

## CP 24 Social Media Policy

<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Manager Economic Development and Sustainability
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### Policy Objective

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Enhance communication and community engagement through effective use of social media to contribute to trust and confidence in Council.
- To ensure the use of social media is consistent with key policies, including the Media Policy and the Staff Code of Conduct.
- To define roles and responsibilities across the organisation in the use of social media

### What is Social Media

Social media includes web and mobile-based technologies where individuals or organisations comment, contribute, create, forward, post, upload or share content for the purpose of communication.

Forms of social media include, but are not limited to:

- social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn)
- micro-blogging sites (e.g. Twitter)
- photo sharing sites (e.g. Instagram)
- video sharing sites (e.g. YouTube)
- blogs, both personal and corporate
- wikis and other online collaborations (e.g. Wikipedia)
- forums, discussion boards, online social groups
- instant messaging (e.g. Jabber, Messenger)
- that use simple publishing tools or new technologies emerging from the digital environment to communicate with individuals, communities and organisations.

## **Scope**

This policy applies to:

- the use of social media by permanent, part time, casual, volunteer and contracted Council officers.
- all official social media accounts managed by Council and that are the property of Council
- all activities undertaken on a Council social media platform or with a social media tool

This policy does not apply to Councillors.

## **Procedure**

### **Official Spokesperson**

The Mayor and Chief Executive Officer are the two official spokespersons for the Council and are responsible for making and managing public statements on Council decisions, policy issues and matters which affect the community.

### **Day to Day Operations**

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for ensuring that factual information is provided through all forms of official social media.

Official Council social media accounts are for apolitical use only.

The dissemination of information through Council's official social media platforms must comply with the Social Media Policy.

If a matter requiring Council's attention is raised on social media, a response will be considered by the Chief Executive Officer and the Communications team. The response will be published by the Communications team with the consent of the Chief Executive Officer.

Council staff are not to publish any information on any form of social media without first going through the appropriate approval process, which in every instance, includes as a minimum the approval of the Department Manager.

### **Management of Assets**

All tools, sites and content of Council social media are the property of Council. Each of these Council assets must be administered using Council email addresses ending in @benalla.vic.gov.au. The Communications team is to be a joint administrator on all Council social media assets and is to maintain a current register of logon details.

Council staff are not to attach personal email addresses to the administration of Council assets.

All Council social media assets are to be connected through a central management tool as overseen by the Communications team. This tool is Hootsuite. This is to ensure consistency in reporting, co-ordination in the timing of post and to prevent exclusive administration access to a single Council Officer.

At no time are volunteers, committee members, contractors or any person other than delegated Council staff to have logon or author access to a Council social media asset or to publish to any Council social media asset.

### **Delegations by the Chief Executive Officer**

Council recognises that social media is a proactive and less formal way to communicate with the community. The Chief Executive Officer may delegate the authority to publish on social media to the Council Officers in relation to specific areas within their functional area of expertise including:

- Benalla Art Gallery
- Benalla Performing Arts and Convention Centre
- Benalla Festival
- Benalla Youth (Wots4Me, B-Town Youth, YOUth Matter)
- Enjoy Benalla
- Benalla L2P Program
- Supporting Benalla Business
- Benalla Library

### **Posting to the Benalla Rural City Council social media accounts**

Under delegation from the CEO the MEDAS has the authority to approve posts to be placed on Council's main social media pages. It is the responsibility of the CEC and Communications team to seek MEDAS approval to post content that is informative, accurate and timely.

The Chief Executive Officer may also delegate to the Communications team the authority to share relevant third-party posts. These may include events that are supported by Council, information disseminated by state or federal government bodies, or community groups supported by Council.

### **Responding to comments and direct messages**

Under delegation from the CEO the CEC and MEDAS have the responsibility to respond to all social media direct messages in a timely manner. As this may require coordination with the relevant staff member/s to formulate a response; a reasonable time to action is two working days.

Under delegation from the CEO the CEC and MEDAS are to use their discretion to respond to comments made on Council social media posts in a timely manner. At no time will Council respond to comments or posts made to non-Council-owned social media pages, even if Council is tagged in the post.

When deciding whether to provide a response to a comment on a Council post, the CEC / MEDAS must consider whether the comment is constructive, relevant and able to be answered accurately. If a fair and reasonable question is asked on a Council-owned post or page, the CEC / MEDAS will work with the relevant staff member/s to formulate; a response a reasonable time to action is 24 hours from the time of the comment noting that Council will not respond to comments outside of working hours.

### **Posting sensitive materials**

The CEC should be mindful to not post sensitive or controversial material on Fridays as best practice. Caution in this area will reduce the risk of legitimate comments going unanswered over the weekend and Council social media posts being trolled without moderation.

### **Moderating social media accounts**

Under delegation from the CEO the CEC and MEDAS are to use their discretion to moderate Council's social media accounts. Officers responsible for managing Council-owned social media accounts such as the Benalla Library, Art Gallery etc should consult the CEC on how to effectively deal with problematic users otherwise known as Trolls. The CEC may hide or advise Officers responsible for managing social media accounts to hide abusive, threatening, antisocial or disruptive comments. Should the CEC and MEDAS agree to block a social media user from commenting on a Council-owned account the CEO and GMC must be made aware of the reasons for this action and it be reported to Councillors in their weekly briefing.

All Council Officers who receive delegation from the Chief Executive Officer are to adhere to the Social Media Policy and are not to publish any content regarding policy issues or provide personal interpretations of Council decisions or actions. They are not to express their personal opinions on matters relating to either the Council or anything not related to the Council. The Chief Executive Officer may revoke this delegation at any time.

The Council does not allow excessive tagging in social media posts.

This delegation includes, but is not limited to:

- ensuring that the use of Council's social media accounts is in accordance with the relevant policies of the platform
- ensuring that all social media accounts have suitable recordkeeping and privacy processes in place before posting and that these practices are maintained through the life of the account
- moderating and responding to comments and direct/private messages
- monitoring the social media accounts for inappropriate comments/information reporting any inappropriate comments/information to the relevant Department.

## **Manage Accessibility**

Council is committed to meeting accessibility standards for all online channels and recognises its responsibility to provide access to services and information to all residents and visitors equally regardless of ability, channel of choice and use of assistive technologies.

As a minimum standard, to ensure as many people as possible can access and understand content, all official social media tools will:

- follow the primary principle of simple, clear and fast
- be written in plain English
- use a friendly and informal tone
- use words that the target audience understands
- consider feedback from the community and update content accordingly
- use best practice website and social media content principles
- use shortened URLs to meet character limit restrictions

Best practice website and social media content principles are outlined in the Australian Government Digital Service Standard and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

## **Council Elections and Caretaker Period**

Council's official social media channels may continue to provide regular communication with the community during the caretaker period.

Council will not respond to any political comments made or posted during the caretaker period and Council retains the right to remove messages which contravene caretaker conventions, whether from Councillors, candidates or members of the community.

Councillors will not be provided with assistance in social media channels in relation to election campaign matters or publicity. Councillors must not promote their own social media channel or websites via Council's official social media channels.

## **Social Media for personal use**

Council recognise Council staff use personal social media accounts for private purposes. Personal social media use includes any use that is not sanctioned by Council or defined as official work use.

All officers have an obligation to act responsibly and ethically when communicating about matters relating to the Council when using social media. When using social media in a personal capacity, it is important that personal comments are not interpreted as representing the Council. Commenting from personal accounts on Council posts or posts discussing Council matters is strongly discouraged.

Comments made via social media are treated as public comments and will be treated the same as comments made to the media.

The *Local Government Act 2020*, the Staff Code of Conduct and other relevant Council policies apply to the official and personal use of social media during and outside office hours.

### **Monitoring personal social media accounts and usage**

Council respects everyone's privacy. Council does not specifically monitor or moderate personal social media accounts or usage on personal equipment outside work hours.

Complaints received regarding statements on social media which do not follow the above principles or breach policy obligations will be investigated. This includes references to policy, operations, customers, officers, the Mayor and Councillors.

### **Applying for an ongoing or campaign account**

Campaign social media accounts are externally facing social media accounts which are developed and maintained for one specific project or campaign. Campaign channels are intended to be established for a specific purpose, on a specific social media platform and for a specific time period. Once established, campaign accounts are considered an official social media tool and are the property of Council.

Ongoing accounts are externally facing social media accounts which are developed and maintained in an ongoing way and for an indefinite period of time. They are generally related to an area of specialisation within Council and once established, as considered an official social media tool and are the property of Council.

Application for a campaign or ongoing social media account must be made by the Department Manager to the Chief Executive Officer. The application is in the form of a social media business case signed by the relevant Department Manager.

### **Review**

This policy may be reviewed at any time by the Council to accommodate changes in legislation, regulations, policy gaps, new technology or systems, as well as remain consistent with industry best practice.

**Relevant legislation includes the following:**

- *Defamation Act 2005 (Vic)*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)*
- *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)*
- *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)*
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic)*
- *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)*
- *Protected Disclosure Act 2012*

**Council Policies:**

- *Benalla Rural City Council Staff Code of Conduct*
- *Benalla Rural City Council employment contracts*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Prevention of Discrimination, Harassment and Victimisation Policy*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Disciplinary Guideline*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Customer Service Policy*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Information Privacy Policy*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Records Management Policy*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Community Engagement Policy*
- *Benalla Rural City Council Social Media Protocol*

**Other References:**

- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)
- Digital Service Standard, Digital Transformation Agency