Social Media Policy

Purpose

The purpose of the Social Media Policy (Policy) is to outline:

- the expectations of staff, volunteers and Councillors in relation to the posting of content on, and the general use of, social media, when making public comment whilst working for or representing Baw Baw Shire Council (Council),
- what is considered to be acceptable use of social media in both a professional and personal capacity; and
- define the types of content that are prohibited on Council's social media, whether posted by staff, volunteers, Councillors or members of the public.

The Social Media Policy is implemented for the entire current Council term.

Governance principles

Section 9 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) specifies the overarching governance principles and supporting principles that Council must adhere to in the performance of its role and functions.

This Policy gives effect to the following overarching governance principles outlined in Section 9(2) of the Act:

- Priority is to be given to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations,
- the municipal community is to be engaged in strategic planning and strategic decision making,
- innovation and continuous improvement is to be pursued,
- the transparency of Council decisions, actions and information is to be ensured.

This Policy also takes into account the following supporting principles defined in Section 9(3) of the Act:

- The community engagement principles (Community Engagement Policy),
- the public transparency principles (Public Transparency Policy),
- the service performance principles.

Definitions

Social media is the term used for internet-based tools which allow for user participation and refers to user-generated information, opinion and other content shared over digital networks. Social media also includes all other emerging electronic and digital communication platforms.

Staff means Council employees, contractors, agents, members and volunteers whether on leave or otherwise.

Councillor means a person who holds the office of member of a council.

Approved officers are responsible for managing and authorising the use of Council's social media accounts and engaging with the general public. Approved officers include the Digital Communications Advisor(s), Manager Strategic Communications and the Executive Leadership Team.

Official use of social media means the use of any Council-administered account or posting content that may be reasonably interpreted as the statement of an officially endorsed position or decision of Council.

Personal use of social media means the use of social media in any context outside of professional/Councillor duties.

Scope

This policy applies to elected Councillors, the Executive Leadership Team and staff including full-time, part-time, contract, casual, work experience and trainees, contractors, and volunteers of Council.

It applies to any and all online content published on websites, apps or social media channels by staff or Councillors whether as part of official use, or personal use (content) that can be linked to their role with Council, whether Council is specifically mentioned or not.

Legislative context

- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2004*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*

Related policies and documents

This Policy is intended to support and align with other relevant Council policies and procedures, including the following:

- Baw Baw Shire Council – Acceptable Use of Information and Communication Technology

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- Baw Baw Shire Council Child Safety Policy
- Baw Baw Shire Council Community Engagement Policy
- Baw Baw Shire Council Employee Code of Conduct Policy
- Baw Baw Shire Council Media Policy
- Baw Baw Shire Council Public Transparency Policy
- Baw Baw Shire Councillor Code of Conduct
- Baw Baw Shire Councillor Staff Interaction Policy.

What is social media?

Social media facilitates the creation and sharing of information via online communities and networks. It includes online pages, groups, channels, tools or platforms that enable people and organisations to engage with one another by creating and sharing content and information, such as text posts, images, documents and video.

Social media can be used to work more effectively in the following ways:
- Communication – social media allows councils to communicate important messages in an effective, accessible and timely manner. This includes news and information, emergency warnings and statuses, events and launches, and services, projects and facilities.
- Conversation – social media is all about a conversation. It allows councils to ask for opinions and better engage with their communities. It can also change or enhance the perception of the council and correct any misinformation or deception.
- Collaboration – social media provides more efficient ways of working together and sharing information with residents and businesses. It also supports traditional media by broadening its reach and scope.

With its growing use by Australians across all ages and interests, social media is now a key part of Council's broad and integrated digital communications program, complementing our other communications activities including the media program and website.

Council will use social media to:
- Educate the community and raise community awareness of Council services, projects, events and initiatives,
- Inform the community about service delivery interruptions,
- Inform the community about community engagement opportunities,
- Provide an informal, timely and accessible way for the public to communicate with Council Support traditional media by broadening its reach and supporting key messages.

Benefits and challenges of social media

While social media provides a timely, cost-effective channel for Council to communicate with the community, it also poses some risks, such as reputational, legal, and cyber security risks.

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With our various social media accounts independently managed by Council employees and other Council representatives, it's vital that Council minimises the potential for its brand or reputation to be compromised, provides a safe, moderated and respectful online space for the community to interact with our organisation, and prevents confusion in the community due to mixed messaging or inconsistent application of Council's branding standards.

Policy principles

This policy is to uphold the integrity and reputation of Council in social media, to ensure Council builds strong and positive relationships with the community, and further ensure that such engagement in social media does not discredit Council's reputation.

Policy details

The policy details what is considered to be acceptable use of social media and is designed to assist staff and Councillors in participating in social media, recognising the many different degrees of interaction and usage that exist amongst Council's staff and Councillors in various public and private capacities.

Social media may only be used by staff for an official use if the use on a social media platform has been approved by an **approved officer.**

For Councillors, it is encouraged they work with the Manager Strategic Communications to set up or re-establish any existing accounts to be utilised for their Councillor social platforms. A councillor social media platform will be categorised as this if it clearly discloses "Councillor or Cr" in the name on any social media platform or in any introduction section on any social media platform.

Content posted online may remain public even after the content has been deleted. Whenever content is posted online, it should be treated as permanent and public, even if the intention is to post it privately.

Appropriate use of social media

Social media users, including staff and Councillors, must:
- Ensure any information about Council is accurate, factual, and transparent
- Reference only publicly available information such as information that is already found on Council's website or publications,
- Ensure any information about Council is not disparaging of the organisation, Councillors or employees,
- Ensure that any posted information is clearly linked to the purpose of the social media account or is in the community's interest,
- Ensure material that is obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, discriminatory or hateful to another person or entity is not posted, or is removed if posted by a user,
- Be polite, professional and ethical in social media interactions,

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- Be respectful when there are differences of opinion,
- Be accountable for what you say and do when using social media,
- Direct individuals to official communication channels to make a request of complaint,
- Correct any errors in a timely manner,
- Seek out feedback on social media content prior to posting if further clarification is required,
- Only ever publish content that is apolitical and free from personal opinions, beliefs or political views, however Councillors have the ability to express their own opinions if it is made clear and publicly disclosed that it is their own personal opinion they are expressing and not of that of the Council overall,
- Never publish a personal opinion on policy proposals or of the wider Baw Baw Shire Council implications and services, however Councillors have the ability to express their own opinions if it is made clear and publicly disclosed that it is their own personal opinion they are expressing and not of that of the Council overall,
- Always be mindful that information on social media and other digital platforms is in the public and is often permanent. As information is so often shared, deleting information is no guarantee that it has not been replicated elsewhere on the internet,
- Ensure formal statements and announcements are not announced on Council's social media channels unless approved by Communications, these types of communications are to be left to the official spokesperson i.e. Mayor, CEO or the Executive Leadership Team,
- Note that having authorisation for one social media channel does not automatically give a department permission to create another. Each channel must be authorised and created through the Communications team. For Councillors, it is encouraged they work with the Manager Strategic Communications to set up or re-establish any existing accounts to be utilised for their Councillor social platforms. A councillor social media platform will be categorised as this if it clearly discloses "Councillor or Cr" in the name on any social media platform or in any introduction section on any social media platform.
- Ensure to check the licensing agreement of photographs in any existing archives before use.

Note that Council's social media presence is built around the concept of a 'conversation' and sharing key information with the community, it is not a marketing or sales tool.

Social media users, including staff and Councillors, must not:
- Falsely represent themselves as another Council employee or Councillor,
- Discredit the reputation of Baw Baw Shire Council, its Councillors or employees
- Disclose any confidential information,
- Where possible, participate in social media where there is a conflict between their Council duty and their personal interests,
- Represent or speak on behalf of Baw Baw Shire Council on any social media channel however Councillors have the ability to clarify inaccurate information or express their own opinions if it is made clear and publicly disclosed that it is their own personal opinion they are expressing and not of that of the Council overall,

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- Create social media assets (pages/profiles/sites/blogs) that represent an affiliation with Baw Baw Shire Council,
- Speak inappropriately or negatively about Baw Baw Shire Council or any staff or member of Council.

If unsure whether the information is confidential or publicly available:
- **Staff** should contact an approved officer
- **Councillors** should contact the Chief Executive Officer or Manager Strategic Communications.

Baw Baw Shire Council reserves the right to remove content that violates its Social Media Policy, any associated policies or the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2004 or any usage guidelines (or similar) on our channels.

Prohibited content

Content that includes or links to the following types of content is not permitted on Council social media channels under any circumstances:
- Material that would offend contemporary standards of taste and decency.
- Abusive, bullying, harassing, threatening, hateful, profane or sexual language or imagery.
- Discriminatory material aligned to age, gender, cultural background, disability, family status, marital status, nationality, parental status, political opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, religious beliefs/activity, responsibilities, sexual orientation,
- Commercial solicitations or transactions.
- The promotion of excessive consumption of alcohol or participation in gambling.
- Content which is false or misleading.
- Confidential information about the Council or third parties.
- Copyright or ownership protected materials.
- Illegal materials or materials designed to encourage law breaking.
- Materials that could compromise Council, employee or system safety.
- Materials which would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks).
- Material which would bring the Council or its stakeholders into disrepute.
- Personal details or references to Councillors, Council staff or third parties, which may breach privacy laws.
- Spam (i.e. the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages).

Any user generated content (such as comments, replies or posts) that does not adhere to the above guidelines will be removed and the user blocked if necessary.

By continuing to use any Council social media channels, users indicate their awareness and acceptance of these conditions.

Staff use of social media

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The use of social media by staff will also be carried out in accordance with the Baw Baw Shire Employee Code of Conduct.

Councillor use of social media

The use of social media by Councillors will also be carried out in accordance with the Councillor Code of Conduct and the Baw Baw Shire Councillor Staff Interaction Policy.

Community content moderation

Community content is social media posts (comments) made by members of the community. Council reviews community content and, where necessary, will moderate or remove content in accordance with the sections titled '**Appropriate use of social media'** and '**Prohibited content'** above, and the **Social Media Operational Guidelines**.

Social media engagement with persons under 18

Council acknowledges that social media platforms are a common tool used in the grooming of children for abuse. As part of Council's adherence to Child Safety Standards legislation, measures are in place to ensure the safety of all children who engage with Council via social media.

When interacting with individuals identified or suspected to be under 18 years of age, staff and Councillors are not to create private social media groups or communicate via direct private messages. If it is deemed appropriate for a response to be provided directly to a message, a minimum of two officers or two serving Councillors are to oversee the social media communications.

Where an officer or Councillor receives a direct disclosure of abuse (or forms a reasonable belief of abuse) via social media communications, they will adhere to the Baw Baw Shire Council Child Abuse reporting procedure.

All records of social media engagement with individuals identified or suspected to be under 18 years of age will be kept in accordance with the requirements of the Public Records Office of Victoria and the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Record keeping

Any passwords and logins associated with social media sites used by Council must be registered and accessible by staff with the appropriate authority. Where an officer requires a personal social media account to manage one of Council's social media assets, no login credentials will be registered, however, a list of page administrators will be maintained. The Manager Strategic Communications will be responsible for maintaining these credentials and the list of staff with access to Council's social media assets.

As all social media activity is a matter of public record, it is Council's responsibility to ensure that all social media content disseminated by Council, as well as all user responses, are systematically recorded and documented for future reference.

Currently, Council uses the social media documentation tool Brolly to maintain continuous cloud-stored records of all social media activity on our channels.

Responsibilities

Approved officers

Are responsible for managing and authorising the use of the Council social media accounts and engaging with the general public, or associated groups, in an official Council capacity to ensure any enquiries are responded to within a timely manner during business hours.

They are also responsible for monitoring official Council accounts/profiles during business hours for any breach or potential breach of this policy and ensuring the removal or modification of any social media posts or comments, or the reporting of those posts or comments as required.

Staff are responsible to understand and comply with the provisions of this policy.

Councillors are responsible to understand and comply with the provisions of this policy.

If you have any questions about this policy and how it may impact you, please contact the Strategic Communications Team by email to communications@bawbawshire.vic.gov.au.

Enforcement of this Policy

Breaching this Policy may result in performance management, review or disciplinary action.

Approval date	18 March 2025
Approval authority	Executive Leadership Team
Effective from	23 July 2025
Review term	Council term
Next review date	December 2028
Responsible position	Manager Strategic Communications
Responsible Director	Director Economic Development, Arts and Advocacy
Version	3.0

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