

# POLICY

<b>TITLE:</b>	SOCIAL MEDIA		
<b>DIVISION:</b>	CORPORATE SERVICES		
<b>ADOPTED BY:</b>	COUNCIL		
<b>DATE OF ADOPTION:</b>	MARCH 2021	<b>DATE OF REVIEW:</b>	MARCH 2026
<b>MOTION NUMBER:</b>	OC58/21		
<b>POLICY NUMBER:</b>	CP21		
<b>LEGISLATIVE REF:</b>	Section 109(2) of the Local Government Act 2019		

## PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to employees on the use of social media, both for business and personal purposes and sets clear expectations of employee's conduct. This is to ensure that employees are able to use social media effectively for both business and personal purposes without inadvertently placing themselves in a situation where the appropriateness of their conduct is called into question.

While the guidelines and expectations regarding conduct must be followed by all employees it should be noted the policy document itself does not constitute a term of contract of employment. Staff should refer to the Council's "Code of Conduct" for specific guidance on how the council expects them to behave.

## 1. SUMMARY

Social media is an increasingly popular means of communication that allows people greater freedom in how they express themselves both socially and for business purposes. For many it is now their preferred way of finding out what is going on or contacting organisations like Barkly Regional Council.

Engaging with people through social media can give us, as a Council, connection and dialogue with residents we may not reach through other channels. Council has the opportunity to use this medium to help people to find the right information and correct misconceptions.

This policy will help staff to make the right decisions about social media. It is important that they have an understanding of the opportunities, as well as the risks social media brings. This policy outlines the standards Council expects when you engage in social media, in both a business and personal capacity.

The social media policy may be amended, withdrawn, suspended or departed from at the discretion of the Council at any time. All staff must ensure that they are familiar with, comply with the contents of, and support the Council's policies, procedures and guidance.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

Council is committed to ensuring employees understand the Social Media Policy and expectations of them when making public comment both in their professional and personal lives. It has been developed to assist employees to be mindful of their obligations and responsibilities under relevant legislation, and the code of conduct.

The same high standards of conduct and behaviour generally expected of Council employee's also applies when participating online through social media. Online participation should reflect and uphold the values, integrity and reputations of the employees program / directorate and the whole organisation.

Employees are not authorised to speak on behalf of the Council unless specifically authorised to do so by the CEO.

## 3. PRINCIPLES

Council respects that employees have the same right to freedom of expression as other members of the community, subject to a legitimate public interest in maintaining an impartial and effective public service. In doing so, however, employee must behave in a way that it does not seriously call into question their capacity to act apolitically and impartially in their work. It is also important that the reputation of the Council is not placed at risk by comments that our employees make.

Employee should be aware that content published online and on social media is, or may become publicly available, even from personal social media accounts. Council expects the employee to take reasonable steps to ensure that any social media use or public comment, including online falls within the following parameters.

- Don't make comments that are unlawful, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, discriminatory or hateful to, or about work, colleagues, peers or the Barkly Regional Council;
- Don't use a work email address to register personal social media accounts;
- Don't make comments that are, or could be perceived to be:
  - Made on behalf of the Council, rather than an expression of a personal view;
  - Compromising their capacity to fulfil duties as a Council employee in an impartial and unbiased manner. This applies particularly where comment is made about the organisations policies, programs, services, and other employee.
  - So harsh or extreme in its criticism of the Council, elected members, other employees, that the employee is no longer able to work professionally, efficiently or impartially;
  - Critical of peers or other stakeholders associated with Council;
  - A gratuitous personal attack that is connected with their employment;

- prejudicial to the integrity or the good reputation of the employees Directorate and/or the Council;
- compromising public confidence in their Directorate or the Council;
- are mindful that their behaviour is bound by Council’s Code of Conduct and Council’s ICT Acceptable Usage Policy at all times, even outside work hours and when material is posted anonymously or using an alias or pseudonym; and
- make clear that any views expressed are their own, and not those of the department. However, this will not necessarily protect them from breaching Council’s Code of Practice. If an employee can be identified as working for Council and they criticise the organisation, or elected members, or any Council program, it’s reasonable for people to question their impartiality and ability to do their job effectively.

When considering making personal comments, employees should reflect on the following questions:

- Could your comments cause Council or other stakeholders to lose confidence in your ability to work in an impartial and professional manner?
- Are your comments consistent with how the community expects the Council to operate and behave?
- Could your comments lower or undermine the reputation of your program, Directorate or the Council?
- Are your comments lawful? For example, do they comply with anti-discrimination legislation and laws relating to defamation?
- Would you be comfortable if your manager read your comments?
- What if someone takes a screenshot of your comments and then circulates these around?

### 3.1 The internet is forever

Content published on the internet can remain public indefinitely. Content can also be replicated and shared beyond the original intended audience who may view it out of context or use it for an unintended purpose. For example, private messages or posts can be saved, screenshot and made public – with little potential for recourse. It is important to be aware that according to the terms and conditions of some third-party sites, the content published is the property of the site where it was posted and may be re-used in ways that were not intended.

Before posting to a social media site it is important for users to understand the tool/platform, read the terms of service and all user guides, and look through existing content to get an idea of the posting etiquette and any cultural and behavioural rules or protocols associated with that social media platform.

Do not rely on a social media site’s default or adjustable security settings as any guarantee of privacy. Even if the employee does not identify themselves online as a Council employee, they could be identified as one by other people. Posts can be traced back to individual employees and be identified as an employee of the Council even if they posted anonymously or using a pseudonym.

#### **4. PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

As the use and popularity of social media grows, the line between what is public and private, personal and professional can become blurred. It is important therefore that employees are aware that their personal digital activity could have an adverse impact on their professional role or the council's image and reputation.

Even if you do not expressly name the council as your employer on social media, this policy will still apply if a connection with your employment can be reasonably made.

You should refer to Council policies or your manager for guidance on what the Council considers to be unacceptable in any public comment you make about the services delivered or commissioned by the Council.

Specifically, Council will not tolerate any of the following activity on social media if it can be connected to you as an employee of the Council:

- Abusive or threatening behaviour;
- Inappropriate comments or materials that may be regarded as discriminatory;
- False or misleading statements that could have a negative effect on the Council's reputation;
- Inciting or supporting somebody to commit a crime or other unlawful acts; and
- Sharing confidential information relating to Council's processes, and/or business
- Escalating an online dispute about the council without referring the interaction to the PR & Events Officer for strategic advice and to minimise reputation damage to the organisation.

This could include content you share or like as this could suggest that you approve of that content.

#### **5. PROFESSIONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

If you are required to use social media platforms for Council related activities or public facing interactions on behalf of the organisation you should be aware that:

- Anything you post on behalf of council will directly affect the values and views of the organisation;
- The tone of you social media content should align with core values of the organisation
- If you are unsure if your content will cause any kind of issue or you are dealing with community feedback and difficult online behaviour you should refer the interaction to the PR & Events Officer;
- You fully understand the platform you are creating content on and always adhere to best practice to the nature of that platform and guidelines.

## 6. CYBERBULLYING

People make comments on social media that they may not say to someone face to face. These comments on social media can be just as damaging as any other form of bullying. Cyber-bullying can be hurtful and in some circumstances it can be a criminal act.

Cyber-bullying can take many forms:

- Abusive texts, on-line posts and emails;
- Imitating others on line using fake profile and other methods;
- Spreading rumours and telling lies on-line;
- Making hurtful comments;
- Making threats or comments designed to intimidate on-line;
- Repeated unwanted messages being sent to you; and
- People sending photos or videos of you to others to embarrass or humiliate you.

If any employee is threatened by cyber-bullying as part of your work environment, it is a requirement that you report this to your supervisor immediately. Council may in some circumstances refer cases of cyberbullying to relevant authorities for their actioning.

## 7. RESPONSIBILITY AND DELEGATION

Management:

Management will:

- Ensure all staff have read and signed the Social Media policy;
- Enforce staff in adhering to the Social Media policy;
- Hold regular toolbox talks and educate employees about the Social Media policy;
- Support staff if a complaint has been raised regarding the breach of the policy; and
  
- Report any known breaches of the social media policy and any relevant policies to the People & Culture department

Employees:

Each employee has an obligation to:

- Adhere to this policy, the ICT acceptable use policy and the Code of Conduct policy

- Keep in mind the relevant Council policies and guidance when considering any social media activity, whether business or personal;
- Ensure that no personal information about work related individuals is provided to third-parties without their consent;
- Report any known breaches of the social media policy and any relevant policies to their direct manager; and
- Report to your manager, any conflicts of interest that may be identified when using any social media

## **8. RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS**

- Barkly Regional Council Code of Conduct Policy
- Barkly Regional Council Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Barkly Regional Council ICT acceptable usage Policy
- Commonwealth Criminal Code 1955

## **9. EVALUATION AND REVIEW**

Within six (6) months of a new term of Council.

**Acknowledgement**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (*Print full name*) have read and understood the Barkly Regional Council Code of Conduct and I agree to abide by this code which is outlined above.

Employee signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date signed: \_\_\_\_\_