



### RATIONALE/BACKGROUND

These guidelines are designed to ensure effective and appropriate use of online platforms for the purpose of delivering Council information, promotion of Council and community activities and encouraging community engagement.

These guidelines cover:

- Corporate use of online platforms;
- Elected Member use of official Councillor online platforms; and
- Personal use of online platforms by Elected Members, Authorised Representatives and Staff.

### OVERVIEW

Council's Online platforms Policy outlines the roles within Council that have permission to represent Council on online platforms, and the responsibilities regarding online platforms use by Elected Members and Staff.

### GUIDELINES

#### 1. CORPORATE USE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS

Individuals intending to use online platforms to communicate on behalf of Council should ensure they have appropriate authorisation from the Mayor and/or General Manager. All online platforms activity must occur in line with permissions and the following procedures:

##### 1.1 Developing, posting and responding to content

Uploaded content must only disclose information which is suitable for the public domain. In developing, posting and responding to content, Authorised Representatives must:

- uphold the values of the Council by acting with respect, integrity and professionalism;
- ensure that relevant legislation has been complied with and that Council codes, policies and procedures are adhered to;
- avoid political bias;
- avoid conflicts of interest.

When developing, posting and responding to content, Authorised Representatives must not:

- use abusive, profane or sexually explicit language;
- undertake commercial solicitations or transactions except in accordance with an agreed Council strategy;
- use copyright or ownership protected materials without appropriate approvals;

Doc No: CG031	Version No: 1	Approval Date: 14 December 2023
Responsibility: General Manager	Approved By: Council	Review Date: 14 December 2027



- be discriminatory, defamatory, or encourage law breaking;
- compromise Council, employee or system safety;
- spam; or
- air personal campaigns.

### 1.2 Removing content

Council reserves the right to remove certain content such as illegal or offensive material.

Comments that negatively impact the experience of other community members (including Council Staff) may also be removed. Those posting such comments will receive a warning. If members of the public continue to post such comments after receiving two warnings, they may be blocked from the page.

Comments that contravene the House Rules (see below) may also be removed.

### 1.3 House rules

The following house rules apply to all Council official Facebook pages and will be posted clearly for public to access.

This online platforms channel is maintained by Circular Head Council. This is a supportive online community that is built on respect. Everyone is encouraged to participate in an open and constructive conversation about relevant topics. This page supports the Facebook Statement of Rights and Responsibilities and related policies – and requests visitors to this page do the same.

<https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/>

This page is moderated in a way which recognises that everyone has a right to comment and engage with the content in a way which may be positive, neutral or negative. Council reserves the right to remove content that:

- harasses, abuses or threatens an Elected Member, Council staff or a member of the public
- discriminates based on age, gender, impairment, political beliefs, race, religion or sexuality;
- contains obscene or offensive language;
- constitutes spam or solicits business;
- is unlawful or incites others to break the law;
- might compromise the safety or security of the public;
- is misleading, off-topic, knowingly false or mischievous.

Repeated contravention of these rules will result in the person responsible being blocked from the page. Comments that negatively impact the experience of other community members (including Council Staff) may also be removed and those

Doc No: CG031	Version No: 1	Approval Date: 14 December 2023
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posting such comments will receive a warning. If offending comments continue after receiving two warnings, the person responsible may be blocked from this page.

This page is not for official complaints, requests for service or feedback and contributions to the page will not be treated as official correspondence requiring Council action. Please see Council's Customer Service Charter for details on official contact methods or contact Council here

<https://www.circularhead.tas.gov.au/our-council/feedback-form>

### 1.4 Managing public comment on Council online platforms

Where practical, Authorised Representatives will monitor official Council online platforms content daily during business hours and establish whether:

- content is factual, accurate and up-to-date.
- posts are relevant.
- comments need removal.

Whilst Authorised Representatives will attempt to answer simple matters with a direct response, most matters cannot be resolved through online platforms.

Responding to individual comments will generally NOT occur unless:

- a response will correct a factual error that will likely make a message clearer for other users or if the factual error may cause reputational harm to Council.
- a response will provide information that will benefit the wider audience.

### 1.5 Direct messaging through Council's online platforms

Comments/enquiries/complaints/requests for service made via direct message through Council's online platforms will not be considered official correspondence and therefore are not subject to the Customer Service Charter guidelines.

If a community member sends a request/comment through online platforms they will receive an automated message requesting they submit their message via Council's approved feedback channels via email, phone or website forms.

### 1.6 Commenting as Council

Only those Authorised Representatives as outlined in these guidelines may post, reply or comment on any site on behalf of Council.

Doc No: CG031	Version No: 1	Approval Date: 14 December 2023
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## **1.7 Sharing of third-party content**

*Authorised Representatives may choose to share posts or online platforms content from third party sites. Material shared should:*

- abide by these guidelines;
- be of broad public interest or benefit (e.g. public health notices);
- be of specific interest to the local community (e.g. a local event);
- not unduly benefit one private business or entity over another.

## **1.8 Prohibited or offensive activities**

Elected Members and Authorised Representatives must not:

- post or respond to material that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist or infringes copyright.
- establish fictitious identities deliberately intended to deceive, mislead or lie.
- bring Council's integrity into disrepute or harm Council's operations or reputation.
- use Council's intellectual property or copyrighted materials.
- disclose sensitive or confidential information.
- use Council sites for personal use (eg. advertising items for sale).

## **1.9 Privacy and confidentiality**

Personal and sensitive information cannot be published without the permission of the person to which that information belongs.

No person is permitted to disclose confidential Council information, including but not limited to matters relating to closed meetings of Council.

## **1.10 Public content**

Any activities on online platforms should be considered public activities. Despite the availability of privacy functions on online platforms websites, the possibility exists for content to be shared beyond intended recipients. The terms and conditions of use for most online platforms sites state that all content becomes the property of the site on which it is posted, therefore online content is essentially permanent and should never be considered by the author as private.

## **1.11 Infringements**

Persons covered under the policy scope who engage in infringing workplace behaviour may be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the Circular Head Council Enterprise Agreement or Councillor Code of Conduct.

Doc No: CG031	Version No: 1	Approval Date: 14 December 2023
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## 2. ELECTED MEMBER USE OF OFFICIAL COUNCILLOR SITES

2.1 This advice relates to the following types of online platforms:

- **A Councillor's official online platforms sites** - You are identified as a councillor on this page and the page is predominantly about your work as a Councillor.
- **A Councillor's election campaign online platforms sites:** You are identified as a Councillor and your activity on this page is predominantly about campaigning for re- election.

### 2.2 Councillor responsibilities

Councillors are responsible for the management of their own official online platforms, and it is important councillors understand:

- Councillors are held to a higher standard of conduct than the general public and Councillors accept this as an obligation of public office.
- How to moderate comments on online platforms as a Councillor.
- How to deal with complaints lodged via online platforms.
- What constitutes a 'public record' on online platforms and how these need to be managed.
- Specific requirements for using online platforms during an election period.

### 2.3 Making comments about Council

The use of online platforms by an Elected Member is no different to using any other communication tool, and as such is subject to the guidelines of the relevant Councillor Code of Conduct.

The following questions provide an effective litmus test for whether a post is appropriate. When commenting, consideration should be given to the following:

- Could what you are doing harm the reputation of your Council?
- Are you disclosing Council material that you are not authorised to disclose?
- Have you made it clear to others when your contribution is as a private individual, not an elected member of Council?
- Are you willing to defend your post to your fellow Councillors/work colleagues?
- Would you be comfortable saying it to a stranger at a bus stop or posting in on a public shop window?
- Are you behaving with integrity, respect and accountability?

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## ONLINE PLATFORMS GUIDELINES

### 2.4 Content standards

All Councillors are required to show respect for all persons and differences of opinion when engaging with the community.

To uphold Council values when using official Councillor online platforms sites it is recommended Elected Members:

- ensure that comments do not reflect adversely on the reputation of Council and/or local government.
- maintain confidentiality of local government information that is not publicly available.
- do not undermine the position of other Councillors or Staff.
- do not attempt to unduly influence other Councillors or Staff or undermine public confidence in Council and its processes.
- are aware that personal comments about public issues may compromise their capacity to perform in an unbiased manner.
- ensure comments do not indicate that they have come to a conclusive view on a matter coming before Council, prior to fully considering a proposal.

Any conduct on online platforms which breaches the Councillor Code of Conduct is inappropriate. This includes behaving in a way which contradicts the Local Government principles outlined in the Code of Conduct including transparency, meaningful community engagement, social inclusion and ethical and legal behaviour.

Councillors are encouraged to publish a link to these guidelines on their official sites.

### 2.5 Moderating comments on official Councillor online platforms

It is important that the general public can comment and engage with Councillors – making comments which may be positive, neutral or negative.

It is equally as important that there are clear guidelines as to what acceptable online platforms engagement looks like, in what circumstances comments may be hidden or deleted, or when a person may be blocked from the page.

These guidelines are intended to provide a set of standards for acceptable online platforms behaviour for both the Councillor and the general public.

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## ONLINE PLATFORMS GUIDELINES

If there is a need to delete or hide online platforms comments or block a user from your page (e.g., if the post is offensive), the offending person should be referred to Council's online platforms house rules outlined in 1.3 of this document

### 2.6 Dealing with Complaints

If an individual appears to be making a complaint about either you, another Councillor or the Council in general, Councillors should refer the complainant to the appropriate avenue to have their complaint heard.

If the complaint appears to be against a Councillor, a suggested

response is: Hi [name],

The official way to lodge a complaint against an elected member in Tasmania can be viewed here: <https://www.circularhead.tas.gov.au/our-council/councillors/the-role-of-the-council-and-of-councillors>

If the complaint is about Council in general a suggested response is:

Hi [name],

Sorry you feel that way. If you want to lodge this feedback, our official council complaint and feedback channels are the correct way to raise your issue. You can find out how to do this here <https://www.circularhead.tas.gov.au/our-council/feedback-form>

### 2.7 Specific requirements for using online platforms during an election period

Election material includes anything intended to influence an elector about voting at an election or affect the result of an election.

If a Councillor uses online platforms to campaign for an election, their account must state the name and address (other than a post office box) of the person who authorised the account.

If a Councillor posts any videos, images, or other material that can be downloaded and distributed separately from their account as a distinct piece of election material, it is recommended that those videos, images or materials include the same authorisations.

A Councillors' post on online platforms (both official and personal accounts) must not:

- mislead or intend to mislead an elector about the ways of voting at the

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## ONLINE PLATFORMS GUIDELINES

election.

- contain a false statement of fact about the personal character or conduct of the candidate, if you knew it was false when you made the post.
- purport to be a representation of a ballot paper for use in the election, if it is likely to induce an elector to cast an informal vote.
- contain information which is factually inaccurate.

### 3. PERSONAL USE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS

As an Elected Member, Authorised Representative or Council Staff, personal use of any online platforms must comply with Council's Online platforms Policy.

Personal use of online platforms must not:

- purport to represent or speak on behalf of the Council;
- damage the reputation of Council or breach any Council policy;
- use Council's intellectual property or copyrighted materials;
- disclose sensitive or confidential information;
- disclose information before Council has officially released it; or
- post offensive, harassing, or defamatory comments.

Persons covered under the policy scope who engage in behaviour that does not comply with Council's Online platforms policy and these guidelines will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the Circular Head Council Enterprise Agreement or the Councillor Code of Conduct, whichever applies.

General guidelines for personal online platforms use are:

- Use common sense and be thoughtful how you present yourself – if you wouldn't say it in public don't say it online.
- Respect your audience, and colleagues.

Nothing in these guidelines should be interpreted as diminishing or attempting a person's right to engage in lawful activities as individuals expressing opinions that are clearly identified as their own.

### REFERENCES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Circular Head Council Online platforms Policy

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