

**Title:** Social Media Policy  
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**Revision History:**

Date	Action	Who
8 August 2014	Draft policy prepared	Jacqui Rabel
27 August 2014	Policy adopted	Council

**1. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to enhance Murrindindi Shire Council’s (MSC) communication and engagement with the community of Murrindindi Shire and other stakeholders by sharing and exchanging information and ideas in virtual networks and communities online.

**2. Rationale**

Council needs to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by social media channels to connect with members of Murrindindi Shire community and other stakeholders. Social Media will enhance Council’s ability to communicate with and listen to its community by complementing existing communication tools. Social media will provide a means by which Council can improve information flows and access to, and delivery of, services.

This policy provides a framework to guide and govern use of social media by all Councillors, Council employees, contractors (agencies and individuals who provide services to the Council) and volunteers appointed to undertake Council business and consultants.

**3. Scope**

This policy provides parameters and guidance which will govern Council’s use of social media in carrying out Council business and in relation to private use of social media which has a bearing on Council business.

This policy applies to all social media, which is defined as any form of electronic communication through which users share information, ideas, personal messages, images or video. The social media platforms covered by this policy are too numerous to mention, but this policy is intended to cover all digital environments to which people may add comment, contribute content, create, forward, link, tag, post, upload and share content. The absence of a reference to a particular kind of social media activity does not limit the application of this policy.

This policy applies at all times and to all places where social media is used to communicate in digital form any issue which reflects a view on Council business or services, Council’s role, Councillors or Council employees (“Representatives of Council”).

This policy does not apply to private use of social media, where no reference is made or could be perceived to have been made, to Murrindindi Shire Council, its Councillors, staff, policies, practices or services, suppliers or other stakeholders.

#### 4. Policy

Used well, social media is a valuable tool to reach rapidly expanding online communities. It provides another vehicle for Council to use in its communication, engagement and collaboration with the community of Murrindindi Shire and other stakeholders, which will supplement and enhance existing mainstream channels of communication. It also provides an advocacy tool for Council in pursuing its priorities.

Social media is an environment where a more casual communication style is appropriate. This can present challenges for a Government body, which tends to use formal and structured communications. Council commits to ensuring the style of language and the message communicated is clear yet informal. The focus of social media communication should always remain centred around engaging with the community, not simply broadcasting.

Delegated officers will have sole responsibility for responding to Community inquiries, requests or criticism. Any requests from Council staff for permission to use social media for Council-related business must be put to the Chief Executive Officer.

A protocol document governing delegations, usage and practices relating to social media will be developed and will guide both the rollout and scope of Council's social media use.

##### ***What you can't do***

Prohibited behaviours or content on social media include anything which would be prohibited by law, regulation or policy in any other context. These behaviours could include, but are not limited to

- profane, abusive or sexually loaded language, malicious, defamatory, racist or discriminatory remarks, false or misleading content, bullying or harassment and breaches of privacy or any other law.
- material which would bring Council, Councillors or Council employees into disrepute.

Representatives of Council must not

- disclose material which is confidential or pertains to internal discussions or decisions within Council.
- endorse or express political opinion, affinity or allegiance.
- publish content in exchange for reward of any kind and not seek to buy or reward favourable social media commentary.

The same rules of conduct which apply within Council apply when using social media. Users should be aware that disciplinary action might result from breaches of policies governing conduct which occur in the use of social media.

Any prohibited or questionable content should be brought to the immediate attention of Manager Communications, Library and Customer Services.

## ***Standards and Expectations***

It is expected that representatives of Council will:

- Filter requests through normal Council processes where possible. For example, customer requests received through social media platforms need to be entered into the internal customer request system. Council staff should seek appropriate authorisation from the CEO before using social media.
- Comment only on their area of expertise and responsibility and only if authorised to do so.
- Monitor and respond when necessary but do not censor or stifle discussion.
- Discuss only publicly available information.
- Be accurate, helpful, informative and courteous, including to those who express criticisms.
- Correct any errors or misleading information as soon as possible and acknowledge and take responsibility for posts and comments
- Be clear about their identity and declare vested or conflicts of interest.
- Ensure permission is sought from anyone appearing in images or video before uploading/sharing these via social media.
- Ensure that others intellectual property rights are observed and seek permission before reproducing copyright or trademark material or linking to a third party site.
- Refer all media enquiries made through social media channels to Council's communication unit.

Social media is another communication channel through which customer requests and complaints can be made. Council will endeavour to treat issues, requests and comments delivered through social media platforms as if they were inwards correspondence, noting that it might not always be clear that this is the case, including where posts are of a general or multifaceted nature, are made anonymously or no contact details are given.

Any concerns about appropriate language, content and usage should be addressed to delegated users or to Manager Communications, Library and Customer Services.

### ***Use of social media in private capacity by Council staff***

This policy is not intended to cover private use of social media by representatives of Council where no reference is made or could be perceived to have been made, to Murrindindi Shire Council, its Councillors, staff, policies, practices or services, suppliers or other stakeholders.

However a breach of this policy might occur if social media is used privately in a way which links, or could be perceived to be linked, to the workplace or to Council. This could result from discussion of issues or between people which could identify to a third party a connection to Council, even when identities are not made explicit.

To avoid this, representatives of Council must not comment, post, express or imply a personal opinion relating to Council or its business. Authorised messages from Council must be easily distinguishable from the opinion of a representative of Council.

All Council Officers are allowed reasonable personal usage of social media in the work environment, as long as this does not interfere with proper performance of work, breach Council's Staff Code of Conduct, this policy or any other Council policies, guidelines or laws. Use will be monitored to ensure staff compliance.

## **Use of Social Media by Councillors**

Councillors might wish to use social media to promote their activities to the communities within their Wards. This policy does not seek to unduly limit such usage, but highlights particular obligations and issues which arise.

As elected officials, Councillors are responsible for the content they publish in a personal capacity on any social media platform and should recognise the potential harm that might be caused to the Council when they can be identified as representing Murrindindi Shire Council.

Councillors should observe rules set out in relevant legislation and policies governing Councillor conduct when using social media and understand that social media can provide a permanent record of their comments. In particular, Councillors should ensure that they do not

- Cause detriment or reputational harm to the Council, other Councillors, Council officers or any other person.
- Disclose information that is derived from a confidential document or closed Council process.
- Contravene the Councillor Code of Conduct or any other Council policy

In addition to the standards and expectations set out in this document, Councillors should expressly state on all postings that the content or views they post or upload are their own and not those of the Council and should refrain from implying that they are authorised to speak as a representative of the Council.

Councillors should abide by the provisions of Council's Election Caretaker Policy in using social media.

## **5. Supporting Documents**

Protocols governing use of social media are currently being developed.

## **6. Related Policies**

The acceptable use of social media within Council is regulated by other laws, regulations and Council policies, including

- **Confidentiality and Privacy Policy**
- **Equal Employment Opportunity policy**
- **Complaints Resolution Policy**
- **Customer Service Policy**
- **Employee Conduct Policy**
- **Election Caretaker Policy**
- **Council Staff Code of Conduct**
- **Prevention of Bullying and Occupational Violence**
- **Using Consultants Policy**
- **Email Policy**
- **Fraud Prevention and Control**
- **Communications policy**
- **Conflict of Interest policy**
- **Councillor Code of Conduct**
- **Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007**
- **Local Government Act**

## **7. Governance**

The Executive Management Team and Senior Management Team, in conjunction with Manager, Communications, Customer and Library Service, are responsible for ensuring understanding of, and compliance with this policy by members of their work area.

**8. Portfolio and/or Riding Councillor Input**

Input has been sought.

**9. Responsible Officer**

Manager, Communications, Customer and Library Service

**10. Human Rights Charter**

This policy has been developed with consideration of the requirements under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.