



# SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR STAFF

NOVEMBER 2022

## i. BACKGROUND

As in the federal and state jurisdictions, social media has become an important tool in government and political discourse at the local level. In the context of NSW local government, social media has two primary functions:

- a) it is used by councils to interact and share information with their communities in an accessible and often more informal format.
- b) it enables councillors to promote their achievements and address their constituents directly about community issues and events in ways that either complement or bypass traditional news and print media.

Social media presents Council with a number of benefits such as promoting events, engaging with specific target groups, undertaking project based community consultations and Council service offerings.

Despite its obvious benefits, social media also presents a variety of challenges and risks. These include:

- the emergence of new, harmful forms of behaviour, such as cyber-bullying and trolling
- maintaining the accuracy, reliability and integrity of information disseminated from multiple sources
- organisations can be held liable for content uploaded onto their social media platforms by third parties
- content uploaded in a person's private capacity can adversely affect their employment and cause significant reputational damage to colleagues and employers, and
- rapid innovation can make it difficult to keep pace with emerging technologies and trends.

In addition, potential corruption risks may arise due to social media use. These include:

- customers, development proponents / objectors, tenderers, or other stakeholders grooming public officials by behaviours such as 'liking' specific posts, reposting content, or sending personal or private messages
- public officials disclosing confidential or sensitive information
- using social media for sponsorship opportunities, which may unfairly advantage one sponsor over another and lack transparency, and
- public agencies or officials promoting certain businesses by behaviours such as 'following' them, 'liking' content, or making comments, which may result in those businesses being favoured over others.

This is a separate policy to the Social Media Policy for Councillors.



## ii. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Weddin Shire Council Social Media Policy – Staff, and annexure 'House Rules' is to provide a clear standard of conduct for the Weddin Shire Council in relation to social media use.

Clause 3.1(b) of the *Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW* provides that council officials must not conduct themselves in a manner that is contrary to a council's policies. If adopted by a council, a breach of the policy will be a breach of the council's code of conduct.

The Policy is a local supplement to the provisions of the Act and Regulation.

The Policy is adopted from the Model Social Media Policy, developed by the Office of Local Government and has been developed for Staff.

## iii. POLICY OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- provide clear standard principles in relation to conduct and behaviours when engaging on social media platforms to assist councillors, staff and other council officials of Weddin Shire Council to fulfil their duties.
- underpin every aspect of a council's social media activity and all councils and council officials should commit to upholding them.

## iv. LEGISLATION

- *Local Government Act 1993*
  - section 232(1)(f)
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*
- *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002*
- Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW
- State Archives and Records Authority of NSW 'Government Recordkeeping / Advice and Resources / Local Government' and 'Social media recordkeeping for councillors'

## v. APPLICATION/SCOPE

This Policy applies at all times to all staff, contractors, labour-hire and Council Officials in the Weddin Local Government Area.



## 1. POLICY

### 1.1 PRINCIPLES

We, the staff and other officials of Weddin Shire 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.
- Relevance** We will ensure our social media platforms are kept up to date with informative content about our Council and community.
- Accuracy** 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.
- Cohesion** Council officials genuinely work to serve their community, often with limited resourcing and within frameworks dictated by legislation, and plans and policies adopted by Council, that prioritise work and services. While specific lines of actions being pursued by Council may not align with every community member's priorities, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand." Council officials' use of social media platforms/profiles seeks to build cohesion between Council and the public it serves—for our shared future prosperity—and invite the public to foster this cohesion through the adoption of these principles.

Council's social media platforms/profiles and content are guided by Council's Social Media Policy - Staff and 'House Rules' (section 3; **Annexure A**) for posts.

## 2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The following table outlines the roles and responsibilities of personnel. Noting that the position titles may change, however, the responsibilities remain the same.

Roles	Responsibility
The Elected Council	Are committed to upholding and promoting the principles of social media engagement as outlined in this policy and will adhere to the standards of conduct and behaviours,
General Manager	The General Manager is responsible for the overall control and implementation of the Policy.



Roles	Responsibility
Director of Corporate Services	The Director of Corporate Services is responsible for the review of this policy at least every three (3) years.
Council Officers	Council officers, council staff and its contractors must uphold this policy.
General Public	The general public must act in accordance with this policy and abide by any determination made as a result of this policy should they wish to have access to social media platforms.

### 3. HOUSE RULES

The House Rules outline the principles and procedures by which Council officials, staff, contractors and labour-hire engage with the community and other users on the social media platforms on which Council has a presence and, by which such social media platforms/profiles are moderated.

Posting to any of Council's social media profiles implies your conscious and explicit agreement to comply with the House Rules and the actions to be taken should a post be contrary to them.

The House Rules (**Annexure A**) should be read in conjunction with Weddin Shire Council's Social Media Policy - Staff.

### 4. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING WORK HOURS

Council staff may only access and engage on social media in their private capacity while at work during breaks.

Council staff who access and engage on social media in their private capacity during work hours must ensure it not does not interfere with the performance of their official duties.

### 5. STANDARDS OF CONDUCT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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.



- 5.1.1. Council officials/staff 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.
- 5.1.2. Council officials/staff 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) advertises, endorses or solicits commercial products or business
  - n) constitutes spam
  - o) is in breach of the rules of the social media platform.



5.1.3. Council officials/staff 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.

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

5.1.5. Council officials/staff must not incite or encourage other persons to act in a way that is contrary to the requirements of this policy.

## 6. POSTING CONTENT

Council's social media presences will, where appropriate:

- Council may decide to post to third party presences for information, promotion or service delivery activity or to provide factual clarification in response to third party information as it pertains to Council as per Council policy and at discretion of the Council.

Note: Councils and council officials/staff should be aware that they may be considered a 'publisher' of any content uploaded onto a social media platform they administer, including content that:

- is uploaded by a third party; and/or
- appears on their social media platform because they have 'liked', 'shared', or 'retweeted' the content, or similar.

## 7. PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

What constitutes 'private' use?

For the purposes of this policy, a council official's/staff social media engagement will be considered 'private use' when the content they upload:

- 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
- 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/staff 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 recognises that staff may wish to use social media in a personal capacity.

The General Manager and Council employees/staff are personally responsible for content they publish on any form of social media. They should take measures to ensure their personal comments cannot be mistaken for the official view of Council, impact Council's reputation, offer views on councillors or other staff members or affect the staff member performing their role within Council and comply with Council's code of conduct. Council employees are encouraged to refrain from entering into debates or conversations online regarding Council matters.

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<sup>1</sup>.

## **8. ESTABLISHMENT AND DELETION OF COUNCIL SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS**

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 of the General Manager or their delegate.

## **9. POSTS OR CONDUCT RESULTING IN REMOVAL OR HIDING OF CONTENT AND/OR THE BLOCKING OR BANNING OF A PERSON**

Engagement contrary to the above principles or to the following guidelines may be removed outright or 'hidden' from public view, and the person responsible for posting it may be blocked or banned, according to the provisions of Council's Social Media Policy, whether that person be a Council official or member of the public.

### **9.1 THE PROCESS OF BEING BLOCKED OR BANNED FROM COUNCIL'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS/PROFILES**

Where a person uploads content onto a social media platform that, in the reasonable opinion of the moderator, is of a kind, contrary to the principles and/or guidelines specified in the House Rules, the moderator may remove or 'hide' that content. Further information can be found at **Annexure A**.

---

<sup>1</sup> Social Media: Guidance for Agencies and Staff (Government of South Australia) – page 9



## **9.2 SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING AND MODERATION**

Council's social media platforms and profiles will be monitored and moderated during normal Council business hours, being 8:30am to 5:00pm, Monday to Friday, except public holidays, and outside these hours in the instance of a significant instance of non-compliance.

## **9.3 USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING EMERGENCIES**

During emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health incidents, the General Manager, Directors; executive Assistants or otherwise appointed by the General Manager will be responsible for the management of content on the Council's social media platforms.

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.

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

## **9.4 PLATFORMS**

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

- FaceBook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn

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

## **9.5 COMPLAINTS**

Concerns or complaints about the administration of a Council's social media platform/profile should be made to Council's General Manager in the first instance. Further information is available at **Annexure A**.



## DEFINITIONS

Key Terms	Meaning
authorised user	members of council staff who are authorised by the General Manager to upload content and engage on the Council's social media platforms on the Council's behalf
council official	in the case of a council - councillors, members of staff and delegates of the council (including members of committees that are delegates of the council)
minor	for the purposes of clause 5.1.3(b) of this policy, is a person under the age of 18 years
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
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



<b>Title: Social Media Policy - Staff</b>			
<b>Department: Corporate Services</b>			
<b>Version</b>	<b>Resolution #</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Author</b>
0.1		31/08/2022	EA to GM
0.2		15/09/2022	Director Corporate Services to Council
1.0	299/22 Adopted	17/11/2022	GM
<p>This policy may be amended or revoked at any time and must be reviewed at least three (3) years since its adoption (or latest amendment). The Director, Corporate Services will be responsible for the review of this policy. Review of this policy will incorporate relevant legislation, documentation released from relevant state agencies and best practice guideline.</p>			
<b>Review Date: August 2025</b>			
<b>Amendments in the release</b>			
<b>Amendment History</b>		<b>Date</b>	<b>Detail</b>
DRAFT		15/09/2022	Draft for consultation
1.0		17/11/2022	Adopted version following consultation
<b>Annexure Attached: A – House Rules</b>			
<b>Noreen Vu General Manager</b>			



## **ANNEXURE A**

### **HOUSE RULES**

To be read in conjunction with Weddin Shire Council's Social Media Policy - Staff.

The Weddin Shire Council's Social Media 'House Rules' outline the principles and procedures by which Council officials engage with the community and other users on the social media platforms on which Council has a presence and by which such social media platforms/profiles are moderated.

Posting to any of Council's social media profiles implies your conscious and explicit agreement to comply with these rules and the actions to be taken should a post be contrary to them.

#### **I. GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The principles guiding Council officials' use and moderation of Council's social media are:

**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.

**Relevance:** We will ensure our social media platforms are kept up to date with informative content about our Council and community.

**Accuracy:** 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.

**Cohesion:** Council officials genuinely work to serve their community, often with limited resourcing and within frameworks dictated by legislation, and plans and policies adopted by Council, that prioritise work and services. While specific lines of actions being pursued by Council may not align with every community member's priorities, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand." Council officials' use of social media platforms/profiles seeks to build cohesion between Council and the public it serves—for our shared future prosperity—and invite the public to foster this cohesion through the adoption of these principles.

#### **II. GUIDELINES**

A person or social media entity or profile must not use social media to post or share any comment, photos, video, electronic recording or other information or media 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 Council's Code of Conduct, or is unlawfully discriminatory
- 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 Code of Conduct
- 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) advertises, endorses or solicits commercial products or business
- n) constitutes spam
- o) is in breach of the rules of the social media platform.

### **III. POSTS OR CONDUCT RESULTING IN REMOVAL OR HIDING OF CONTENT AND/OR THE BLOCKING OR BANNING OF A PERSON**

Engagement contrary to the above principles or to the following guidelines may be removed outright or 'hidden' from public view, and the person responsible for posting it may be blocked or banned, according to the provisions of Council's Social Media Policy, whether that person be a Council official or member of the public.

### **IV. THE PROCESS OF BEING BLOCKED OR BANNED FROM COUNCIL'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS/PROFILES**

Where a person uploads content onto a social media platform that, in the reasonable opinion of the moderator, is of a kind, contrary to the principles and/or guidelines specified in the House Rules, the moderator may remove or 'hide' that content.



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

If the moderator removes or 'hides' the content under this clause, they must, where practicable, notify the person who uploaded the content that it has been removed and the reason(s) for its removal and their rights of review, specified in the following paragraphs.

A person may request a review of a decision by a moderator to remove or 'hide' content under this clause. The request must be made in writing to the General Manager and state the grounds on which the request is being made.

Where a review request is made under this clause, the review is to be undertaken by the General Manager or a member of staff nominated by the General Manager who is suitably qualified and who was not involved in the decision to remove or 'hide' the content.

If a person uploads content that is removed or 'hidden' under clauses 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 of Weddin Shire Council's Social Media Policy on two (2) occasions, that person may be blocked or banned from the social media platform and/or all social media platforms moderated by Council.

A person may only be blocked or banned from a Council social media platform with the approval of the General Manager. This clause does not apply to blocking or banning a person from a Councillor's social media platform.

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.

The duration of the block or ban is to be determined by the General Manager, or in the case of a Councillor's social media platform, the Councillor.

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.

Where a person uploads content of a kind referred to under clauses 5.1.2 of Council's Social Media Policy, and the moderator is reasonably satisfied that the person's further engagement on the social media platform poses a risk to health and safety or another substantive risk (such as the uploading of defamatory content), an interim block or ban from the platform/all platforms may be imposed on the person immediately for a period no longer than thirty (30) days.



A person who is the subject of an interim block or ban from the platform/all platforms under this clause must, where practicable, be given a chance to respond to the interim block or ban being imposed. Any submission made by the person must be considered when determining whether the interim block or ban is to be removed or retained.

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

Where a review request is made, the review is to be undertaken by the General Manager or a member of staff nominated by the General Manager 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 General Manager, the review must be undertaken by another senior and suitably qualified member of staff who was not involved in the decision.

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.

## **V. PRIVACY AND YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Social media communications are in the public domain. Council officials and members of the public who post to a social media platform/profile should exercise caution about what personal information, if any, they upload onto social media.

The *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* applies to the use of social media platforms by Council officials. To mitigate potential privacy risks, Council officials will:

- a) advise people not to provide personal information on social media platforms
- b) inform people if any personal information they may provide on social media platforms is to be used for official purposes
- c) moderate comments to ensure they do not contain any personal information
- d) advise people to contact the Council or Councillors through alternative channels if they have personal information they do not want to disclose in a public forum.

Council officials are to comply with the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* when engaging on and/or moderating social media platforms. In fulfilling their



obligations, Council officials should refer to any guidance issued by the Information and Privacy Commission of NSW, such as, but not limited to, the Health Privacy Principles.

## **VI. SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING AND MODERATION**

Council's social media platforms and profiles will be monitored and moderated during normal Council business hours, being 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, except public holidays, and outside these hours in the instance of a significant instance of non-compliance.

Council officials who are responsible for the moderation of the Council's or councillors' social media platforms may remove content and 'block' or ban a person from those platforms. Such actions must be undertaken in accordance with clauses 5.1.1 – 5.1.5.

For the purposes of this Part, 'social media platform' and 'platform' means both the Council's and councillors' social media platforms.

## **VII. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING EMERGENCIES**

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

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.

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

## **VIII. RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

Social media content created, sent and received by council officials (including councillors) acting in their official capacity is a council record and may constitute open access information or be subject to an information access application made under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*. These records must be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* and the Council's approved records management policies and practices.

You must not destroy, alter, or remove social media content unless authorised to do so. If you need to alter or remove social media content, you must do so in accordance with this policy, and consult with the Council's records manager and comply with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998*.



In fulfilling their obligations, council officials 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<sup>2</sup>.

## **IX. COMPLAINTS**

Concerns or complaints about the administration of a Council's social media platform/profile should be made to Council's General Manager in the first instance, either in writing and posted to the General Manager, PO BOX 125, GRENFELL NSW 2810; by email to [mail@weddin.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mail@weddin.nsw.gov.au); or by using the online complaint form on Council's website.

Complaints about the conduct of Council officials (including Councillors) on social media platforms/profiles are to be directed to the General Manager, using any of the above contact points.

Complaints about a General Manager's conduct on social media platforms may be directed to the Mayor, either in writing and posted to The Mayor, Weddin Shire Council, PO BOX 125, GRENFELL NSW 2810 or by email addressed to The Mayor to [mail@weddin.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mail@weddin.nsw.gov.au)

---

<sup>2</sup> See State Archives and Records Authority of NSW 'Government Recordkeeping / Advice and Resources / Local Government' and 'Social media recordkeeping for councillors'