

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Policy Number:	1.4
Approved by:	Council
Date Approved:	December 2025
Date of Next Review:	December 2026
Applicable to:	Councillors, Council employees and temporary staff, volunteers, contractors and consultants engaged by Council
Responsible Officer:	Manager Customer and Communications
Related Policies:	Media and Communications Policy
Related Documents:	Employee Code of Conduct Model Councillor Code of Conduct Customer Service Charter Wellington Shire Council Social Media Guide – Staff Induction Wellington Shire Council Written Style Guide and Web Style Guide Wellington Shire Council Corporate Style Guide
Statutory Reference:	Nil

OVERVIEW

The objective of this policy is to provide understanding and guidance for the appropriate use of social media platforms and tools for the purpose of conducting Council business.

THE POLICY

This policy applies to Councillors, Council employees and temporary staff, volunteers, contractors consultants and work experience students engaged by Wellington Shire Council. This policy also applies to agencies and individuals who provide services to Wellington Shire Council.

The policy outlines requirements for compliance with confidentiality, governance, legal, privacy and regulatory parameters when using social media to conduct Council business. It aims to:

- Inform appropriate use of social media tools for Wellington Shire Council
- Promote effective and productive community engagement through social media
- Minimise miscommunication or mischievous or damaging communications
- Ensure that only accurate information is shared on social media platforms

The policy applies to those digital spaces where people may comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload and share content, including:

- blogs; bulletin boards; citizen journalism and news sites
- forums and discussion boards; instant messaging facilities
- microblogging sites (e.g. X, Tumblr)
- online encyclopedias and wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)
- podcasts and video podcasts
- social media (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, X, Instagram, TikTok, Messenger, WhatsApp, Snapchat, YouTube, Vimeo)

- video and photo sharing sites (e.g. Flickr, Pinterest, Periscope)
- e-marketing software (Mailchimp or other)
- third-party event builders (Eventbrite, TryBooking or other) and;
- any other websites that allow individuals to use simple publishing tools or new technologies emerging from the digital environment.

The absence of a reference to a particular site or type of social media activity does not limit the application of this policy. Access to current social media channels can be discussed with the Communications and Media team.

This policy is not intended to cover personal use of social media where:

- The author publishes information in their personal capacity and not on behalf of Wellington Shire Council; and
- No reference is made to Wellington Shire Council, its Councillors, staff, policies and services, suppliers or other stakeholders or council related issues.

Where an employee refers to Council activities, issues, policy or Council decisions in their personal use of social media, Wellington Shire Council will consider whether the employee in doing so has breached Wellington Shire Council's Employee Code of Conduct. This policy should be read in conjunction with other relevant policies and procedures of Wellington Shire Council.

When using social media in relation to Council business, Councillors, employees and temporary staff, volunteers and contractors are expected to:

- Seek prior authorisation from the Communications and Media Unit.
- Adhere to codes of conduct, policies and procedures.
- Behave with caution, courtesy, honesty and respect.
- Comply with relevant laws and regulations.
- Reinforce the integrity, reputation and values of Wellington Shire Council.
- Forward any important social media activity to the Communications and Media unit for follow up.
- Direct stakeholders to official communication channels to make a request or complaint.
- Consider if comments on a post may be harmful to the reputation of Council and if warranted, moderate or remove comments as necessary in line with the rules of Council's social media channels.
- Act responsibly when communicating as Council, a Councillor or a Council representative on any social media channel and in particular, in online community groups.

The following content is not permitted under any circumstances:

- Abusive, profane or sexual language.
- Content not relating to the subject matter of that channel or website.
- Content which is false or misleading.
- Confidential information about Council or third parties.
- Copyright or Trademark protected materials.
- Content that uses Council brands, logos or identifiers without approval from the Communications and Media unit.
- Discriminatory material in relation to a person or group based on age, colour, creed,

disability, family status, gender, nationality, marital status, parental status, political opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, race or social origin, religious beliefs/activity, responsibilities, gender or sexual orientation.

- Illegal material or materials designed to encourage illegal activity.
- 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 Wellington Shire Council into disrepute.
- Personal details or references to Councillors, Council employees or third parties, which may breach privacy laws.
- Spam, meaning the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages.
- Statements that could be considered bullying or harassment.
- Council employees using their personal online profiles to comment or provide negative or trolling feedback on social media content about Council's community consultation, projects, works or Council issues.
- Council employees using their personal online profiles to comment or provide negative or trolling comments on content posted by elected Councillors to Councillor social media pages.
- Fake Council or employee profiles used to distribute or comment on Council content, content related to a Council decision, or content posted by a Councillor.
- Personal social media accounts linked to employee email addresses or similar.
- Posts to social media groups on behalf of Council. If an employee or Councillor wishes to post to a local community group on behalf of Council, they should seek approval from the Communications and Media unit.

In addition:

- Social media channels are monitored and updated by the Communications and Media Unit, or other employees as deemed necessary during normal business hours or as reasonably required.
- All employees with administrative access to social media profiles are expected to maintain the right to disconnect. This includes the ability to turn off comments to aid moderation and restrict publication of posts to between normal business hours (8am-5.30pm weekdays). Posting outside of these times may require moderation beyond normal working hours and is at the discretion of the responsible business unit, with support from the Communications and Media team.
- Council employees can make a request for online or social media promotion directly to the Communications and Media team. Councillors can do this by contacting the Manager Customer and Communications.
- Content posted to social media must have permissions and legible, high-quality imagery suitable for online purposes. Logos or other authorised imagery requires permission from the Communications and Media team before being posted on social media.
- Where a team or staff member would like to make significant updates to, or create a new social media page, request must be received from the business unit Manager, with a further request made to the Communications and Media team for consideration.
- Councillors may hold a public social media profile. Ownership remains that of the Councillor

who created it and Councillors must maintain responsibility for updating any content and moderating commentary. Councillors are required to advise the Manager Customer and Communications of the profile.

- Council employees must not comment or provide feedback on social media content concerning community consultation of projects or works. Issues should be passed on to the Communications and Media Unit to be addressed.
- Council employees using their own personal online profiles are permitted to share social media items on their preferred platforms and should do so in line with this policy.

When using social media in their private time via **personal accounts**, Councillors, Council employees and temporary staff, volunteers, contractors and consultants engaged by Council should not:

- Publish any information on behalf of Wellington Shire Council.
- Make any reference to Wellington Shire Council, its Councillors, employees, policies and services, suppliers, other stakeholders or Council-related issues.
- Upload photographs of themselves or their colleagues where they are easily identifiable as a Council employee (for example wearing a Council uniform, driving a Council vehicle), acting in an unprofessional or illegal manner.
- Use social media to bully, intimidate or harass current employees, contractors or stakeholders of Council.
- Rely on privacy settings, thinking your comments and/or photos are private.

Councillors may maintain a **public** social media profile. When using social media as a Councillor, the following guidelines should be followed in addition to the recommendations set out in this policy:

- Be cautious about distinguishing between fact and opinion when discussing Council matters.
- Encourage community members to follow Council's corporate social media channels and follow the Customer Service Policy for any inquiries.
- Refrain from speaking on behalf of Council on social media, particularly in community groups. Councillors are encouraged to share content from Council's main social media accounts.
- Do not commit Council to a decision on social media, Councillors cannot independently make a decision for Council on social media.
- Ensure any photos or videos uploaded satisfy Council's photography permission process or seek permission for use from the Communications and Media team.
- Do not discuss or share confidential information regarding Council matters on social media.

If you have any doubt about applying the provisions of this policy, check with the Communications and Media team before using social media to communicate. Depending upon the nature of the issue and potential risk, it may also be appropriate to consider seeking legal advice.

ENFORCEMENT

All content published or communicated on behalf of Wellington Shire Council using social media must be recorded (including the author's name, date, time and media site location) and kept on record.

Wellington Shire Council actively monitors social media for relevant contributions that impact on the municipality, its operations and reputation. Wellington Shire Council will be able to find and act upon contributions made by Councillors and Council employees if deemed necessary.

This policy will be published on Council’s website and promoted to Councillors, staff, volunteers and contractors of Wellington Shire Council. Breaching this policy may result in disciplinary action, performance management and review. Serious breaches may result in suspension or termination of employment or association.

REVISION HISTORY

VERSION	DATE	SUMMARY OF CHANGES
1.0	December 2022	Update of terminology, details referencing social media.
1.1	December 2023	Minor formatting and terminology updates. Date of Next Review updated to December 2024.
1.2	December 2024	Date of Next Review updated to: December 2025. Coordinator role updated to Manager Communications and Media. Further articulation of requirements for employees and Councillors. Minor update to language.
1.3	December 2025	Date of Next Review updated to December 2026. Responsible Officer: updated to Manager Customer and Communications. Added Work Experience students for whom policy applies to.