

# Hay Shire Council Policy



<b>Title of Policy</b>	Social Media Policy	
<b>This applies to</b>	Employees volunteers Councillors Contractors	
<b>Author</b>	David Webb	<b>Date Approved:</b> 22 February 2022
<b>Position of Author</b>	General Manager	<b>Authorised by:</b> Council
<b>Legislation, Australian Standards, Code of Practice.</b>		
<b>Related Policies/Procedures</b>		
<b>Attachments</b>		
<b>Aim</b>	To provide guidance and a framework for the use of Social media by Council representatives.	
<b>Version</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Date</b>
Version 1	Initial Issue	29 <sup>th</sup> April 2014
<b>Superseded Policies</b>		
<b>The Policy</b>		

## OBJECTIVE

This policy establishes a clear set of guidelines for Hay Shire Council’s employees, volunteers, Councillors and Council engaged contractors who use social media.

The use of social media follows the same standards of professional practice and conduct associated with all other media practices. Common sense and sound judgment will help avoid issues.

## POLICY

### DEFINITIONS

Social media is a general term used to describe the tools and forms of publishing which are based on an interaction or conversation online between an author and active readers. This is different compared to the traditional broadcast media perception of the ‘audience’ as a passive consumer of content.

Social media covers many different forms of technology, such as Facebook, Instagram, blogs, wikis, apps, photo/video sharing and social networking.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This policy is linked and overlaps with the Code of Conduct and Media Communications Policy and it is expected that workers will follow the guidelines in the above documents when using any form of social media.

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It is Council's expectation that the use of social media tools is part of a workers duties and it must never interfere with primary duties.

Workers need to be mindful that they are acting in an official capacity for Council in using social media and all content published it is the responsibility of Council.

When publishing content concerning Council to any website outside of Hay Shire Council's official online presence, where approval should be sought in regards to consideration of a disclaimer such as: "The information contained herein does not necessarily represent Hay Shire Council's positions, strategies or opinions".

Staff in leadership roles must consider that any published statement or information, even in a clearly personal context, may be misunderstood as expressing Council's positions. Have no expectation of privacy.

Respect copyright, fair use and financial disclosure laws. Always protect sensitive information, such as property details and personal information. Do not publish or report on conversations that are meant to be pre-decisional or internal to Council unless given permission by the General Manager.

Council will provide Induction and instructions to all Councillors and employees on legal implications of engaging with members of the community on Council social media pages.

## **PRIVATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA A. Overview**

This section covers a staff member's use of external social media sites and the related potential impact on Council including but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, social networking websites, wikis, podcasting, RSS, tagging, virtual worlds and blogs. It is designed to help Council use these channels effectively to achieve its business objectives and to protect the personal and professional reputation of staff and Council.

Access to, and use of, non-work-related websites during the course of employment is covered by Council's email, internet and computer use conditions contained in the Communication Devices Policy, which all workers are required to read and follow the guidelines contained in the policy.

## **B. Conflicts between Private and Professional Use**

Council has no interest in participation by its workers on social media where no mention of Council is made and no association with Council is implied. However, it is important that workers note the following potential causes of conflicts between private and professional use.

Workers should recognise the potential for damage to be caused (either directly or indirectly) to Council in certain circumstances via your private use of social media when they can be identified as a Council employee. Accordingly, workers should comply with this policy to ensure that the risk of such damage is minimised with:

- Blog comments remain permanently accessible. Tracking tools can identify the contents of a website at a particular date, even if the contents are later 'deleted'.
- A search of an organisation's name will produce a full list of any blogged comments about that organisation, so that anyone with internet access can find them.

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- A search using an email address or individual's name will produce a full list of comments and other material made from that address or attributed to that individual.
- Personal revelations and comments, embarrassing photos, etc, that are accessible to current and prospective employers may be detrimental to a person's career prospects, depending on the context.
- Being aware of privacy settings and preferences to restrict access to content.
- An awareness of privacy settings and preferences that restrict content may be preferable to the user.

### C. General Guidelines

Workers are personally responsible for the content that is published in a personal capacity on any form of social media platform. Where workers comments or profile can identify them as a Council employee, they must:

- only disclose and discuss publicly available information;
- ensure that all content published is accurate and not misleading and complies with all relevant Council policies;
- expressly state on all postings (identifying you as a Council employee) the stated views are your own and are not those of Council;
- be polite and respectful to all people you interact with; and
- adhere to the Terms of Use of the relevant social media platform/website, as well as copyright, privacy, defamation, contempt of court, discrimination, harassment and other applicable laws.
- Council will not publish any content on social media that could be deemed as or result in a defamatory situation to an individual or organisation.
- Any commentary that is deemed offensive or defamatory will be hidden or deleted as soon as possible.
- Particularly contentious issues in the community commentary will be disabled overnight or over a weekend when community management is not available.

Workers must not:

- post material that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, breaches a Court suppression order, or is otherwise unlawful;
- imply that a worker is/are authorised to speak as a representative of Council, nor give the impression that the views expressed are those of Council;
- use the Council email address or any Council logos or insignia;
- use the identity or likeness of another employee, contractor or other member of Council;
- use or disclose any confidential information obtained in your capacity as an employee/contractor of Council;
- imply that workers are authorised to speak on behalf of Council, or give the impression that any views expressed are those of Council;
- use a worker's Council email address or Council logos or insignia that may give the impression of official support or endorsement of their personal comment;
- use or disclose any confidential information or personal information obtained in your capacity as an employee/contractor of Council;
- post material that is, or might be construed as, threatening, harassing, bullying or discriminatory towards another employee/contractor of Council; and
- make any comment or post any material that might otherwise cause damage to the Council's reputation or bring it into disrepute.

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## D. Guidance for Navigating Legal Issues

The following is offered as general guidance to assist workers in complying with the obligations set out in this policy.

### *Privacy, confidentiality and information security*

- Workers should only use personal information obtained in the course of their employment/engagement with Council in a manner consistent with Council's Media Communications Policy and Code of Conduct policy.
- Users should not publish or report on conversations or information that is deemed confidential or classified or deals with matters that are internal in nature.

### *Copyright*

- Workers should respect copyright laws and fair use of copyrighted material and should attribute work to the original author/source wherever possible.

### *Bullying & Harassment*

- The Good Working Relations policy applies online and in the physical workplace.
- Workplace bullying and harassment includes any bullying or harassing comments employees make online, even on their own private social networks or out of office hours.
- Abusive, harassing, threatening or defamatory postings are in breach of Council's Good Working Relations policy, and may result in disciplinary action being taken.
- All employees are expected to treat their colleagues with respect and dignity and must ensure their behaviour does not constitute bullying and/or harassment.

### *Defamation*

- Workers should refrain from publishing material that may cause injury to another person, organisation, association or company's reputation.

### *Offensive or obscene material*

- Material may be offensive or obscene and may infringe relevant online classification laws if it pornographic, sexually suggestive, harassing, hateful, racist, sexist, abusive or discriminatory.

### *Contempt of Court*

- Workers should exercise care if referring to pending court proceedings to avoid publishing material that may have a tendency to prejudice those proceedings, in particular, material that will not be part of the evidence in those proceedings.
- Workers should make enquiries as to any applicable court suppression orders prior to commenting on any court proceeding (whether past or pending).

## COMPLIANCE

Non-compliance with this policy may have the potential to damage the reputation, image, competitive or financial position of Hay Shire Council and consequently, may result in disciplinary action. This may include termination of employment in serious cases. Employees who breach the law may also be personally liable for their actions.

## POLICY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND REVIEW

This policy is issued under the authority of the General Manager and will be reviewed and amended as required in consultation with Directors, Managers and Staff.

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