



Policy

77 SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Version 03

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Responsible Officer: Director Corporate Services

1. POLICY STATEMENT

Council recognises the benefits of using social media as a means for engaging our communities, marketing, promotion and disseminating time-sensitive information to the widest possible audience.

It is acknowledged that certain risks are associated with social media tools and that these risks are not limited to reputation and the legitimate interests of Council. Moreover, it is based on the notion that under law, online content is permanent and should never be considered private.

Therefore, this policy has been developed to assist staff use social media in a productive and responsible manner.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Guide and support Council officials responsible and productive use of social media.
- Extend reach of Council messages online by strengthening its relationships with relevant audiences.
- Seek feedback and suggestions from engaged residents, ratepayers, business and visitors.
- Monitor social media activity as it relates to Berrigan Shire Council.

3. SCOPE

This policy covers:

- The establishment and content management of Berrigan Shire Council social media accounts.
- The use of social media by Council officials on matters concerning the Council or likely to be viewed as concerning Council; and



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- describes appropriate use of social media by Council Officials in a private or work capacity.

4. OBJECTIVE

This policy is developed to assist the Council with the following Delivery Plan Objectives:

2.2.2 Council operations support ethical, transparent and accountable corporate governance

2.2.3 Participate in networks that promote regional and cross-border collaboration, planning and service delivery

3.2.2 Provide opportunities for lifelong learning, cultural expression and recreation

4.2.3 Engage local business through regular meetings, electronic newsletter, Council bulletin and media publications

5. DEFINITIONS

Social Media – Software tools that allow groups to generate content and engage in peer-to-peer conversations and exchange of content.

Examples include:

- Social networking sites – for example. Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, Friendster
- Video and photo sharing websites – for example. Flickr, YouTube
- Micro-blogging sites – for example. Twitter
- Weblogs, including corporate blogs, personal blogs or blogs hosted by traditional media publications
- Forums and discussion boards such as Whirlpool, Yahoo! Groups or Google Groups
- Online encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia
- Any other web sites that allow individual users or companies to use simple publishing tools.

Council Official – as defined in the Council Code of Conduct. It includes Councillors, Council employees and Council volunteers.

Council Social Media Accounts: – are only those social media accounts created with the express permission of the General Manager

Post – broadcast information in a public forum

6. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

6.1. Use of Council accounts



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6.1.1. General principles

Social media is a public forum and Council officials will act accordingly. Posting on social media is the equivalent of a letter in the newspaper or a public address. Council officials are bound by the Berrigan Shire Council Code of Conduct and this policy applies to postings and use of Council social media accounts. This policy also applies to postings made by Council Officials on non-Council social media on matters concerning the Council or likely to be viewed as concerning Council.

When using Council social media, Council officials will:

- Act in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct and not bring the Council into disrepute
- Take responsibility for their online activity
- Only use these services in accordance with this policy and Council's Communication Devices and the Internet Policy
- Not share or re-post publicly available information that may foreseeably harm or damage the reputation of Council, other entities or persons
- Post or cause the posting on social media Confidential and Personal information held by the Council.

6.1.2. Establishment and posting of Council accounts

In general, Council's activity on social media services will be via social media accounts established specifically for this purpose. Council social media accounts will only be established with the express permission of the General Manager.

Only Council officials expressly authorised by the General Manager will be permitted to add content to, and/or moderate a Council social media account and/or site. The principles of the Council's Media Policy apply to all use of Council's social media accounts. Therefore, all content posted online must be appropriately authorised.

6.1.3. Monitoring

The Council will take reasonable steps to monitor and/or moderate content posted on its social media platforms by third parties.

People making requests of the Council via social media accounts will be referred back to the Council's standard customer request procedures. The Council will not otherwise respond to requests on social media platforms other than the provision of straightforward publicly available information, i.e. opening hours etc.

The following inappropriate content posted on its social media platforms will be edited and/or removed:

- Personal attacks (including attacks on Council staff and individual Councillors) and defamatory statements or comments
- Profane or sexual language or content, or links to sexual content



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- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, colour, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation;
- Solicitations of commerce;
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.
- Other material as determined by the Council's General Manager.

The Council will keep a record of all posts it deletes for reason of inappropriate conduct as per the above. People who repeatedly or egregiously post material as per the above will be banned from accessing Council's social media platforms.

While the Council encourages debate on topical issues relating to its activities, the Council's social media platforms are a means to promote the Council's plans, activities and positions and not a general platform for discussion. There is no general public right to access, post or comment on the Council social media platforms.

6.1.4. Owner's Rights and Records Management

The Council will respect the legal and moral rights of content owners when publishing third-party content on its social media accounts. This includes ensuring that the Council has consent to use the material and that appropriate credit is given to the creator.

Online Council statements can be held to the same legal standard as traditional media communications. The Council will establish a process to ensure that the Council meets its statutory and regulatory record keeping obligations when using its social media accounts.

Council officials responsible for maintaining social media accounts will ensure that relevant procedures regarding copyright and consent and records management are followed.

6.1.5. Council services and committees.

Where appropriate, the General Manager may authorise a service-specific social media platform; for example Library, Economic Development etc. This policy equally applies to these dedicated accounts.

Volunteer committees of the Council may establish dedicated social media accounts and/or sites. The committees must advise the Council of the existence of these accounts so the Council can monitor their content.

These accounts remain bound by this policy and the volunteers responsible for the accounts remain bound by the Council's Code of Conduct.



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Social media accounts operated by volunteer committees must include a disclaimer clearly stating that the views expressed are not necessarily the views or the position of the Council.

Posting on volunteer committee accounts does not fall under the banner of the Council's Media Policy and specific authorisation is not required for each individual item posted on those platforms. However, the Council reserves the right to direct a volunteer committee to remove inappropriate content or in the case of continual breach of this policy, require that it close and delete the account.

It is impractical for the Council to continually monitor activity on social media sites operated by its volunteer committees. When the Council is informed about inappropriate, offensive or otherwise objectionable material posted on these sites, it will take timely and appropriate action to rectify the issue.

6.2. Use of personal accounts

6.2.1. General principles

All Council officials are bound by the Berrigan Shire Council Code of Conduct. This includes their interactions on personal social media services.

When using personal social media accounts, Council officials will:

- Take responsibility for their online activity. Social media is a public forum and Council officials must act accordingly. Council officials are bound by the Berrigan Shire Council Code of Conduct and this policy applies to postings to and uses of social media accounts.
- Only use these services in accordance with this policy and Council's Communication Devices and the Internet Policy. Use of social media from Council devices and/or Council internet connections is not considered private.
- Not use a personal social media account for Council purposes without the express permission of the General Manager.
- Not share or re-post publicly available information that may foreseeably harm or damage the reputation of Council, other entities or persons.
- Not create or establish fictitious names or identities with the intent to avoid compliance with this policy or Council's Code of Conduct.
- Ensure that their postings on social media are clearly separated from their role as a Council official.
- Not present personal views in a manner to suggest that those views are endorsed or supported by the Council.
- Council officers must not use corporate email addresses, for example. "<name>@berriganshire.nsw.gov.au" to create personal accounts in sites unrelated to the Council.



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6.2.2. Councillors

As members of the community, Councillors are entitled to use social media services to enter into public debate in their private capacity and make comment on Council affairs provided they clearly state that such public comment reflects their personal opinion and not that of the Council or a committee of Council.

6.2.3. Employees

Employees will ensure that their personal use of social media services does not undermine their productiveness and effectiveness at work. Employees will give their attention to the business of Council when on duty.

Employees must not use social media to communicate with other employees about Council business without express permission.

Use of personal social media accounts by employees during workplace incidents such as evacuations or accidents may cause distress to others. Employees should be mindful of this and exercise care when posting on social media.

Inappropriate use of social media may lead to disciplinary action in line with the Local Government (State) Award.

7. RELATED POLICIES OR STRATEGIES

7.1. Legislation

- *Local Government Act 1993*
- *Local Government Regulation 1994*
- *State Records Act 1998*
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*
- *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*
- Local Government (State) Award 2014
- NSW Government Social Media Policy and Guidelines

7.2. Council policies and guidelines

- Berrigan Shire Council Code of Conduct
- Berrigan Shire 2023 (Community Strategic Plan)
- Communication Devices and the Internet Policy
- Equal Employment Opportunity, Workplace Bullying and Harassment policy
- Media Policy