POLICY NAME:	**SOCIAL MEDIA**
POLICY REF:	**S02**
MEETING ADOPTED:	**24 March 2016** **Resolution No. 240316/21**
POLICY HISTORY:	**220312/16**

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OBJECTIVE

To provide guidelines for Council officials to engage in social media activities as part of their role in community building and discussing Council services, activities and resources.

The policy also covers Council employee and Councillor personal use of social media.

Council will use social media to interact and engage externally with other organisations, forums and individuals for the purposes of:

- Directing members of the community to Council information and services.
- Extending the reach of publicly available Council information.
- Building a reliable identity by adhering to the social media engagement principles of transparency, responsibility and respect.
- Creating social networking places for community building and interaction, to facilitate and support discussion around Council services, plans, publications and resources.

POLICY

Council policy is to promote and actively encourage the use of social media to provide enhanced opportunities for engagement and to assist Council in obtaining information and feedback from the community.

In using social media it is important that Council officials acknowledge that they, at all times, are representing Council. This means that the information provided and the type of behaviour presented must be consistent with Council's Code of Conduct and the organisation's vision, values and corporate goals.

To ensure this occurs the balance of this policy deals with how social media interaction is to be managed and the processes to be followed.

1.   Areas of responsibility

1.1   Content Management

The General Manager, or nominated delegate, will be responsible for providing delegations to staff authorised to use social media

Once authorisation has been provided authorised staff members will be responsible for maintaining and updating the social media pages.

Councillors are entitled to create, maintain and update their own social media forums, subject to the information outlined in this policy.

1.2   Emails and Private chats

Authorised staff may participate in email correspondence and private chats to answer customer enquiries. If a question / answer (Q&A) is deemed publicly relevant, authorised staff can post the Q&A for all to view.

Customer details or private information that could identify the customer must be removed before posting.

Staff must follow internal protocols when using this form of media.

1.3   Technical and Security

Council's Information Services Section carries responsibility for technical and security issues relating to the authorised use of social media.

2.   Engagement Principles

When using social media to engage with the community, general conduct principles, as outlined in Council's Code of Conduct (Integrity, Leadership, Selflessness, Impartiality, Accountability, Openness, Honesty, Respect) must be followed.

Additionally Council employees must adhere to the principles of transparency, responsibility and respect.

2.1   Transparency

Accurately reflect the organisational message across all social media platforms. Ensure you identify yourself as a representative of Ballina Shire Council, when acting for Council. Only disclose publicly available information.

2.2   Responsibility

Ensure that content published is factual and complies with relevant Council policies, particularly those relating to confidentiality and disclosure in Council's Privacy Management Plan.

Do not post material that will breach Council's Code of Conduct.

Do not disclose a customer's personal information in social media spaces unless you have written permission.

2.3   Respect

Be respectful of all individuals and communities with which you interact online.

Be polite, objective and observe the rights of other people's opinions, even in times of heated discussion and debate.

Adhere to the Terms of Use as stated by the social platform being used, and seek to conform to the cultural and behavioural norms of that social media space.

Respect and do not breach copyright, privacy, financial disclosure and other applicable laws when publishing on social media platforms and be mindful of not damaging Council's reputation or commercial interests.

3.   Content Management

3.1   Types of content

Examples of content that will be broadcast via social media include:

- Events to attract visitors to the Ballina Coast and Hinterland.
- Promotion of Ballina Coast and Hinterland and local tourism operators.
- Media releases issued by Council.
- Community News and Notices as published in the local print media.
- Emergency Notifications.
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3.2   Guidelines

Content management guidelines for authorised spokespeople are as follows:

- Only comment on topics within your own area of responsibility and only if you have authorised authority to do so
- Ensure any Council related content is factually accurate and compliant with Council policies eg: Privacy Management Plan, Records Management Policy & Procedures, and Code of Conduct
- Do not reveal confidential or commercially sensitive information about Council and only disclose publicly available information
- If an unwanted or threatening comment or approach in social media is made report the matter to the General Manager.

3.3   Standard practices

- Protect sensitive or personal information
- Monitor user comments
- Be accurate
- Correct mistakes
- Be considerate
- Respect and do not breach copyrights and trademarks
- Use Council email addresses and strong passwords
- Avoid advertisements, sponsorships and endorsements
- Stay within your area of expertise

4.   Training

Staff using social media tools on behalf of Council will need to ensure adequate training and resources have been provided to ensure consistency during annual leave, sick leave and extended staff absences and to prevent disruption of service if staff leave Council.

5.   Branding

All Council social media presences will have a consistent look and feel, including the use of Council's logo or logo branding or the business unit or project.

6.   Implied Endorsements

If possible, Council's content will not appear next to advertisements. Platform settings will be reviewed to disable advertisements when possible.

7.   Personal use of social media

Employees and Councillors have the right to participate in social media using personal equipment in their own time, however issues may arise where Council is mentioned online or where it is possible to link employees and Councillors to their employment and service to Council.

In such cases employees and Councillors should follow these rules:

- Do not mix the professional and personal contexts in ways that are likely to compromise the interests and reputation of Council
- Do not imply Council endorsement of your personal views
- Be aware of the laws covering libel, defamation, privacy and protection of intellectual property
- Be familiar with Council's Code of Conduct as activities on social media may be subject to the requirements of the Code. Anyone identified as an employee or councillor of Council, and posts comments or pictures on social media that negatively impact Council's reputation or brand or create anything that would be potentially embarrassing or considered offensive to Council may be subject to disciplinary action.

Council has no interest in employee or Councillor participation in social media when no mention of Ballina Shire Council is made and no association with Ballina Shire Council is implied. However, it is important that employees and Councillors note the following issues:

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

8.   Monitoring

Key personnel delegated approval to use social media for Council purposes will monitor content and public comments.

9.   Risk Management

The use of social media platforms increases the opportunity for negative comment and feedback to be aired in the public arena. This is a normal part of consultation and should be monitored in the same way traditional forms of

community feedback are monitored. Any issues should be dealt with efficiently and in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct and Complaints Policy.

Council reserves the right to remove any posts or comments that the authorised social media contact deems to be unfit.

The following process will act a suitable guide:

i)   The issue of complaint/comment is reported to the authorised social media officer for that particular section of Council

ii)   The authorised social media officer reports the issue to the General Manager, or nominated delegate, within 24-hours of the issue being identified during normal business hours. The General Manager, or nominated delegate, decides the most suitable response:
   - remove the complaint/comment
   - issue an apology
   - correct any misinformation
   - request to further examine the issue on the complainant's behalf.

iii)   The authorised social media officer will communicate the appropriate response to the user within 24-48 hours of the issue being identified, during normal business hours. If appropriate, the response may be conveyed in a private forum, such as email or direct message to the user or via the public domain for the social media platform in use.

iv)   It is the responsibility of the authorised social media officer to continually manage the issue as appropriate until the issue has been resolved.

v)   If the user continually uses Council's social media spaces for abusive behaviour, vexatious complaints or consistent negative comments, the user may be banned from using the social media platform upon the General Manager, or nominated delegate's, authorisation.

10.   Records management

Material published in Council's official social media sites must be recorded and archived on a monthly basis in accordance with Council's Records Management Policy & Procedure.

Approved social media spokespeople are responsible for identifying record material and properly registering into Council's Electronic Document Management System (EDMS). Generally content entries, comments, blog posts, links and videos should be registered into the EDMS. This can be achieved by using several web applications or by using the screen shot method.

11.   Formal Correspondence

Online material published by the public is not treated as formal correspondence. If a member of the public has:

   - A formal request, comment or enquiry

- A complaint against Council, Council staff or Councillors; or
- A response to an item for community consultation.

they will be requested to contact Council in writing or via phone call to Council's Customer Service Centre.

12.   Comments policy

The following policy statement, as a guide, will be added to Council's Facebook pages, or similar social media forums.

*We welcome you and your comments to the Ballina Shire Council **<or Council business unit administered by Ballina Shire Council>** Facebook page.*

The purpose of this site is to:

- *Direct members of the community to Council information and services.*
- *Extend the reach of publicly available Council information.*
- *Build a reliable identity by adhering to the social media engagement principles of transparency, responsibility and respect.*
- *Creating social networking places for community building and interaction, to facilitate and support discussion around Ballina Shire Council services, activities and resources.*

Once posted, Ballina Shire Council reserves the right to delete submissions that contain vulgar language, personal attacks of any kind, or offensive comments that target or disparage any ethnic, racial or religious group. Ballina Shire Council also reserves the right to delete comments that:

i)   *are spam or includes links to other sites*
ii)   *are clearly off topic*
iii) *advocate illegal activity*
iv)   *promote particular services, products or political organisations*
v)   *infringe on copyrights or trademarks.*

Online material published by members of the public is not treated as formal correspondence. If a member of the public has:

- *A formal request, comment or enquiry*
- *A complaint against Council, Council staff or Councillors; or*
- *A response to an item for community consultation.*

they should contact Ballina Shire Council via the contact details below.

Please note that the comments expressed on this site do not reflect the opinions and position of Ballina Shire Council, its Councillors or employees. If you have any questions concerning the operation of this online moderated discussion site, please contact the Communication Liaison Officer or General Manager of Ballina Shire Council.

Ballina Shire Council
PO Box 450
Ballina NSW 2478
Email: council@ballina.nsw.gov.au
Ph: 02 6686 4444

13.   Standards of Conduct

Non-compliance with this policy may have the potential to damage the reputation, image or competitive or financial position of Council, and consequently, may result in disciplinary action.

BACKGROUND

The use of social media continues to expand rapidly. Councils often find it difficult to engage with segments of the population that don't engage in traditional methods of media (ie. Print and radio) and the appropriate use of social media provides an opportunity for councils to improve their consultation processes

As the use of social media becomes more prevalent across all generations it will also provide an efficient, immediate and cost effective method of information distribution and collection.

Social media methods also continue to evolve and it is important that any policy provide the flexibility needed to ensure it remains relevant to modern technology and its uses.

DEFINITIONS

Authorised Spokesperson	Authorised by delegation the General Manager
Blog	Or Web Log is a personal journal published on the World Wide Web consisting of (posts) entries which may consist of opinions or information which is updated on a regular basis.
Council	Ballina Shire Council, and or its business units eg: Visitor Information Centre, Northern Rivers Community Gallery, Ballina Byron Gateway Airport, Community Centres and Flat Rock Tent Park.
Comment	Content that is published to the internet using social media
Community Building	The process of recruiting potential community or network participants, helping them to find shared interests or goals, use the technology and develop useful conversations.
Content	Text, pictures, video and other meaningful material that is on the internet.
EDMS	Electronic Document Management System
Forums	Discussion areas on websites where users can post messages or comment on existing messages.
Interoperability	A property referring to the ability of diverse systems to work together "interoperate".

Screen Shot	A picture of a website, taken by pressing the print screen key on the keyboard and saving as a pdf or jpeg.
Social Media	Internet based tools and platforms for sharing and discussing information. Popular social media platforms include:
	Social Networking sites: Facebook, MySpace and Linked-in.
	Video and photo sharing websites: Flickr, YouTube
	Micro-blogging sites: Twitter
	Forums and discussion boards: Google groups, Yahooo!, Groups.
	Weblogs: Corporate blogs, personal blogs and blogs hosted by traditional media outlets.
	Online encyclopaedias: Wikipedia.
	Service Reviews: Customer reviews such as Trip Advisor.
Social Networking	The practice of using online resources to create a profile or online presence and then socialise with others using social media tools.
Unfit Content	The use of words that may offend, defame, or discriminate individuals or organisations.
User	A person who is engaging or interacting within a social media platform, who is not the authorised Council employee.
Vexatious Content	Comments initiated without insufficient grounds and serve only to cause annoyance.
Web 2.0	Web applications that facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the web.
Web Applications	Computer software hosted in a browser controlled environment designed to help perform specific singular or multiple related tasks generally to help solve a problem.

SCOPE OF POLICY

This policy applies to:

- Council employees authorised to represent Council on social media platforms

- All Council Employees
- Councillors
- Committees of Council

Exclusions

This policy does not apply to personal use of social media where no reference has been made to Council, its employees, councillors, contractors, services and activities.

RELATED DOCUMENTATION

Legislation

- Local Government Act
- Government Information (Public Access) Act

Council documents

- Code of Conduct
- Complaints Policy

REVIEW

The Social Media Policy is to be reviewed every four years.