurement etc.
- **Correct misinformation**: if our views are either deliberately or accidentally misrepresented, social media allows us to clarify our position and provide a correction.

Like our website, Council encourages a collaborative approach to social media content by our staff and contractors. This means that everyone is welcome to provide and suggest content ideas within their area of expertise, regardless of an individual's personal experience or proficiency in using social media.

What to use and when
Council does not encourage the use of separate social media accounts for each work area within the organisation. The preference is to use our official accounts for promoting whole-of-organisation messages. However, there will be times when a separate account is appropriate.

Which social media channel(s)?
This list details the types of social media channels that may be suitable to meet your communication goals. It is a sample list only and does not include all potential social media channels. See Scope above.

The appropriateness of each social media channel will depend on your target audience, your communication goals, whether you need an open (public) or closed (invite only) network, and what resources are available to fulfil your needs.

Consult	Campaign	Network	Inform/share	Reference	Image-video
Purpose:					
Consult formally or informally on a particular subject; conduct a survey or poll.	Campaign to connect with interested members of the public, grow a community.	Collaborate, facilitate a forum, bring together colleagues, share and discuss information in a secure way.	Provide regular updates, link to media releases and websites, generate interest.	Provide factual information, expert contributions, share and educate.	Share photos publicly, share video content, live webcast or workshop/meeting/forum.
Channels:					
ElementOrg	Facebook	Teams	Facebook	NGSC Website	YouTube
Office Forms	Twitter	YouTube	Twitter	Wikipedia	Instagram
	Instagram	Zoom (not recommended but in use within our networks e.g. EWHS community information session)	Instagram		Facebook
Polly (Internal use)	YouTube	POZI	LinkedIn		Twitter
	LinkedIn				LinkedIn

Content: Guidelines for engagement

Consistent with our *Social Media Policy*, Councillors, staff and contractors may at times participate in social networks and conversations that relate to your work.

Contributions by individuals present a useful opportunity to share your knowledge, build your networks, and contribute to community conversations about areas of professional interest.

Regardless of whether you are contributing on a private network (such as a private Facebook group, restricted Teams chat or other closed groups that can only be seen by participants) or an open network (a public blog, Facebook page or Twitter account), the guidelines are the same. Closed networks are not fail-safe; a post by you can still be taken as a screenshot and posted on a more public forum by another participant.

There are three simple engagement rules:

1. Disclose
2. Protect
3. Common sense

Disclose

You should disclose your real name, who you work for and be clear about your role.

Be transparent and act with honesty and integrity; this will quickly be noted in a social media environment.

Be yourself; stick to your area(s) of expertise, contribute about what you know and, if appropriate, use a disclaimer that the views expressed are your own and not those of the Council.

Protect
Make sure that in being transparent and truthful, you do not violate any confidentiality or privacy guidelines, or other laws such as copyright and defamation.

Do not reveal any confidential or commercial-in-confidence information. If in doubt, check first.

Prior permission is to be sought from anyone who appears in any photographs, video or other footage before sharing these via any form of social media.

Permission is to be sought from the creator or copyright owner to use or reproduce copyright material including applications, audio tracks (speeches, music, podcasts), footage (video or animations), graphics (graphs, charts and logos), images, artwork, photographs or publications. Permission is also to be sought before publishing or uploading material in which the intellectual property rights, such as trademarks, are owned by a third party, eg company logos, trademarked content or photography. When using references, seek prior approval, verify Australian and international usage rights on ipaustralia.gov.au and, where possible, provide a link to the source.

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 is not permitted.

Play nice; do not criticise your workplace, colleagues, other organisations or people, and don't say things that could undermine or damage the reputation of the Council.

Common sense
The lines between professional and personal, public and private are blurred on social media. Perception is reality and identifying yourself as a Council employee creates a perception about your expertise and about us.

If an individual identifies themselves as a Council employee (either for official business or in private use) their profile and related content must be consistent with how they wish to represent themselves to fellow work colleagues, clients and general community.

Try to add value to the conversation. Think before you contribute, keep the conversation real and don't say anything you wish you could take back – it's too late once you 'share'.

Remember that postings will be public for a long time and may be accessed by unknown parties.

Prohibited content
The following content is not permitted under any circumstances:
• Abusive, profane or sexual language
• Content not relating to the subject matter of that blog, board, forum or 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
- Materials that could compromise council, employee or system safety
- Materials which 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 which would bring the 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 which may be considered to be bullying or harassment

How and when to respond

Social media moves quickly and requires timely, well considered responses. However, not every mention of the Council will require a response.

The attached flow chart aims to guide how and when to respond to comments either about the Council on other social media sites, or in response to comments received on our social media site(s).

Where a response is warranted, ideally it should be provided within 24 hours. In instances where comments may be harmful, have the capacity to escalate very quickly or may breach our policies, a response is required within two hours.

For example: if a person posts a comment on our Facebook page that uses inappropriate language, is discriminatory or defamatory, seeks to sell/promote a commercial product or otherwise breaches our terms and conditions of use it should be removed immediately, with a reminder posted about usage and a link to our social media and community engagement policies.

This flow chart also intends to help people take a step back, review the situation and wait just a little while to see if someone in our social media community steps in to correct things without us needing to do anything. Sometimes that can be the best outcome.

How we respond is critical. A well-prepared response can defuse a potentially hostile situation; while a panicked response can do more harm than good. While it is always useful to respond initially on the platform where the communication first took place, it is also appropriate to then follow up or move the conversation offline. This is particularly useful for complaints that may require continued personal dialogue to resolve.

Discussion on our social media sites should be allowed uncensored, and negative comments, criticism or complaints should not be removed if they do not breach our terms and conditions of use. For questions, advice or help with an urgent response please contact the Media and Communications Officer for assistance.

Flow chart: Responding on social media
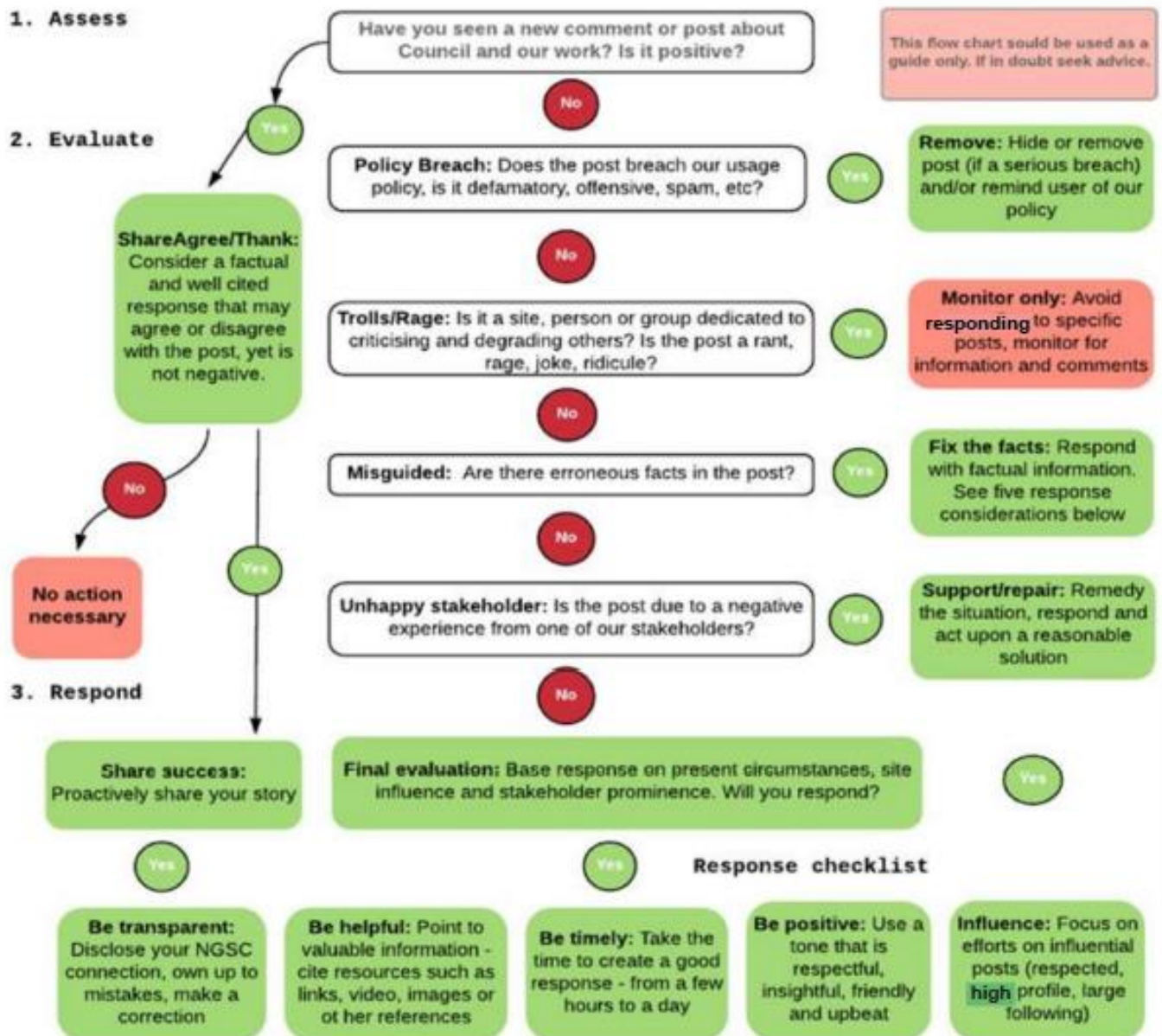
If you have any doubt about applying the provisions of the *Social Media Policy* or these guidelines, check with the Media and Communications Officer. before using social media to communicate. Depending upon the nature of the issue and potential risk, it may also be appropriate to consider seeking legal advice.

References
Social Media Policy

Relevant legislation
- *Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)*
- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*
- *Defamation Act 2005 (Vic)*
- *Fair Trading Act 1999 (Vic)*

- *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)*
- *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*
- *Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic)*
- *Spam Act 2003 (Cth)*
- *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*
- *Public Records Act 1973 (Vic)*
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic)*
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)*

Review history

Date	Review details	Action
28.3.2018	ELT review	ELT adoption
27 July 2022	4-year review, minor changes, replaced Google link to policy	Not required