



Social Media Guide - Councillors

1. PURPOSE

The *Social Media Guide - Councillors* has been developed to guide the use of social media by the elected Councillors of Whitehorse City Council. Social media provides dynamic and engaging two-way and multilateral communication opportunities to create, share and facilitate valuable community discussion and engagement.

This Guide is intended to assist Councillors to use social media in a way that minimises exposure of Council and Councillors to legal and reputational risk.

It should be considered in conjunction with relevant legislation, the *Councillor Code of Conduct*, the *Media Policy*, the *Election Period Guide* and other Council policies and procedures.

2. OBJECTIVES

The Guide outlines advice for Councillors in relation to confidentiality, governance, legal, privacy and regulatory parameters when using social media in their capacity as Councillors, including when they are candidates for re-election to Council. It aims to:

- Outline acceptable use of social media on behalf of Whitehorse City Council
- Comment on risks and good practice for use of social media as a Councillor of Whitehorse City Council
- Promote effective and productive community engagement through social media
- Minimise miscommunication and manage risks to Council associated with the use of social media
- Offer guidance and support to Councillors on the use of social media in their role

3. SCOPE

This Guide applies to use of social media by Councillors when used in their:

- Professional capacity, in their role as Councillors ; and
- Personal capacity, where that use is connected with, or might otherwise impact on, Council, its reputation and/or its effectiveness.

4. DEFINITIONS

Social media is a group of online applications designed to allow information to be created, shared, discussed and disseminated. Social media includes the sites, tools, channels and engagement platforms used to publish content and promote connections and conversations. "Social media" includes but is not limited to:

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, WeChat, Weibo)
- Video and photo sharing websites (e.g. YouTube, Flickr, Vimeo))Video and webinar conferencing (e.g. Zoom, Teams)
- Blogs, including those hosted by social channels or media outlets (e.g. Tumblr, 'comments' or 'your say' feature on websites)
- Wikis and online collaborations (e.g. Wikipedia)
- Forums, discussion boards and groups (e.g. Google groups, Reddit, Whirlpool)
- Podcasting
- Instant messaging (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger)
- Chat rooms
- Task management tools (e.g. Asana, Slack, Planner)
- Community Engagement Platforms (e.g. YourSay)
- Geo-spatial tagging (e.g. Google maps, Foursquare)
- Online gaming platforms (e.g. Gamification apps, Fortnite, Twitch)
- Any other tool or emerging technology that allows individuals to publish or communicate in a digital environment

Councillor Professional use is defined as use of social media in a capacity as a representative of Council.

Abusive or inappropriate content includes, but is not limited to:

- Profanity
- Any material that matches the definition of 'inappropriate activity' in Council's IT Acceptable Use Policy
- Inappropriate sexual language
- Discriminatory material in relation to a person or group based on the attributes outlined in Council's Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Policy
- Statements that breach human rights

Materials that would breach applicable laws include, but are not limited to:

- Content that is false or misleading
- Copyright or trademark protected materials
- Illegal material or materials designed to encourage law breaking
- Personal details, images or references to Councillors, Council employees or third parties that may breach privacy and/or defamation laws
- Statements that may be considered to be bullying or harassment

- Defamatory statements about person(s), community organisations or businesses
- Confidentiality – matters deemed confidential by Council resolution or designated as confidential by the CEO

5. GUIDELINES

Whitehorse City Council recognises that social media provides dynamic and engaging two-way and multilateral communication opportunities, shifting from traditional information sharing, to valuable community discussion and engagement.

5.1 Councillors should:

- Reinforce the integrity, reputation and values of Whitehorse City Council including adhering to codes of conduct, policies and procedures.
- Endeavour to support the Council and fellow Councillors in their words, deeds and actions in any form of social or media commentary, social media posts or comments.
- Behave with inclusivity, honesty, respect and integrity.
- Comply with relevant laws and regulations and ensure confidentiality of Council information.
- Secure and preserve the positive public image of, and confidence in, the office of Councillor at all times.

5.2 To mitigate risk and reputational damage Councillors should disclose on their personal page or account *'I am an elected Councillor at Whitehorse City Council and comments made by me on this page and elsewhere using this account are my own views and may not represent the position of Council.'*

5.3 The Mayor should be kept informed of any relevant social media content or Councillor contact with organisations, resident groups or others that could foreseeably escalate into adverse media or social media attention and which might impact or compromise Whitehorse City Council.

5.4 Councillors' comments on or engagement with content on Council's corporate and satellite social media channels should be consistent with decisions of Council. Councillors should not seek to distinguish their position or voting history on a matter from their Councillor colleagues on Council's corporate social media channels.

5.5 Councillors wishing to take an individual position on an issue, distinguish their position from that of their Councillor peers or discuss their voting history should do so on their own social media channels.

5.6 Councillors should consider their activity on third party social media accounts, such as resident groups or community groups, having regard for the intended purpose, audience, tone and content of those channels.

It is Councillors' responsibility to manage their social media accounts including creating accounts, publishing and sharing content, monitoring comments and responding to private messages and gaining permissions to publish images, video and other materials if required.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- 5.7 While the Mayor and Councillors may use their own social media accounts to express personal views, they are strongly encouraged to have a dedicated Councillor account separate to any other personal or business accounts they might hold.
- 5.8 Councillors should ensure that they have appropriate privacy settings on all social media sites moderated, managed or operated by them, bearing in mind that all social media posts are public to some degree.
- 5.9 Councillors should identify and separate personal opinions from Council position. When contributing to public comment on social media, Councillors should act in accordance with the principles of the *Councillor Code of Conduct* when discussing Council matters.
- 5.10 Councillors should be mindful not to engage in personal online disputes with other social media users. They are encouraged to take the discussion or dispute offline to private channels.
- 5.11 Councillors will be personally liable for any comments or posts on social media that breach privacy and/or defamation laws.
- 5.12 When using social media to conduct Council business, Councillors should not publish content in exchange for reward of any kind.
- 5.13 Councillors should not post comments or testimonials about businesses in relation to services they have provided to Council.
- 5.14 When using social media, Councillors should not directly criticise other Councillors or council employees in order to undermine their position.
- 5.15 When using social media, Councillors should not attempt to unduly influence other Councillors, council staff or contractors or undermine public confidence in the processes of council.
- 5.16 Councillors should be alert to the possibility that personal comments about public issues may compromise their capacity to perform duties in an independent and unbiased manner, or create a perception that they are biased or not independent.
- 5.17 Councillors should ensure their comments do not indicate that they have come to a conclusive view on a matter coming before council, prior to fully considering

the proposal and related issues.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 Councillors are responsible for:

- a) Exercising their responsibilities and obligations as outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020*, the *Councillor Code of Conduct*, *Media Policy and the Election Period Policy* to, among other things, act with integrity and impartially discharge their own responsibilities in the interests of the local community.
- b) Complying with the Terms of Use determined by each social media platform.
- c) Being mindful they do not post, like or comment on abusive or inappropriate content, or materials that would breach applicable laws, or expose them or Council to defamation or other actions and liabilities.
- d) Seeking approval from the Strategic Communications & Customer Service department when using Council branding on social media content they have created.
- e) Including a prominent disclaimer on personal and Councillor social media platforms stating that the views are their own and do not represent the position of Council. Councillors should be aware that a disclaimer on personal social media accounts or posts will not, in itself, mean all content will necessarily be interpreted as personal use unrelated to their Councillor role.
- f) Continuing to redirect Council enquiries or service requests via the Councillor Request Process or Snap Send Solve respectively.
- g) Not committing Council or Council officers to actions, or undertakings, and not reproducing internal communications without prior permission from the relevant Director or Manager.
- h) Taking into consideration whether their social media posts or comments may solicit controversy that may result in adverse mainstream or social media attention and additional work for Council officers.
- i) Being mindful that some social media posts and online conversations solicit enquiries and requests that create significant unplanned work for officers

- j) Seeking written permission when publishing photos of Council staff on social media.
 - k) Re-sharing content and posts from Council's official social media and web platforms where applicable. Councillors are encouraged to share content to their own channels, with a comment to their network sharing their own opinion. Comments on official Council social media accounts should be relevant, thoughtful and abide by social media community guidelines of the groups or account holders, and the rules of the social media platform.
 - l) Adhering to all requirements in relation to statements and authorising of election material during any Election Period;
 - m) Attending training and development in the use of social media from the Strategic Communications & Customer Service department.
 - n) Understanding and complying with the provisions in this guide and seeking advice from the Strategic Communications & Customer Service department if unsure about applying the provisions of this guide.
- 6.2 The Strategic Communications & Customer Service department are responsible for the ongoing development, implementation and review of this guide and any associated processes or guidelines and appropriate training for Councillors.
- 6.3 The Mayor, CEO and Manager of Governance and Integrity are responsible for requesting removal of any content published by Councillors which may adversely affect Council's reputation or put it at risk of legal action.

7. RELATED POLICIES & LEGISLATION

This guide is implemented in conjunction with the following Whitehorse City Council documents:

- IT Acceptable Use Policy
- Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Policy
- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Media Policy
- Election Period Policy

The following legislation relates to this guide:

- *Copyright Act 1968*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*

- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- [ACSC Security Tips for Social Media and Messaging Apps](#)

INTERNAL USE ONLY

8. REVIEW

Responsible Manager:

Manager Strategic Communications & Customer Service

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This guide has been reviewed for Human Rights Charter compliance.