

Social Media Policy

Date Adopted: 23 July 2024

Version: 2.1

Policy Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Establish the role, function and purpose of Council's social media usage
- Limit the risk to Council's reputation through the communication of inaccurate information or inappropriate use of social media by council officials
- Provide a framework for the administration and management of social media platforms
- Outline the standard of conduct for all Council officials who use social media in their official capacity
- Provide a clear guide on the recording of information and privacy considerations.

Policy Scope

This policy applies to the official and private social media channels of councillors, the general manager, council officials and staff as it applies to Council's managed social media channels and the representation of Council on social media.

Policy Statement

Social media is at the heart of modern communication. Since its inception, social media has grown in popularity and influence and is now fundamental to not just how people interact with one another but also to how we work, play and consume information and social ideas. Maitland City Council is committed to using social media platforms as they offer an accessible, equitable, transparent, engaging and immediate two way conduit for Council to connect with the community. Maitland City Council will use social media to:

- be used as a communication channel to assist in efficient and effective service delivery
- promote, inform, educate, and engage with the community on Council's policies, projects, facilities, services and activities
- develop stronger relationships with the community
- provide an informal, timely and accessible way for the public to communicate with Council
- support traditional media and other communications methods by and increasing its overall reach.
- seek input into Council's decision making

- provide essential updates to the community during a crisis or emergency.

1. Principles

1.1 We, the councillors, staff and other officials of Maitland City Council are committed to upholding and promoting the following principles of social media engagement:

OPENNESS	Our social media platforms are places where anyone can share and discuss issues that are relevant to our Council and the community we represent and serve.
TRANSPARENCY	We will ensure our social media platforms are kept up to date with informative and relevant content about our Council and community.
HONESTY	The content we upload onto our social media platforms 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.
RESPECT	Our social media platforms 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. Administrative framework for Council's Social Media platforms

Platforms

2.1 Council will maintain a presence on the following social media platforms

- a. Facebook
 - I. Maitland City Council
 - II. My Maitland
 - III. Maitland Library
 - IV. Hunter Valley Steamfest
 - V. The Levee Central Maitland
 - VI. Maitland Gaol
 - VII. Bitter & Twisted Boutique Beer Festival
 - VIII. Maitland Regional Art Gallery
 - IX. Maitland Animal Management Facility
- b. Instagram
 - I. Maitland City Council
 - II. My Maitland
 - III. The Levee Central Maitland
 - IV. Maitland Regional Art Gallery
- c. LinkedIn
 - I. Maitland City Council
 - II. Maitland Regional Art Gallery
- d. YouTube
 - I. My Maitland
 - II. Maitland Regional Art Gallery
 - III. Bitter and Twisted Beer Festival
- e. Vimeo
 - I. Maitland City Council
- f. Snapchat
 - I. My Maitland

2.2 Council's social media platforms must specify or provide a clearly accessible link to the 'House Rules' for engaging on the platform.

Establishment and deletion of Council social media platforms

2.3 A new council social media platform, or a social media platform proposed by a council related entity (for example, a council committee), can only be established or deleted with the written approval from staff with the delegation to do so. Due consideration will be taken before any new social media platforms are established or deleted, including the management structure, internal reviews, cyber security, data management and impacts on workload capacity.

2.4 Where a council social media platform is established or deleted in accordance with clause 2.3, the Manager, Communications, Engagement and Marketing may amend clause 2.1 of this policy without the need for endorsement by the Council's governing body.

2.5 Annually, the Communications, Engagement and Marketing team will undertake an audit of all Council social media presences to review their continuing effectiveness and appropriateness to Council's needs. Social media presences that no longer required will be deleted following consultation with the relevant Executive Manager/Director.

Appointment and role of the Social Media Advisor

2.6 The Manager, Communication, Engagement and Marketing will ensure one or more members of Council's Marketing & Communications Team is authorised to act as the Social Media Advisor.

2.7 The Social Media Advisor'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 to be provided to authorised users
- c. maintain a register of authorised users
- d. maintain effective oversight of authorised users
- e. moderate the Council's social media platforms
- f. ensure any authorized users comply with Council's Notifiable Data Breach Policy and Privacy Policy
- g. ensure the Council complies with its record keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998
- h. ensure the Council adheres to the rules of the social media platform(s)
- i. coordinate with the Council's Marketing & Communications Team to ensure the Council's social media platforms are set up and maintained in a way that maximises user friendliness and any technical problems are resolved promptly.

2.8 The Social Media Advisor may delegate their functions under paragraphs (e) and (g) of clause 2.7 to authorised users.

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

Authorised users

2.10 Authorised users are members of council staff who are authorised with social media delegation to upload content and engage on social media on the Council's behalf.

2.11 Authorised users should be members of council staff that are responsible for managing, or have expertise in, the events, initiatives, programs or policies that are the subject of the social media content.

2.12 The Social Media Advisor will appoint authorised users with social media delegation when required.

2.13 An authorised user must receive a copy of this policy and induction training on social media use and Council's obligations before uploading content on Council's behalf.

2.14 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, allowed to be shared and is public information
- b. correct inaccuracies in Council generated content
- c. engage in discussions and answer questions on Council's behalf on social media platforms
- d. keep the Council's social media platforms up to date

e. where authorised to do so by the Social Media Advisor:

- moderate the Council's social media platforms in accordance with section 2.21 – 2.35 of this policy
- ensure the Council complies with its record keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998 in relation to social media.

2.15 When engaging on social media on Council's behalf (such as, but not limited to, on a community social media page), an authorised user must identify themselves as a member of Council staff but they are not obliged to disclose their name or position within the Council.

2.16 Authorised users must not use Council's social media platforms for personal reasons.

Administrative tone

2.17 Authorised users upload content and engage on social media on the Council's behalf. Authorised users must use language consistent with Council's Language and Writing Style Guide and avoid expressing or appearing to express their personal views when undertaking their role.

2.18 Authorised users may use more personal, informal language when engaging on Council's social media platforms, for example when replying to comments.

Register of users

2.19 The Social Media Advisor will maintain a register of authorised users with social media delegation. This register is to be reviewed annually to ensure it is fit for purpose.

Ceasing to be a user

2.20 The Social Media Advisor can revoke a staff member's status as an authorised user, if:

- a. the user makes such a request
- b. the user has not uploaded content onto any of the Council's social media platforms in the 28 days.
- c. the user has failed to comply with this policy
- d. The Social Media Advisor is of the reasonable opinion that the user is no longer suitable to be an authorised user

Moderation of council's social media platforms

2.21 Council staff who are responsible for the moderation of the Council's social media platforms may remove content and 'block' or ban a person from those platforms. Such actions must be undertaken in accordance with sections 2.21 – 2.35. This Part does not apply to councillor's social media platform.

2.22 Council staff must ensure they comply with the record keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998, Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009, Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998, Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 and Council's records management policy.

House Rules

2.23 Social media platforms must state or provide an accessible link to the 'House Rules' for engaging on the platform.

2.24 At a minimum, the House Rules should specify:

- a. the principles of social media engagement referred to in clause 1.1 of this policy
- b. the type of behaviour or content that will result in that content being removed or 'hidden', or a person being blocked or banned from the platform
- c. the process by which a person can be blocked or banned from the platform and rights of review
- d. a statement relating to privacy and personal information
- e. when the platform will be monitored
- f. that the social media platform is not to be used for making complaints about the Council or Council officials and will include a link to Council's Complaint Handling Policy.

2.25 For the purposes of clause 2.24(b), third parties engaging on social media platforms must not post or share comments, photos, videos, electronic recordings or other information that:

- a. is defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening or intimidating to Council officials or members of the public,
- b. contains profane language or is sexual in nature
- c. constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW, or is unlawfully discriminatory
- d. contains content about the Council, Council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive
- e. breaches the privacy of Council officials or members of the public
- f. contains allegations of suspected breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct or information about the consideration of a matter under the Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW,
- g. violates an order made by a court
- h. breaches copyright
- i. advertises, endorses or solicits commercial products or business,
- j. constitutes spam

k. would be in breach of the rules of the social media platform.

Removal or 'hiding' of content

2.26 Where a person uploads content onto a social media platform that, in the reasonable opinion of the moderator, is of a kind specified under clause 2.25, the moderator may remove or 'hide' that content.

2.27 Prior to removing or 'hiding' the content, the moderator must make a record of it (for example, a screenshot).

Blocking or banning

2.28 If a person uploads content that is removed or 'hidden' under clause 2.26 of this policy on three occasions, that person may be blocked or banned from the social media platform / all social media platforms.

2.29 A person may only be blocked or banned from a Council social media platform with the approval of the Social Media Advisor.

2.30 Prior to blocking or banning a person from a social media platform, the person must, where practicable, be advised of the intention to block or ban them from the platform/all platforms and be given a chance to respond. Any submission made by the person must be considered prior to a determination being made to block or ban them.

2.31 The duration of the block or ban is to be determined by the Social Media Advisor.

2.32 Where a determination is made to block or ban a person from a social media platform/all social media platforms, the person must, where practicable, be notified in writing of the decision and the reasons for it. The written notice must also advise the person which social media platforms they are blocked or banned from and the duration of the block or ban and inform them of their rights of review.

2.33 A person may request a review of a decision to block or ban then from a Council social media platform. The request must be made in writing to the Manager Communications, Engagement and Marketing and state the grounds on which the request is being made.

2.34 Where a review request is made under clause 2.33, the review is to be undertaken by the Manager Communications, Engagement and Marketing or a member of staff nominated by the Manager Communications, Engagement and Marketing who is suitably qualified and who was not involved in the decision to block or ban the person. Where the decision to block or ban the person was made by the Manager Communications, Engagement and Marketing, the review must be undertaken by another senior and suitably qualified member of staff who was not involved in the decision.

2.35 Where a person that is the subject of a block or ban continues to engage on a social media platform(s) using an alternative social media account, profile, avatar, etc., a moderator may block or ban the person from the platform(s) immediately. In these circumstances, clauses 2.31 to 2.34 do not apply.

3. Administrative framework for councillor’s social media platforms

- 3.1 For the purposes of this policy, councillor social media platforms are not council social media platforms. Part 2 of this policy does not apply to councillors’ social media platforms.
- 3.2 Councillors are responsible for the administration and moderation of their own social media platforms, and ensuring they comply with the record keeping obligations under the State Records Act 1998, Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009, Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998, Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 and council’s records management policy in relation to social media.
- 3.3 Clause 3.2 also applies to councillors in circumstances where another person administers, moderates, or uploads content onto their social media platform.
- 3.4 Councillors must comply with the rules of the platform when engaging on social media.

Induction and training

- 3.5 Councillors who engage, or intend to engage, on social media will receive induction training on social media use.

Identifying as a councillor AND GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

- 3.6 For the purpose of this Policy, item 3.7 applies to a councillors official public social media platforms
- 3.7 Councillors must identify themselves on their public social media platforms and at a minimum include:
 - the fact that they are a Councillor, Mayor or Deputy Mayor
 - first name and last name
 - a profile photo which is clearly identifiable
 - a disclaimer to the following effect: “The views expressed and comments made on this social media platform are my own and not that of the Council”.
- 3.8 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 platforms and updated within 14 days of a change in circumstances.
- 3.9 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 platform.
- 3.10 Councillors may upload publicly available Council information onto their social media platforms.

Councillor queries relating to social media platforms

3.11 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 through the online Councillor portal in accordance with the Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy.

4. Standards of conduct on social media FOR COUNCIL OFFICIALS

- 4.1 This policy only applies to Council officials' use of social media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a Council official. The policy does not apply to personal use of social media that is not connected with a person's role as a Council official.
- 4.2 Council officials must comply with the Council's Code of Conduct when using social media in an official capacity or in connection with their role as a Council official.
- 4.3 Council officials must not use social media to post or share comments, photos, videos, electronic recordings or other information that:
- a. is defamatory, offensive, humiliating, threatening or intimidating to other Council officials or members of the public
 - b. contains profane language or is sexual in nature
 - c. constitutes harassment and/or bullying within the meaning of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW, or is unlawfully discriminatory
 - d. is contrary to their duties under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and their responsibilities under any policies or procedures adopted by the Council to ensure workplace health and safety
 - e. contains content about the Council, Council officials or members of the public that is misleading or deceptive
 - f. divulges confidential Council information
 - g. breaches the privacy of other Council officials or members of the public
 - h. contains allegations of suspected breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct or information about the consideration of a matter under the Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW
 - i. could be perceived to be an official comment on behalf of the Council where they have not been authorised to make such comment
 - j. commits the Council to any action
 - k. violates an order made by a court
 - l. breaches copyright
 - m. constitutes spam
 - n. is in breach of the rules of the social media platform.

4.4 Council officials must:

- a. attribute work to the original author, creator or source when uploading or linking to content produced by a third party
- b. obtain written permission from a minor's parent or legal guardian before uploading content in which the minor can be identified.

4.5 Council officials must exercise caution when sharing, liking, retweeting content as this can be regarded as an endorsement and/or publication of the content.

4.6 Council officials must not incite or encourage other persons to act in a way that is contrary to the requirements of this section of this Policy.

4.7 Councillors must uphold and accurately represent the policies and decisions of the Council's governing body but may explain why they voted on a matter in the way that they did. (see section 232(1)(f) of the Local Government Act 1993).

5. Use of social media during emergencies

5.1 During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the Manager Communications, Engagement and Marketing, will be responsible for the management of content on the Council's social media platforms.

5.2 To ensure consistent messaging both during and after an emergency, authorised users and Council officials must not upload content onto the Council's or their own social media platforms which contradicts advice issued by the agency coordinating the emergency response, or agencies supporting recovery efforts.

5.3 Training on social media use during emergencies should be included in training and/or induction provided to authorised users and councillors.

6. Private use of social media

Note: Activities on social media websites are public activities. Even though privacy settings are available, content can still be shared and accessed beyond the intended recipients. The terms and conditions of most social media sites state that all content becomes the property of the site on which it is posted.

What constitutes 'private' use?

6.1 For the purposes of this policy, a Council official's social media engagement will be considered 'private 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.

6.2 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.

Use of social media during work hours

6.3 Council staff who access and engage on social media for incidental personal purposes during work hours must ensure it does not interfere with the performance of their official duties and does not breach this policy or the Use and Access of Internet Protocol.

7. Concerns or complaints

7.1 Council does not accept complaints via social media.

7.2 Concerns or complaints about the administration of council’s social media platforms, the conduct of Council officials (including councillors) on social media platforms should be made verbally, or in writing by letter, fax, email or live chat as outlined in Council’s Complaint Management Policy.

Policy Definitions

AUTHORISED USER	members of Council staff who are authorised with social media delegation by the General Manager or Social Media Advisor to upload content and engage on the Council’s social media platforms on the Council’s behalf
COUNCIL OFFICIAL	A collective term for Councillors, members of staff, and delegates of the Council (including members of committees that are delegates of the Council) unless otherwise stated
HOUSE RULES:	Rules outlining acceptable participation on Council’s social media official channels. These are available on each channel.
MINOR	For the purposes of clause 4.4(b) of this policy, is a person under the age of 18 years
MODERATOR	Facilitates, reviews, and guides a discussion or debate and related interactions to ensure all shared content is appropriate and follows community rules
OFFICIAL CHANNELS	Official Council social media accounts that are managed by staff of Council

PERSONAL INFORMATION	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
PLATFORM	A platform is a digital service connecting business to various target audiences
SOCIAL MEDIA	Online platforms and applications - such as but not limited to social networking sites, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video and audio sharing sites, and message boards - that allow people to easily publish, share and discuss content. Examples of social media platforms include, but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Yammer, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and Wikipedia
SOCIAL MEDIA ADVISOR	Is a member of the Marketing & Communications team, reporting to Manager, Communications, Engagement and Marketing, appointed under clause 2.6 of this policy
STAFF	Includes the General Manager and all Council employees, volunteers and contractors.

Policy Administration

BUSINESS GROUP:	People & Performance
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Manager, Communications, Engagement & Marketing
COUNCIL REFERENCE:	
POLICY REVIEW DATE:	Three (3) years from date of adoption
FILE NUMBER:	111/13
RELEVANT LEGISLATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Local Government Act 1993 • NSW Defamation Act 2005 • Privacy Act 1988

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government Information Public Access Act 2009 • Privacy and Personal information Protection Regulation 2019 (NSW) • Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW) • Privacy and Personal Information Protection Amendment Bill 2022 (NSW) • Health Records and Information Protection Act 2002 (NSW) • NSW State Records Act 1998
<p>RELATED POLICIES / PROCEDURES / PROTOCOLS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code of Conduct • Complaints Management Policy • Privacy Management Policy • Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy • Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy • Internet and email use Policy • Right to information Policy • Records Management Policy • Work Health and Safety Policy • Equity, Diversity & Respect Policy • Data Breach Policy 2023 • Communications and Engagement Strategy • Complaint Management Policy • Violent, aggressive and threatening behaviour procedure • Media Policy • Language and Writing Style Guide

Policy History

VERSION	DATE APPROVED	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGES
1.0	28 October 2014	New policy adopted
2.0	23 July 2024	Periodic review

2.1	13 February 2025	Updated to new branding and alignment to organisation structure. No change to content.
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