



## Social Media Policy for Councillors

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

George Town Council recognises that social media is an essential communication, engagement and customer service channel.

This policy acknowledges that Councillors are elected representatives and as such are required to represent and communicate with their community as part of a robust local democracy, including through public debate and engaging with their constituents online.

Social media provides a platform to encourage dialogue between Councillors and the community, and enable Councillors to gain insight into the community and its needs via public feedback.

However, clear and consistent guidelines are required to ensure the appropriate use of social media by Councillors. This policy enables Councillors to speak on social media while protecting the interests of Council and complying with the Code of Conduct.

It is consistent with Council's Code of Conduct, in particular Part 8 "Representation".

## 2. TYPE OF POLICY

This Policy is a Council Governance Policy that requires endorsement by Council and provides specific direction in relation to governance practices.

## 3. OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Guide Councillors on the use of social media sites;
- Protect the reputation of George Town Council; and
- Provide an effective platform for community engagement and public debate.

## 4. SCOPE

The policy applies to George Town Council Councillors and informs them of their responsibilities in relation to the use of social media in an official or individual capacity which reflects on their position as a Council official.

## 5. LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN

### Goal 02

Support an active, vibrant and culturally diverse community life that enjoys livable and amenity rich neighbourhoods.

### Key objective

Actively engage and consult with the community, notably young people and those from cultural and economic backgrounds.

### Goal 05

Ensure Council listens to and understands community needs and continues to make responsible decisions on behalf of the community.

### Key objectives

Continue to improve Council communication with the community, including celebrating the successes and achievements.

## 6. LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS & RELATED COUNCIL DOCUMENTS

- Local Government Act 1993
- Personal Information Protection Act
- Copyright Act 1968
- George Town Council – Code of Conduct

## 6. LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS & RELATED COUNCIL DOCUMENTS (CONT.)

- George Town Council – Policy No. 02 – Personal Information Protection Policy
- George Town Council – Policy No. 28 – Information Disclosure
- George Town Council – Policy No. 33 – Risk Management

## 7. RISK CONSIDERATIONS

Unfiltered social media content is open to misinterpretation and therefore can misrepresent the George Town Council.

This policy is aimed at providing a broad understanding of social media risks and the management of social media risks. Non-adherence to this policy and the George Town Council Code of Conduct and relevant legislation has the potential to place the Council at significant risk.

## 8. POLICY

### 8.1 Definition of Social Media

Social media facilitates the creation and sharing of information and ideas via virtual communities and online networks. It invites communication, collaboration, discussion and debate. It also enables the development of social and professional networks, groups, follows and contact.

This policy relates and applies to social media platforms, including but not limited to:

- Facebook;
- Twitter;
- Instagram;
- YouTube;
- LinkedIn;
- Google;
- Snapchat;
- Council's Intranet
- Blogs; and
- Video podcasts

Council's official social media platforms are administered by Council staff to ensure consistency of content, tone and style.

### 8.2 Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors

Councillors should be aware that any social media activity or interaction, either official or personal, is public, permanently available, traceable and able to be produced elsewhere.

Councillors should also be aware that whether they intend it or not, what they post online in a private capacity may reflect on George Town Council and their role as Councillors, and they should therefore behave in a way that upholds the values and reputation of Council, consistent with the Code of Conduct and other policies.

Councillors are reminded that 'shares', 'likes' or 'retweets' may be viewed as an endorsement of the original post.

## 8. POLICY (CONT.)

In the spirit of a respectful democratic environment, constructive criticism or negative comments/commenters should not be blocked or removed, unless they are overtly offensive and defamatory, incite hatred and violence or are criminal in nature.

Councillors must also be aware of posts by others to their social media pages and consider if the post and its comment/s are offensive or may incite hatred, violence and/or criminal acts. Any post/comments made to a Councillor's social media page/site should be monitored by the Councillor to ensure that it meets the standard of socially acceptable behaviour/commentary. Councillors should remove any post/comment that does not meet the required standard of this policy.

### 8.3 Councillor use of social media

Councillors are responsible for the preparation, posting and management of their own content on their social media channels. Councillors can make personal comments on their social media platforms, but must make clear that any views are their own opinions as an individual and not those of Council.

The following examples relate to, but are not limited to, what a Councillors must not do:

- Speak on Council's behalf;
- Commit Council to any action, pre-empt official Council announcements or post any confidential Council information;
- Direct staff to post content, in line with the Code of Conduct;
- Breach the privacy of other Council officials or those that deal with Council;
- Post content that is offensive, humiliating, threatening or intimidating to other Council officials or those that deal with Council; or
- Post content about Council that may be misleading or deceptive.

Councillors must also ensure that their use of social media, and Council's computer resources or other mobile devices, is consistent with the Code of Conduct.

The Mayor can issue material in line with official media releases issued on mayoral letterhead on his/her separate mayoral social media platforms. The Mayor should also approve any posts by Council officials on official Council social media channels using his/her image and/or quotes.

### 8.4 Guidelines for Councillors using social media

The following are examples of, but are not limited to, what Councillors should and should not do on social media.

#### Do.....

- Follow Council's social media channels to stay in touch with what's happening, and to like and share Council's posts.
- Remember everything you say and do is public, and you can be identified as a Councillor of the George Town Council.
- Pause before you post – would you be comfortable with this information being shared with your family, friends, work colleagues, media and the broader community, and is the information likely to bring you or Council into disrepute?
- Be mindful of your general conduct obligations under the Code of Conduct, including the requirement not to damage Council's reputation.
- Be careful to communicate accurate information.

## 8. POLICY (CONT.)

- Be courteous and respectful of fellow Councillors, Council officials and members of the community, including respecting people's privacy.
- Report any violations of this policy to the General Manager.

### Don't.....

- Imply that you are speaking on behalf of George Town Council.
- Disclose official, personal or confidential information that is not publicly available (such as staff, personal information, legal advice, commercial-in-confidence and Code of Conduct complaints).
- Post material that is obscene, pornographic, defamatory, threatening, harassing or discriminatory to any individual, group or organisation or may lead to criminal penalty.

### 8.5 Emergencies

In the event of an emergency, publishing Council information on social media sites will be the responsibility of the appointed communications officer with approval from the General Manager or their delegate.

### 8.6 Breaches of this Policy

Breaches of this policy by Councillors may result in an investigation of the alleged breach in line with Council's Code of Conduct.

Any alleged criminal offence or allegation of corrupt conduct will be referred to the relevant external agency.

Inappropriate behaviours may include, but are not limited to:

- Using social media to ridicule, vilify, harass, cyberbully, discriminate against or bring into disrepute the Council, or other Council officials, including Councillors, Council officials or community members;
- Posting content that is deemed to be offensive, including obscene or sexually explicit language; and
- Using social media channels to post/provide confidential, personal or sensitive information relating to Council.

Complaints should be referred to George Town Council's General Manager in the first instance.

### 8.7 Privacy

There is no such thing as a 'private' social media site. Posting information online is a public activity and no different from publishing information in a newspaper. Councillors are advised to not post anything to social media sites that they would not be comfortable with if quoted in the media.

Everything posted or received on social media is public property. Once something is published online, control of it is lost forever and it cannot be withdrawn. Search engines can find posts years after publication, while archival systems save or cache information even if deleted.

Posts – even deleted posts – are considered 'publication', and are subject to the same defamation laws as any other media.

## **8. POLICY (CONT.)**

Councillors are responsible for any information they release relating to Council, Councillors or other Council officials. Claiming that comments/images are published on private pages is not defensible.

## **9. IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY**

The implementation of this policy rests with the General Manager.

Shane Power  
**GENERAL MANAGER**