

Council Policy

<h2>SOCIAL MEDIA</h2>	Date Adopted:	March 2024
	Adopted By:	Council
	Review Due:	March 2028
	Responsible Officer:	Manager Communications and Engagement
	Directorate:	Office of the CEO
	EDRMS No:	XXX

STATEMENT

Southern Grampians Shire Council uses social media to connect and engage with the community, promote council services, programs, initiatives and events, and build community awareness of local issues.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, enable Council to be more active in building positive relationships with residents, partners and stakeholders, encouraging them to be more involved in local decision making, enabling better information sharing, engagement and feedback, and ultimately helping to improve Council services and reputation.

The intent of this policy is to provide understanding and guidance for the appropriate use of social media platforms and tools. It aims to assist Council staff, contractors and volunteers officially appointed by Council for the purpose of conducting Council business.

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 Southern Grampians Shire Council;
- Promote effective and productive community engagement through social media;
- Minimise miscommunication or inappropriate communications; and
- Assist Southern Grampians Shire Council manage the inherent challenges arising from the immediacy, access and spread of social media communication.

The policy applies to all online digital spaces collectively referred to as social media where people may comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload and share content.

DEFINITIONS

Social media - a general term to describe the tools and forms of publishing that are based on a two-way interaction online. Social media facilitates the creation and sharing of information via virtual communities and online networks. It invites engagement, collaboration, discussion and debate. It enables the development of social and professional networks, groups, followers and contacts.

Employees – the term employee in this policy refers to full time, part time, casual fixed term and volunteers.

Trolling – a term used when someone posts or comments online to deliberately provoke an argument or emotional reaction.

APPLICATION AND SCOPE

This policy applies all Southern Grampians Shire Councillors, employees and volunteers as it pertains to Council's managed social media presence and the representation of Council on social media.

It is aligned with the Southern Grampians Shire Council Code of Conduct and the Councillor Code of Conduct.

This policy applies to any digital platform where people may comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload and share content, including:

- Social networking sites and apps (eg Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn)
- Southern Grampians Shire Council Website (engagement tools and feedback options)
- Video and photo sharing apps (eg Instagram, YouTube)
- Blogs and eDMs (eg Council and Business e-newsletters)
- Forums, discussion boards and groups (Social Pinpoint)
- Instant messaging (eg Facebook Messenger)
- Podcasts

GENERAL PROVISIONS

POLICY STATEMENT

Governance

Southern Grampians Shire Council's social media platforms represent a public face of Council and require sufficient governance to ensure appropriate usage and monitoring.

Council's corporate Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn pages are managed and administered by the Communications Team which create and approve all content before being published.

There are a number of other social media accounts that are managed by staff in other departments including Visitor Services, Hamilton Gallery, Hamilton Performing Arts Centre, Hamilton Cinema, Hamilton Library, Youth, L2P, Hamilton Indoor Leisure and Aquatic Centre (HILAC) and HILAC Occasional Care. Staff in those areas are responsible for posting content to their relevant sites. Council's Communications team have oversight of these pages and assist with content, moderation and advice as required.

All pages will be administered in accordance with Council's Social Media Guidelines.

Posting Content

When establishing social media accounts on behalf of Council, employees must:

- Seek prior authorisation from the Communications Team
- Adhere to Southern Grampians Shire Council Staff Code 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 Southern Grampians Shire Council.

Inappropriate content is not permitted on any Council page, including but not limited to:

- Abusive, profane or sexual language
- Content not relating to the subject matter of that blog, board, forum or site
- Content which is false or misleading
- Confidential information about Council or third parties
- Copyright or Trademark protected materials
- 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, sex or sexual orientation
- Illegal material or materials designed to encourage law breaking
- 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 council into disrepute
- Personal details or references to councillors, council staff or third parties, which may breach privacy laws
- Spam, meaning the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages
- Statements which may be considered to be bullying or harassment.

Social Media guidelines have been prepared, which provides further information on authorisation, expertise, disclosure, accuracy, identity, opinion, privacy, intellectual property, defamation, transparency, political bias, respect, discrimination, language use, media, modification and moderation.

Responding

Council's social media pages will be actively monitored from 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Not all community comments posted on Council's social media platforms are a direct enquiry to Council or seek a response, often they are just a general comment or acknowledgement. Where a response is required, posters will be provided with information as deemed appropriate by the Communications Team. The team will only provide publicly available information.

Complaints will be managed in accordance with Council's Complaint Handling Policy and will be referred to official channels for further action.

Council will not respond to comments being made about it on community Facebook pages unless the information is misleading and likely to cause harm.

Moderation of information

Southern Grampians Shire Council actively seek ideas, questions, complaints and feedback from the public through social media channels. Open conversation and debate is encouraged, but participants are expected to behave in a respectful manner.

Council will not tolerate content that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, trolling, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, or is otherwise unlawful or deemed inappropriate. Such content will be removed.

Repeat behaviour may result in the person or account being banned from Council pages at the discretion of the Communications Team.

Posts that make specific mention of confidential material about Council or individuals or mention staff by name on Council's social media platforms will be removed.

Council has developed and published acceptable behaviour guidelines on its official Facebook page and website outlining the rules of engagement for users.

Inauthentic Behaviour

Users demonstrating inauthentic behaviour or identity will be blocked from our pages. Accounts that seek to deliberately conceal identity (no profile picture, pseudonym, no friends or following) will be blocked from following Council page. Spam accounts are not tolerated.

This is intended to create a space where people can trust the people and community they interact with.

Employee use of social media

Council recognises that staff may use social media in a personal capacity. All Southern Grampians Shire Council employees and volunteers are personally responsible for content/comments they publish on any form of social media and ensure compliance with the staff code of conduct.

Staff must ensure when using social media that they:

- Make it clear they are expressing their personal opinion and not purporting to represent the position of Council.
- Do not use Council platforms as a forum for political debate or make comments that impact Council's reputation.
- Ensure their personal comments do not divulge privileged or confidential information that can only be known as a result of their role at Council.
- Do not offer views on Councillors or members of staff that may be considered derogatory.
- Do not make posts on social media on their accounts (or accounts believed to be held by them) that could be perceived to reflect negatively on their employment with Council.

Councillor use of social media

When operating any private social media accounts Councillors are encouraged to be mindful of the Councillor Code of Conduct.

Councillors must ensure when using social media that they:

- Make it clear that any unofficial view shared is a personal one and does not represent the Council as a whole.
- Endeavour to make sure that any messages communicated through social media are clear and consistent and portray the Council as a decisive and responsible governing body.
- Are wholly responsible for maintaining any private social media accounts they might hold, create or operate under their own name, and accept all legal responsibilities for such accounts.

Council officers shall not assist any Councillor with the creation or operation of any private social media account – unless approved by the CEO.

ENFORCEMENT

Southern Grampians Shire Council actively monitors social media for relevant contributions that impact on the municipality, its operations and reputation. Southern Grampians Shire

Council will be able to find – and act upon – contributions made by Councillors and staff if deemed necessary.

This policy will be published and promoted to Councillors and staff of Southern Grampians 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.

Any members of the public banned from Council pages can appeal their ban through the Manager Communications and Engagement or other official channels.

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy was adopted by Council on 12 October 2011 and the following reviews have taken place:

July 2012

9 April 2014

CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLIANCE

It is considered that this policy is *Choose an item.* compatible with the relevant human rights identified in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*.

GENDER EQUALITY COMPLIANCE

It is considered that this policy is compatible with the relevant gender equality principles identified in the *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

Is a Gender Impact Assessment required?

- Yes (*legally required for all policies that have a direct and significant impact on the public*)
- No (*please provide an explanation why a Gender Impact Assessment is not required*)

ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*
- *Southern Grampians Shire Council Community Engagement Policy*
- *Southern Grampians Shire Council Staff Code of Conduct*
- *Southern Grampians Shire Councillor Code of Conduct*
- *Southern Grampians Shire Council Social Media Guidelines*
- *Online Safety Act 2021*
- *Defamation Act 2005 & County Court rulings 2022*

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed in 2028.

Trigger points that require an earlier review period of the policy or associated document/s include (but are not limited to):

- change in legislation which has a bearing on the document
- change in Council's position on a particular subject area
- recommendation from a governance body (eg Audit and Risk Committee recommendation, Internal or External Audit Recommendation, integrity agency)

AUTHORISED

CEO

Signature

Date

END