Social Media Policy

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PURPOSE:

To provide clear direction to assist the Mayor, Councillors, Executive Management, Staff, Work experience/Work placement participants and Volunteers (herein referred to as employees) with regard to effective use of social media to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with and empower its residents.

The aim of the policy is to build an understanding of what is appropriate and productive use of social media, to minimise miscommunication and prevent misuse of social media tools that will undermine Council's brand.

POLICY STATEMENT

The Circular Head Council is committed to using social media to complement other communication activities while adhering to a set of clear and consistent guidelines.

RATIONALE/BACKGROUND

Simply put, social media is a collection of internet based tools which facilitate conversations.

Social media is an emerging, rapidly changing part of the Internet and our daily lives. These guidelines will be updated as new sites, communities, technologies, cultures and trends develop. Social media refers to online community sites including Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn, file sharing sites such as Flickr and YouTube, blogs, forums, microblogging (Twitter), and virtual communities such as Second Life. These and other 'Web 2.0' sites are now common place for sharing, learning, connecting with others and expressing our views.

Council recognises the use of and participation in online communities to learn, advocate, collaborate, exchange and contribute for the benefit of your professional and personal

development. It's important as a Council that we stay active, aware and fully engaged with our community.

Social media is relatively new to many people, and the etiquette of participating in them is still emerging. We have put together some "best practice" guidelines from various sources to help you use these channels effectively, and to protect your personal and professional reputation – and that of Council. You can also refer to current Council policies as detailed below.

Social media is now strongly embedded in Australian culture as a personal tool for networking and communication and is increasingly being used as core component of marketing and communications strategies by governments and businesses.

The desire to connect with governments using social media is increasing along with an expectation that this form of communication will be available.

Social media can support organisations in the following:

- *providing information and getting feedback;*
- *demonstrating the business personality/brand;*
- *ensuring organisational transparency;*
- *improving internal communications; and*
- *market research which is low cost.*

Among the advantages of social media are, that it:

- *is fast/can be immediate;*
- *allows for easy content creation/development/dissemination;*
- *can establish large, powerful networks;*
- *is always on;*
- *potentially can reach a large audience; and*
- *can build reputation through attracting attention.*

Around the world, councils are using social media in a myriad of ways including event promotion, communication including local laws, getting community feedback including from hard to reach groups, establishing ongoing networks, emergency management, recruitment, branding and consulting in strategic and specific issues.

Use of social media needs to be embedded within broader governance, communications and marketing strategies, an understanding that there is a need to choose the right tool for the task and awareness of what is appropriate or inappropriate use of social media.

Policy:

This policy advocates that Circular Head Council manages social media users as it would other media audiences, by ensuring it:

- *Adheres to codes of confidentiality and privacy*
- *Behaves with caution, courtesy, honesty and respect*
- *Complies with relevant laws and regulations*
- *Expresses consistency with other Council stakeholder information*
- *Reinforces the integrity, reputation and values of the council.*

Policy Principles:

1. *Social media can be used as a communication tool and to facilitate professional development and online collaboration. Social media will not be the driver for building a communications strategy, but rather, a tactic applied.*

2. *Information disseminated through social media will be accurate, authorised and aligned with council strategies, policies and decisions.*

3. *Use of social media will always follow clear identification of objectives and the right tools to meet those objectives.*

4. *Private information will be protected and copyright, privacy and other applicable laws will be taken into account when interacting with social media.*

5. *There will continue to be appropriate record keeping of information disseminated or collected via social media.*

6. *The use of social media is a personal responsibility regardless of whether it is authorised or individual, in or out of work.*

7. *In developing, posting and responding to content, employees will uphold the values of the Council by acting with honesty, integrity, courtesy and professionalism and will not be discriminatory, defamatory, harassing or encourage law breaking.*

8. *All employees are responsible for being familiar with this policy.*

1. Definitions

This policy is not intended to cover the use of social media for personal use and professional use on Council-related matters. This policy applies to those digital spaces where people comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload and share, including:

- *Blogs, including corporate blogs, personal blogs or blogs hosted by traditional media publications*
- *Bulletin boards*
- *Citizen journalism and news sites*

- *Forums and discussion boards*
- *Instant messaging (IM) facilities*
- *Microblogging Sites (e.g. Twitter)*
- *Online encyclopaedias (e.g. Wikipedia)*
- *Podcasts*
- *Social networking Sites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, Friendster)*
- *Video and photo sharing sites (e.g. Flickr, YouTube)*
- *Video podcasts*
- *Wikis*
- *Any other websites that allow individual users of companies to use simple publishing tools or new technologies emerging from the digital environment.*

In this policy the term "post" means broadcasting information in a public forum.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees' personal use and when representing Council or posting on behalf of Council in social media.

In describing appropriate activity the Policy recognises that employees may use social media in a private capacity or a work capacity, either during work time or personal time, using Council property or personal property.

Any activity by staff or elected members is to be in line with the Professional Social Media Guidelines and Personal Social Media Guidelines.

3. Policies and Legislation

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the following Council policies:

- *Code of Conduct Councillors (Particularly Standards of Conduct Sections 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8)*
- *Customer Service Charter (Section 5)*
- *General Manager's Directives*
  - o *Information Technology Directive*
  - o *Privacy Directive*
  - o *Internet Directive*
  - o *Personal Use of Council Equipment & Internet Directive*
  - o *Communications Process Directive*
  - o *Records Management Directive*
  - o *Advertising Directive*
  - o *Speaking to the Media/Media Releases Directive*
- *Human Resources Manual*
- *Privacy Policy*
- *Public Consultation Policy (Sections 5, 6, 7 and 8)*
- *Risk Management*

The following State and Federal Legislation is deemed to be relevant to this policy:

- *Commonwealth Copyright Act 1968*
- *Tasmanian Criminal Code Act 1924*
- *Tasmanian Defamation Act 2005*
- *Commonwealth Fair Work Act 2009*
- *Right to Information Act 2009*
- *Tasmanian Local Government Act 1993*
- *Commonwealth Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*
- *Tasmania Anti-Discrimination Act 1998*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Age Discrimination Act 2004*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975Commonwealth Spam Act 2003*
- *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*

4. Guidelines

All posts are to be done in accordance with Circular Head Council Social Media Guidelines.

5. Responsibility

The General Manager is responsible for the application of this policy.

Social Media Guidelines

The intent of these guidelines is to provide understanding for the appropriate use of social media platforms and tools by all employees and other relevant stakeholders ("social media users").

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with Council's Social Media Strategy and Policy to ensure compliance.

These guidelines include the use of social media when a person is using Council's information technology resources, social media at home or at work; when the use impacts on the person's responsibilities to Council, residents, suppliers, clients or their colleagues.

Personal Social Media Guidelines

Social media is about people not technology, so remember that your conduct reflects not only on yourself, but on your employer. It is becoming an increasingly important and constant component of our work and personal lives, even more so with many channels available on mobile devices. Please be mindful of this when posting or responding online. Think about not only what you will post, but the tone you will post in and the audience who will be reading it – online content can be found and viewed anytime, anywhere.

Council understands and respects that you may have any number of personal profiles, avatars, blogs and Twitter accounts. Under no circumstances would we wish to interfere with your private business. However, please bear in mind how you represent Council in your private time – social media is blurring the lines between the personal and professional aspects of many people's lives, and anything posted can have an impact on both. Please bear this in mind when posting.

1. Be transparent.

Be honest about your identity through your real or username. If you are engaging, sharing or contributing on behalf of Council, say so (see 'When you are asked to represent Council online'). If you post directly about Council in your personal time, please identify your association with Council, and include a disclaimer on your site or post that you are sharing your personal views and opinions, not as a representative of Council; for example – 'Views expressed on this blog are purely those of David Jones.' Don't hide your identity for the purpose of promoting Council.

2. Protect your privacy.

Whilst it's important to be transparent about who you are, be mindful not to divulge additional personal information that may potentially compromise your privacy or professional confidentiality. Use separate email addresses for social media and generally apply as much common sense as possible to protect against scammers and identity thieves. Further information in relation to privacy is available from the State Government.

3. Be accurate.

Have all the facts before you post to avoid posting misleading or incorrect information about you or Council. Cite and link to your sources whenever possible, it's a good gesture that also

builds links and findability. If you make an error, be the first to correct it – quickly and visibly. This will earn you respect in your online communities.

4. Be respectful.

Play nice. You are more likely to have a positive outcome when posting if you are constructive and respectful. It's OK to discuss a bad experience or disagree with a statement, concept or person so long as you do it in a considered and constructive manner. You're not obliged to agree with posts, so long as you maintain respect. Don't use inflammatory, racist or offensive language, and never upload offensive or explicit written, audio or video content. Don't be fake or someone trying to falsely promote themselves or their company or a troll – you'll be banned or ostracised from communities. It's wise not to be reactive - if you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it's wise to delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed.

5.   Be responsible.

Be careful what you post! Many employers are now reviewing online postings and activity before extending offers of employment, so don't compromise yourself by posting abusive, copyrighted, defamatory, libellous, obscene or even illegal content that may come back to haunt you. Be ethical, considerate and responsible – you are personally responsible for content you publish and comments you make. Be mindful and ensure you never insult anyone online on the grounds of race, circumstances, sex which may be contrary to Council's Code of Conduct.

6. Always think before you post.

There's no such thing as a "private" social media site. Search engines will show posts years after the publication date. More critically, the web is viral and virtually instantaneous - comments can be forwarded worldwide in seconds. Archival systems save information even if you delete a post. If you've posted something you wish you hadn't it's already too late to change it.

7. Maintain personal and organisational confidentiality.

Do not post confidential personal or commercial information about Council, management, Councillors or your fellow employees. Posting confidential, personal or commercial information may breach legal obligations and/or Council policy and procedures. Use good ethical judgment and follow Council policies. If situations involving individuals are discussed on a social media site, be sure that they cannot be identified. As a guideline, don't post anything that you would not repeat in person, in public, to the parties in question.

8. Respect Council time and resources.

Please remember Council computers and your work time are to be used for Council-related business, so use them within reason. It's appropriate to post at work if your comments are directly related to accomplishing work goals such as seeking sources for information or working with others to resolve a problem. Conduct your personal business on non-Council machines and in your own time. See Council's HR policy manual for further details.

Personal use of social media should also comply with the Terms and use of social media detailed below.

Professional Social Media Guidelines

Council has certain staff authorised to post content about the Council online – please contact the Communications Officer for assistance and advice. Council also recognises the use of social media for open dialogue and the exchange of ideas where it's beneficial for the organisation and/or individual in their work or research capacity. Please be considerate, transparent and understand that as a Council employee you are representing your employer and their reputation. We appreciate your engagement in and positive use of social media on behalf of Council – it's critical that as employees and as an organisation we stay relevant and connected. As well as our general guidelines, you should also consider the following.

1. Be personable.

Be honest about your identity, and speak in the first person. Be transparent about being a Council employee and why you are posting – simply be who you are. If you are posting content for publicity or promotional purposes, make sure you are authorised to do so and please adhere to Council's Media Policy. Social communities don't like the hard sell and will usually spy a mole very quickly, which could have a serious detrimental impact on the reputation of the Council. State why you are posting.

2. Be appropriate.

Consider the context in which you're representing Council. Choose your tone appropriately – don't be officious when engaging with young students or on a casual platform, and likewise be professional and businesslike where the situation requires. Social media means just that – it's about communicating with people so always post smartly. Respect and empathise with your audience.

3. Use a disclaimer.

Whenever you post ensure you make it clear this is the content you are authorised to post or the information you have to hand. Check with Council's Media Policy and your area supervisor when publishing content on your school or area's behalf, or in your area of expertise.

4. Be connected.

Wherever possible connect with other Council content, sites or postings. Always reference the source. If you are authorised to create new groups, blogs or sites, always use Council corporate logos and materials – contact your marketing representative for guidance and materials.

5. Be committed.

Successfully engaging in social media is no one time deal – to engage with and build a network or following you need to be committed to regularly posting fresh content. Colleagues or followers will quickly move on to find new value unless you post on a regular basis, which varies depending on the platform from monthly, weekly, daily to even hourly with status updates, and the expectations of your audience. Dead end content may actually have a detrimental effect on your professional and personal online profile.

6. Ensure continuity.

Social networks, groups, communities, blogs and forums need continuity to be effective. Unlike advertising or print, social media is not a release and forget platform, it requires two way interaction, open dialogue and continuous fresh content. Ensure you not only have a plan for when to begin engaging, but when to handover to other colleagues or areas, and when and how to leave a community, thread or group. Don't leave a community untended as it may indicate a lack of commitment to the other users or members and reflect badly on Council.

7. Be active and add value.

If you participate in a social network, join a Facebook group, use Twitter or comment on someone's blog or forum, make sure you are contributing valuable insights. By publishing as an employee, you represent Council's brand and reputation, so be innovative and insightful whenever you can. Ask yourself if your posts will be of interests to readers. Self-promoting behaviour is viewed negatively and can lead to you being banned from Web sites or groups. For authenticity and credibility, monitor your comments, delete spam and abusive posts, and build your networks and communities in a way that complements your online and offline profile. By all means link to Council where appropriate.

8. Reference your work.

Always provide links or references when posting content. Don't breach copyright laws, abide by creative commons licences, and obtain consent when citing colleagues or organisational links when reposting content. In particular, ensure any music or academic content contained within audio and video files has permissions to be published.

9. Think about your customers.

If responding to blog posts, comments or Tweets, as a communicator remember you're also a customer service officer. How will your interaction reflect on Council? Consider your own online exchanges and purchases and act as you yourself would expect to be spoken to by a company. Be personable, relaxed and friendly, as appropriate to the channel or site you're communicating on.

These guidelines are to be used specifically to:

- *Promote understanding about the spread, nature and impact of social media*
- *Inform appropriate use of social media tools for Circular Head Council and by its staff and Councillors*
- *Promote effective and productive community engagement through social media*
- *Address perceived and real concerns regarding use of social media*
- *Minimise the chance of miscommunication or mischievous communications*
- *Help Circular Head Council manage the inherent challenges of speed and immediacy*
- *Suggest guidelines, limitations and parameters regarding use by social media users at Circular Head Council.*

Objective
The objective of these guidelines is to provide employees with a framework for using social media.

Social media tools are to be used by Circular Head Council within the framework of one or more of the following:
- *in complement to other communication activities*
- *as part of a communications plan*
- *as part of a media strategy*
- *as part of a community engagement / consultation plan*
- *or as part of a crisis management plan*

Council selectively uses approved social media sites to:
- *enhance Council's reputation*
- *develop stronger relationships with community members*
- *provide an informal and accessible way for the public to communicate with Council*
- *support traditional media by broadening its reach and scope*
- *promote selected services, events, projects, policies and activities*
- *expand Council's community engagement opportunities*
- *provide essential updates to the community during a crisis or emergency*

Council also uses specific online media sites selectively to:
- *protect Council's reputation by monitoring social media activity that relates to Circular Head Council;*
- *place Council's statements of facts directly onto the public record; and*
- *to respond to or clarify an issue in detail.*

Terms and use of social media

Access – Administrators and use of Council equipment, Council identity and promotion of use of such social media must be approved by the General Manager.

Administration – All social media created must be able to be readily accessed, edited, improved or removed. The General Manager, through Information Technology staff will be responsible for the monitoring of all social media communications. Where appropriate some areas of responsibility may be delegated.

Approval – All proposed social media applications must be approved by the General Manager. Any material that is posted on social media must be done by an approved content author who has undergone appropriate training.

Authorship – The approved content authors are responsible to ensure all communications in social media are as follows:
- *ensuring any information about Council is accurate and factual;*
- *ensuring any information about Council is not disparaging of Council, its Councillors, officers/employees, servants, agents and their respective assignees and insurers; and*
- *ensuring all comments are expressed as personal opinions and not as those of Council.*

At all times the Mayor, Councillors and Officers need to be aware that despite privacy options many items posted in social media are publicly accessible. Therefore any posts are to be posted using best judgement and in the knowledge that any content can negatively affect the person who sent the post, Council and the community.

Breaches *– Any breaches of this policy will be recorded. Circular Head Council reserves the right to remove, where possible, content that violates these guidelines or any associated policies or guidelines; such as the Council's Code of Conduct.*

Staff and elected members must comply fully with the policy at all times. If you are not sure if an activity complies, speak to your Manager, General Manager or Mayor. Non-compliance is a serious matter and appropriate action will be taken.

Complaints in regards to social media will be sent to the Communications Officer who will form a review panel with a representative of Human Resources, the staff member's manager or relevant department manager and an independent person for review. If one of these people is a subject of the complaint, the General Manager will determine who will be represented on the review panel. The review panel will be responsible for recommending an appropriate course of action, which is then to be implemented by the staff member's manager or relevant department manager. Serious breaches may be also taken further to be considered by the Senior Management Team, the General Manager and Councillors. Any disciplinary matter relating to social media is to be addressed using the existing grievance and dispute resolution procedure as outlined in Council's current Enterprise Agreement.

Nothing in this policy should be interpreted as diminishing or attempting to diminish an employee's right to engage in lawful industrial activities.

An Elected Member breaching this policy may be subject to a Code of Conduct complaint (as per the Local Government Act 1993 and the Local Government (General) Regulations 2005.

Social media users who are found to be in breach of these guidelines may be subject to disciplinary action, which could include termination of employment.

Content *- Business units who establish social media sites are responsible for publishing and updating these pages.*

While it will be the responsibility of the business unit to maintain the content, the General Manager will monitor the content on these pages to ensure 1) a consistent Council wide message is being conveyed and 2) adherence to the Social Media Policy.

The General Manager also reserves the right to direct business units to modify social media content based on best practices and industry norms. The content of Council's social media presences should meet the social media strategy in terms of language and tone.

Social media is built around the concept of 'conversation'. It is not, fundamentally, a marketing, propaganda or sales channel controlled by Circular Head Council with disregard for stakeholder opinions and positions. Social media users should always be courteous, patient and respectful.

All posts are to be:
- *Accurate*
- *Truthful*
- *Transparent*
- *Professional*
- *Fair and respectful*
- *Corrected if found to be incorrect*

Posts should not contain or demonstrate any of the following behaviours:
- *Abusive, profane or sexual language*
- *Commercial solicitations or transactions*
- *Content not relating to the subject matter of that blog, board, forum or site*
- *Copyright or ownership protected materials*
- *Discriminatory material including age, industrial activity/inactivity, disability/impairment, status as a parent/carer, gender identity, marital status, parental status, political opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, breastfeeding, race or social origin, religious beliefs/activity, sex or lawful sexual orientation, employment activity, personal association and irrelevant criminal conviction*
- *Illegal 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 or its stakeholders and/or their reputation into disrepute*
- *Spam, meaning the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages.*

Disclaimers and House Rules *- Any social media software used, or sites created by Circular Head Council must feature easily accessible disclaimers that separate 'official' Council positions from personal publishing opinions. Please see Circular Head Council House Rules for information.*

Disclosure *- The approved content authors are responsible to ensure any posted content acknowledges any use of copyrighted, proprietary, private or trademarked material. Only publicly available information should be posted. If in doubt seek approval from the General Manager.*

External Sites and Terms of Service *– All approved content authors are to be made aware of and practice within the terms of any applicable End User Licence Agreement (EULA) and relevant legislation when posting content on behalf of Council.*

Information *– All information is to be provided by approved content authors in their relevant area of expertise. Any information outside this area is to be sourced from the appropriate department. All information should be presented in an accurate, constructive, helpful and informative manner. As per the disclosure section of this policy, only publicly available information should be posted. If in doubt seek approval from the General Manager.*

Making comments about Council – *In using social media for personal communication, staff and elected members must not purport to represent the Council. It is permissible to mention where you work provided the website is appropriate for people of all ages – e.g. not a gambling or adult website, but you must make it clear you don't speak on behalf of council.*

Employees can post public information about Council – that is information which can be found on Council's website. They may also join and participate in official Council social media sites.

In using social media for personal communications, employees must not:
- *damage the reputation of Council,*
- *use Council's intellectual property or copyrighted materials,*
- *disclose sensitive or confidential information, or*
- *post offensive of defamatory comments – particularly about the Council, council employees or elected members.*

Consideration should be given to the following:
1. *Could what you are doing harm the reputation of your Council?*
2. *Are you disclosing Council material that you are not authorised to disclose?*
3. *Have you made it clear to others when your contribution is as a private individual, not an employee of council?*
4. *Are you willing to defend your post to your Manager?*
5. *Would you be comfortable saying it to a stranger at a bus stop or posting in on a public shop window?*
6. *Are you behaving with integrity, respect and accountability?*

Media Relations – *Any requests for comment to media outlets made through social media should be referred to via the terms prescribed in Council's Communication Policy for the Media.*

Monitoring – *Circular Head Council will actively monitor the social media space for relevant contributions that impact on the municipality, its operations, reputation and colleagues. As part of this process Council will be able to find – and act upon – contributions made by its own social media user if deemed necessary.*

Council will monitor all email and internet access through Council's computer and internet facilities. Internet monitoring logs include site details, username, date, time and other data. It is the responsibility of approved content authors to record all interactions in social media that is posted on behalf of Council. Employees must not use personal accounts to make adverse comments about Council its programs, services, projects, other employees or decisions.

In appropriate circumstances, Council may also refer conduct to the Police or other authorities. Non compliance with the Social Media Policy will be managed through the relevant Code of Conduct and other disciplinary systems.

Personal use of Social Media In work time - *Council supports the use of social media for professional purposes such as communicating with fellow employees or professional colleagues, acquiring or sharing information, and use for educational or professional development activities. All personal use of Social Media whether in work time or outside work should comply with the Personal Social Media Guidelines.*

Incidental use of social media during work time is permissible provided use of equipment and consumption of space on network is kept to a minimum and does not compromise, pre-empt or impact adversely upon council business. Such use should not interfere with productivity, effectiveness and legitimate work activities and the time spent on personal use must be kept to minimum. Excessive use will not be tolerated. Council staff should also recognise that any material posted online can be stored by unknown bases for unknown periods of time as per the applicable terms and conditions of the site posted.

Council will provide notice if monitoring of social media usage is to be introduced.

Records Management *– Information posted in social media is subject to public disclosure. Therefore it is the responsibility of approved content authors to record all interactions in social media that is posted on behalf of Council. This includes (but is not limited to) comments, email, followers, friends, posts and subscriber lists.*

Response Time *– Circular Head Council will clearly identify on all social media tools where possible an appropriate response time to social media posts. This response time will be in accordance with times as established in Council's Customer Service Charter.*

Review and Evaluation *– Circular Head Council commits to a regular review and evaluation of the use of social media and its benefit to the community. It is therefore incumbent on approved content authors to record all social media activities.*

Many thanks to Curtin University for the use of the Personal and Professional Social Media Guidelines, which were created with thanks also to DePaul University and Laurel Papworth who provided resources, links and content that contributed to the development of this document. Also thanks to Moonee Valley Council, Frankston City Council, Local Government Association of Tasmania and the Communications Council of Australia.