

EXE 032: ELECTED MEMBER SOCIAL MEDIA

Document Status:	Current	CM Ref:	D21/28773[v2]
Responsible Officer:	Manager Marketing & Communications	Version No:	2
Date Adopted:	August 2021	Resolution #:	O0821-143
Date Reviewed:	January 2022	Resolution #:	O0122-012

Objective

The Council is committed to engaging with the Esperance community and enhancing existing communication and information circulation. Social media has increasingly become an essential part of daily life and method of communication. The use of social media by the Shire and the Elected Members can enhance communication, engagement and collaboration with our community, and share the positive and professional identity of our organisation.

Definitions

Social media includes all of the means by which information in the form of text, still and video images, sound files, data or preferences are communicated to an audience of more than one via the internet. Some examples of popular social media are:

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+)
- Blog posts including video and podcasts
- Video hosts (e.g. Youtube, Vimeo)
- Image sharing sites (e.g. Flickr, Instagram and Pinterest)
- Text or voice chat
- Forums or discussion groups
- Geolocation based media (e.g. Foursquare)
- Wikis and online collaborations (e.g. Wikipedia)
- "The Shire" refers to the Shire of Esperance as an organisation/governing body.
- "Code of Conduct" refers to the Code of Conduct - Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.

Related Documents

- Code of Conduct - Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates
- *Local Government Act 1995*
- *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997*

Policy Scope

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance and direction for the use of social media by Elected Members to meet the expectations of the community and their professional requirements, particularly engaging with the community in both a private and public capacity. With new forms of social media continuously being developed, it is not possible to provide a definitive list of all, or even the most significant types of social media.

Policy

Social media, in its various forms, plays a huge role in the public forum and offers a public means for discussion around council and community issues, particularly around high-profile or topical issues/decisions, especially in the lead-up to Council Meetings and Local Government Elections. Social media can help remove barriers in engaging wide sectors of the community and enhance existing communications and information circulation. One of the roles of Elected Members is to facilitate communications between the community and Council. Communication via social media means that our community has come to expect instant responses from Elected Officials. Where social media encourages short and attention-grabbing statements, the community expects thoughtful, well-reasoned and responsible communications from its representatives. The existing expectations around professional conduct such as those contained in the Code of Conduct and *Local Government Act 1995* apply.

As part of Elected Members induction into Council, a training session will be convened to provide advice to all Elected Members on the best practice use of social media in their role.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Code of Conduct and form part of Council's policies, codes and decisions. A breach of these guidelines may be considered a breach of the Code.

It is important to remember that the use of social media is not without risk and the speed and reach of publishing online means content is available immediately to a wide audience. Anything posted can be difficult to delete and may be replicated endlessly. It may be sent to, or seen by people the author never intended or expected.

Elected Members must not make 'improper use of office' to cause detriment to the Shire or another local government. Standards for Elected Members include the requirement to avoid damage to the reputation of the Shire and the legal fidelity to the Council. It is important to ensure the language and approach used online is consistent with what the community would expect from an Elected Member and meets the requirements of the Code of Conduct.

It is important that when an Elected Member is posting, commenting or liking posts/comments on social media that they think about the language and tone. When commenting it is essential for Elected Members to communicate that their comment/s are their **own personal opinion**, not those of the Council. Comments by Elected Members of the Council have the capacity to affect the Shire's reputation.

Private Profiles and Private Groups

Nothing that is posted online is truly 'private'. Private profile settings and private groups do not guarantee information is only seen by the target audience. Posts may have been screenshot and distributed to individuals, groups and organisations that were never intended to see the content, even after the original post has been deleted.

Privacy settings are not enough to stop someone who disagrees with what has been posted from screen shotting and using it.

Guidelines

Social media can help remove barriers in engaging wide sectors of the community and enhance existing communications and information circulation. The following information is provided to guide Elected Members in the preparation of social media content and responses. Elected Members should:

- remember the Shire President and the CEO are the official spokespersons for the Shire; any statements on behalf of the Council should only be made with specific authority.
- clearly label social media content and responses as personal views and not those of the Shire or the Council. A statement such as '*As an Elected Member for the Shire of*

Esperance the views expressed here are mine alone and should not be taken to represent the decisions and opinions of either the Council as a whole or its staff' will remove any ambiguity.

- ensure content is accurate, relevant and complies with current policies, if in doubt check with the CEO prior to publishing.
- not pre-empt announcements, posts etc. by the administration on behalf of Council.
- avoid offensive, defamatory, intimidating and provocative language, and avoid commenting on or liking posts that contain this type of language.
- avoid making personal comments about other Elected Members, staff or members of the community.
- maintain a positive and respectful tone.
- adhere to copyright, privacy, defamation, discrimination, harassment and other applicable laws.
- observe confidentiality.
- remember Council decision making is by majority, and whilst there may be decisions that are disagreed with, alternative points of view should be made respectfully and constructively.
- where requests for service or official feedback has been posted, comments should encourage direct contact with the Shire to enable the matter to be dealt with.
- where misinformation or factually incorrect information is posted, encourage the original poster to make contact with the Shire for clarification.
- liking, sharing or reacting to a post on social media is generally taken to be an endorsement of that material, as if you had created it yourself, and may be seen by a wider audience than intended.
- not make public statements expressing their opinion on matters before the Council that would indicate a predetermined voting position.

The intent of this Policy is not to stifle Elected Members using social media, but rather to ensure that comments, likes, posts and the use of all forms of social media by Elected Members are thoughtful, well-reasoned and responsible communications suited to their professional position and standing in the community and aligns with the adopted policies of the Council.

It is a statutory requirement for Shire staff to monitor relevant social media posts and retain them in the Shire's document management system for record keeping purposes.

Use of Social Media During Local Government Elections

During a Local Government election period social media may fall into the category of 'election material'. Election material is any material which is published in any format which is intended to affect the result of the election. All election material must contain the **name** and the **address** of the person who authorises the material. Therefore any social media which may in some way comment on Candidates or Council during an election campaign must meet the requirements of the *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997* and associated Regulations. Elected Members and Candidates should familiarise themselves with these requirements. If in doubt, act on the side of caution and refrain from using social media to make comment. Advice can be obtained from the Office of the CEO or Electoral Commissioner's delegate.

..... Policy Ends