



**Social Media Policy**





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## 1. Purpose

Bellinghen Shire Council is committed to keeping its local and wider community well informed about its activities.

This policy has been developed to:

- Outline the standards expected of Bellinghen Shire Council representatives (as defined in 3.2) when they engage in conversations and interactions on social media platforms for professional or personal use.
- Outline how Council will use its social media channels
- Protect the interests of Council through any social media activity.

This policy aims to promote and uphold the following principles relating to social media engagement:

<b>Openness</b>	Our social media pages are places where anyone can share and discuss issues that are relevant to our Council and the community we represent and serve.
<b>Relevance</b>	We will ensure our social media accounts are kept up to date with informative content about our Council and community.
<b>Accuracy</b>	The content we upload onto our social media pages and any other social media platform will be a source of truth for our Council and community and we will prioritise the need to correct inaccuracies when they occur.
<b>Respect</b>	Our social media pages are safe spaces. We will uphold and promote the behavioural standards contained in this policy and our Council's code of conduct when using our social media platforms and any other social media platform.

## 2. Policy Scope

This policy applies to:

- Councillors
- Staff, contractors and volunteers authorised to administer, or contribute to any of Council's social media pages
- Staff and contractors using personal social media accounts.

## 3. Definitions

### 3.1 Definition of social media

Social media is any digital platform or application that allows people to easily publish, share and discuss content. This may include, but is not limited to, social networking sites, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites, and message boards. Social media is often used for communication, marketing, collaboration, discussion and debate amongst the networks of users.

For Bellinghen Shire Council, social media is used to:

- Communicate and engage with our residents, ratepayers and customers
- Raise awareness, inform and educate regarding the various Council and community initiatives
- Create meaningful interactions between Council and the community
- Gather insights and feedback from community members



- Refer community members to detailed information on Council’s website or instruct them on how to make an enquiry through existing customer service procedures.

This policy relates and applies to established Bellingen Shire Council social media accounts and pages, but is not limited to:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Have your say
- Council’s Intranet.

This includes Council’s primary page (Bellingen Shire Council), as well as other secondary pages associated with Council (such as libraries and Section 355 Committees).

### 3.2 The following definitions apply throughout this policy.

<b>Act</b>	means the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> (NSW).
<b>Authorised user</b>	means Council employees who are authorised by the General Manager or Social Media Coordinator to upload content and engage on the Council’s social media accounts on the Council’s behalf.
<b>Clause</b>	unless stated otherwise, means a reference to a clause is a reference to a clause of this policy.
<b>Code of Conduct</b>	means the Code of Conduct adopted by Council.
<b>Council</b>	means Bellingen Shire Council.
<b>Council representative</b>	means an individual who is responsible for delivering a service or activity on behalf of Council. These individuals could be considered (but not limited to): <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Councillors</li><li>• Council employees</li><li>• Contractors (engaged under a contract for services with Council)</li><li>• Council volunteers</li></ul>
<b>Councillor</b>	means a person elected or appointed to civic office as a member of the governing body of council who is not suspended, including the mayor.
<b>Personal Information</b>	means information or an opinion (including information or an opinion forming part of a database and whether or not recorded in a material form) about an individual whose identity is apparent or can reasonably be ascertained from the information or opinion
<b>Social media</b>	means any digital platform or application that allows people to easily publish, share and discuss content. This may include, but is not limited to, social networking sites, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites, and message boards. Examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, YouTube, Reddit and TikTok.
<b>Worker</b>	means an employee, a contractor or subcontractor, an employee of a contractor or subcontractor, a student gaining work experience or a volunteer.



#### **4. Related Legislation, Guidance and Policies**

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following legislation:

- Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)
- Local Government (General) Regulation 2021
- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA)
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act (NSW) 1998 (PPIPA)
- State Records Act 1998

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following NSW Government publications:

- Code of Conduct for Councils in NSW
- Child Safe Standard

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following Council documents:

- Bellingen Shire Community Vision 2035
- Bellingen Shire Council Code of Conduct
- Bellingen Shire Council Community Engagement Policy
- Bellingen Shire Council Records Management Policy
- Bellingen Shire Council Disaster Communications Plan
- Bellingen Shire Council Access to Information Guidelines



## **5. Policy Statement**

The Bellingin Shire Council is dedicated to delivering excellent customer service and effective communication within our community. Council acknowledges the importance of social media as a medium to engage with our residents, ratepayers, and customers.

This policy applies to all Council representatives who use social media for professional or personal purposes during and outside of work hours.

Council encourages Councillors, employees, contractors and volunteers to use social media responsibly and professionally, with a focus on enhancing customer service and community engagement. It is expected that all social media interactions be respectful and comply with relevant codes of conduct, privacy laws, and our Community Engagement Policy.

Council aims to effectively use social media platforms to enhance community engagement, and expects all employees, Councillors and members of the public to use this policy as a guide for best practices.

### **5.1 Council use of social media**

Bellingin Shire Council uses social media in a strategic capacity to engage with and inform community members of the various Council initiatives, projects and services.

Council also uses social media to help achieve its vision as set out in its Community Vision 2035 – including a community that is inclusive, connected to each other in our shire, and with connections beyond – regionally, nationally, and globally. It does by interacting with the community, providing valuable information and celebrating the Bellingin Shire through engaging social media content.

## **6. Roles and Responsibilities**

Council strives to uphold its principles of openness, relevance, accuracy and respect on its primary and secondary social media channels.

It is therefore integral that the administration of Council's social media pages is supervised by a senior and suitably qualified member of staff. The General Manager will appoint one or more suitably qualified members of Council staff as Council's designated Social Media Coordinator.

### **6.1 Social Media Coordinator**

The Social Media Coordinator's role is to:

- a) approve and revoke a staff member's status as an authorised user
- b) develop and/or approve the training and/or induction for authorised users
- c) maintain a register of authorised users
- d) maintain effective oversight of authorised users
- e) moderate Council's social media accounts in accordance with the Moderation section of this policy
- f) ensure Council complies with its record-keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998 in relation to social media (see clause 9 of this policy)
- g) ensure Council adheres to the rules of the social media platform(s)
- h) coordinate with the Council's Communications team to ensure the Council's social media accounts are set up and maintained in a way that ensures user-friendliness and any technical problems are resolved promptly
- i) maintain relevant social media passwords in collaboration with Council's Information Technology department
- j) maintain 'House Rules' for Council social media accounts, outlining expectations for social media users when interacting with Council.



The General Manager may delegate function of the Social Media Coordinator, under paragraphs (a), (e) and (f), to Authorised Users.

The Social Media Coordinator is an authorised user for the purposes of this policy.

## **6.2 Authorised Users**

An Authorised User is a member of Council staff who is granted permission by the Social Media Coordinator to upload content and engage on social media on the Council's behalf. This relates to content distributed on Council's primary and secondary channels.

Council's primary social media pages (i.e., Bellingen Shire Council) are administered by Council's Communications department to ensure consistency and tone of voice. However, staff members from other departments, volunteers and representatives may be authorised to assist with content development and scheduling.

Additional staff members, volunteers and representatives will also be authorised to administer Council's secondary pages, which may include but are not limited to libraries, tourism and section 355 committee groups.

Authorised Users should be members of Council staff that are considered by the Social Media Coordinator to have expertise in managing the events, initiatives, programs or policies that are the subject of the social media content.

Authorised Users must receive a copy of this policy and induction training on social media use and Council's obligations prior to uploading content or interacting on Council's behalf.

Authorised Users should be members of Council staff that are considered by the Social Media Coordinator to have expertise in managing the events, initiatives, programs or policies that are the subject of the social media content.

Authorised Users must receive a copy of this policy and induction training on social media use and Council's obligations prior to uploading content or interacting on Council's behalf.

The role of an Authorised User is to:

- a) ensure, to the best of their ability, that the content they upload onto social media platforms is accurate
- b) correct inaccuracies in Council generated content
- c) where appropriate, engage in discussions and answer questions on Council's behalf on social media platforms
- d) keep Council's social media accounts up to date
- e) moderate Council's social media accounts in accordance with the Moderation section of this policy
- f) ensure the Council complies with its record-keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998 in relation to social media.

Authorised Users must not use Council's social media accounts for personal reasons.

The Social Media Coordinator may revoke a staff member's status as an authorised user, if:

- a) the staff member makes such a request
- b) the staff member has failed to comply with this policy
- c) General Manager or Social Media Coordinator is of the reasonable opinion that the staff member is no longer suitable to be an Authorised User.



### 6.3 Councillors

Bellinghen Shire Council recognises the important role that elected Councillors have in informing the community and raising awareness of key initiatives through their social media pages.

For the purposes of this policy, Councillor social media pages are not considered Council social media accounts.

Councillors are responsible for the administration and moderation of their own social media accounts, and ensuring they comply with the record-keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998 and Council's records management policy in relation to social media.

This policy applies to Councillors in circumstances where another person administers, moderates, or uploads content onto their social media accounts.

#### a) Identifying as a Councillor

Councillors must identify themselves on their social media accounts in the following format:

- Councillor "First Name and Last Name".
- A Councillor's social media account must include a profile photo which is a clearly identifiable image of the Councillor.
- If a Councillor becomes or ceases to be the mayor, deputy mayor, or the holder of another position (for example, chairperson of a committee), this must be clearly stated on the Councillor's social media accounts and updated within five business days of a change in circumstances.

#### b) Other requirements of Councillors' social media accounts

Councillors are expected to adhere to the following requirements during their time as an elected official and representative of Bellinghen Shire Council:

- Councillor social media accounts must specify or provide a clearly accessible link to a 'House Rules' document for engaging on the platform.
- A Councillor's social media account must include a disclaimer to the following effect: "The views expressed and comments made on this social media page are my own and not that of the Council". Despite the above clause, Mayoral or Councillor media releases and other content that has been authorised according to the Council's media and communications protocols may be uploaded onto a Councillor's social media account.
- It is also recommended that Councillors include a disclaimer on individual social media posts, an example of this may be: *The views expressed on my social media pages are my own and are not representative of the Bellinghen Shire Council.*
- Councillors may upload publicly available Council information onto their social media pages.
- Councillors may use more personal, informal language when engaging on social media platforms.
- Questions from Councillors relating to their obligations under this policy, technical queries relating to the operation of their social media platforms, or managing records on social media may be directed to the General Manager in the first instance, in accordance with Council's Councillor requests protocols.
- A Councillor must advise the General Manager of any social media account or page they have an administrative role on where content relating to the Council or Council officials is, or is expected to be, uploaded. The Councillor must do so within:
  - Within five business days of becoming a Councillor,
  - Or within five business days of becoming the administrator.





Councillors may request the assistance of Council staff in adhering to the requirements listed above. This must be requested through the General Manager in the first instance.

Councillor use of social media is also governed by the Code of Conduct.

## **7. Guidelines for official use social media**

### **7.1 Guidelines for official use social media**

When administering a Council social media page, an Authorised User must adhere to the following guidelines:

- a) Be professional and respectful at all times
- b) Adhere to copyright, trademark, plagiarism and fair use laws
- c) Do not express any personal or political opinions which may damage Council's reputation
- d) Do not distribute any content that is considered political in nature, unless stating a resolved position of Council
- e) Do not commit Council to any action or initiative without appropriate authority/Council resolution
- f) Do not distribute images or quotes from Councillors, staff or other representatives without seeking appropriate permissions
- g) Do not engage in arguments with other social media users
- h) Never post anything that may be considered discrimination, bullying or harassment.

### **7.2 Establishment and Deletion of Council Social Media Accounts**

A new Council social media account or page, or a social media page proposed by a Council-related entity (for example, a Council committee), can only be established or deleted with the written approval of the General Manager or their delegate.

Where a Council social media account or page is established or deleted, the General Manager or their delegate may amend the accounts listed in this policy without the need for endorsement by the Council's governing body.

### **7.3 Moderation of Council social media channels**

Council endeavours to use social media to both inform and also as a means to gather valuable community feedback.

Social media accounts require frequent moderating and updating. Where appropriate, and subject to adequate resourcing, Council will respond to genuine questions from community members in a timely manner. This may involve directing social media users to further detail on its website or providing information about how to log service requests, feedback, and questions.

Council's social media accounts must state or provide an accessible link to a 'House Rules' document that clearly outlines expectations for engagement and interactions.

The House Rules document outlines the type of behaviour or content that will result in the removal or hiding of content, or a person being blocked or banned from Council's social media channel.

Prior to removing or 'hiding' the content, the moderator must make a record of the content (for example, a screenshot). A social media user may only be blocked or banned from a Council social media page with the approval of the General Manager and/or Social Media Coordinator.

A person may request a review of a decision to block or ban them from a social media page. The request must be made in writing to the General Manager and state the grounds on which the request is being made.



#### 7.4 Use of social media during emergencies

During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the Communications Lead (with approval from the General Manager) will be responsible for the management of content on Council's social media page (see Bellingen Shire Council's Disaster Communications Plan).

### 8. Personal use of social media

For the purposes of this policy, a Council representative's social media engagement will be considered 'personal use' when the content they upload:

- a) is not associated with, or does not refer to, the Council, any other Council officials, contractors, related entities or any other person or organisation providing services to or on behalf of the Council in their official or professional capacities, and
- b) is not related to or does not contain information acquired by virtue of their employment or role as a Council official.

If a Council official chooses to identify themselves as a Council official, either directly or indirectly (such as in their user profile), then they will not be deemed to be acting in their private capacity for the purposes of this policy.

Council notes that any activity on social media platforms is deemed public activity. Even though privacy settings are available, content can still be shared and accessed beyond the intended recipients.

While this policy does not aim to discourage or limit the use of social media, employees and contractors should be mindful of and understand the potential risks and damage to Council that can arise, either directly or indirectly, from their personal use of social media.

Council workers have a responsibility of privacy and confidentiality towards Council at all times and should not post confidential or sensitive information on personal social media accounts.

Council representatives are reminded that they can be identified as a staff member in a number of ways and should refrain from posting any material that may impact Council's reputation or bring Council into disrepute (as outlined in in the Model Code of Conduct), including sensitive, confidential or personal information.

Staff members must not speak on Council's behalf through their personal social media usage (unless with express authority). This includes but is not limited to, replying to commentary on Council-related services and initiatives. Any concerns or suggestions from staff or Council representatives regarding the moderation of Council accounts should be directed to the Social Media Coordinator or an Authorised User for consideration.

### 9. Records Management

Media content created and received by Council officials (including Councillors) acting in their official capacity is a Council record and may be subject to information access applications made under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009. These records must also be managed in accordance with the requirements of the State Records Act 1998 and the Council's approved records management policies and practices.

Council representatives should refer to any guidance issued by the State Archives and Records Authority of NSW relating to retention requirements for councils' and councillors' social media content .

### 10. Compliance

Breaches of this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, in line with Council's Code of Conduct.



## **11. Document Governance Information**

### **11.1 Document Management Information**

Document Type:	Council Policy
Document Name:	Social Media Policy
Version No.	V1.1
Adopted by:	Council
Adoption date:	24 January 2024
Section / Department:	Organisational Strategy & Communication
Responsible Officer:	Communication & Engagement Lead
ECM Reference No.	INT24/4EE2359

### **11.2 Strategic Alignment**

Community Vision 2035	5 Civic Leadership
Objective	5.2 Our community is informed and engaged with a strong sense of civic leadership
Strategy	5.2.1 The community is engaged in decision-making and implementation using modern communication methods

## **12. Review**

This Council Policy should be reviewed at least every four years or as required due to significant legislative changes.