



SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE

COUNCILLORS

1. PURPOSE

The *Social Media Guide - Councillors* has been developed to promote and guide the use of social media by the elected Councillors of Whitehorse City Council. Social media provides opportunities to build communities and to encourage online conversations through the exploration and consideration of diverse thoughts and views.

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.

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 might not represent the position of Council.*'

It should be considered in conjunction with relevant legislation, the *Councillor Code of Conduct*, the *Media Relations Policy*, 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 to conduct Council business. It aims to:

- Outline acceptable use of social media on behalf 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 the course of fulfilling their functions and duties to Council; 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. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Pinterest, WeChat, Weibo)
- Video and photo sharing websites (e.g. YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, Vimeo, Periscope, Vine, Youku)
- 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
- Geo-spatial tagging (e.g. Google maps, Foursquare)
- Online gaming platforms (e.g. Gamification apps, Fortnite, Second life, Pokémon Go)
- 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

5. GUIDELINES

Whitehorse City Council recognises that social media provides new opportunities for dynamic and engaging two-way communications that can complement existing communication and further improve information, access and delivery of key services.

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 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.

5.3 It is Councillors’ responsibility to manage their social media accounts including creating and sharing content, gaining permissions for the use of images and other materials if required and monitoring comments.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 When using social media to conduct Council business, Councillors should not publish content in exchange for reward of any kind.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.1 Councillors are responsible for:
 1. Exercising their responsibilities and obligations as outlined in the *Local Government Act 1989*, the *Councillor Code of Conduct* and the *Media Relations Policy* to, among other things, act with integrity and impartially discharge his or her own responsibilities in the interests of the local community.
 2. Being mindful they do not post, like or comment on abusive or inappropriate content, or materials that would breach applicable laws.
 3. Seeking approval from the Strategic Marketing and Communications Team when using Council branding on social media content they have created.
 4. 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.
 5. Continuing to redirect Council enquiries or service requests via customer.service@whitehorse.vic.gov.au or Snap Send Solve respectively.
 6. Not committing Council or Council officers to actions, or undertakings, and not reproducing internal communications without prior permission from the relevant General Manager.
 7. Seeking agreement from the relevant General Manager to publish photos of Council staff on social media if a photo permission form has not been completed.
 8. Re-sharing content and posts from Council's official social media and web platforms where applicable.
 9. Seeking training and development in the use of social media from the Strategic Marketing and Communications department.
 10. Understanding and complying with the provisions in this guide and seeking advice from the Strategic Marketing and Communications department if unsure about applying the provisions of this guide.
- 6.2 The Strategic Marketing and Communications 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 is 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 Relations Policy

The following legislation relates to this guide:

- *Copyright Act 1968*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982*
- *Local Government Act 1989*
- *Information Privacy Act 2000*
- *Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act 2003*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*

INTERNAL USE ONLY

8. REVIEW

Responsible Manager: Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications.

Date Adopted: October 2019

Review Date: Commencement of new Council (2020)

This guide has been reviewed for Human Rights Charter compliance.