

2.26 Social Media Policy

Policy Owner	Executive Director Community Services
Responsible Officer	Communications Coordinator
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Objective

The City of Albany (the City) recognises the importance of key behaviour values that are the cornerstone to the behaviour of all employees and interactions with the community.

The objectives of this policy and guideline is to provide guidance to employees, contractors and volunteers around expected conduct whilst using social media.

Scope

This policy applies to everyone who works at the City of Albany, including employees, trainees, contractors, labour-hire staff and volunteers, regardless of whether they work full-time, part-time or casual.

This policy applies any time social media is used.

This includes but is not limited to social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Yahoo!, Google Groups, SMS and any other form of social media in existence whether it is used during work hours or in personal time.

Policy Statements

The City's Executive endorses the following policy statements:

Position Statement

Personal and professional use of social media by City employees, contractors and volunteers must not:

- Bring the City into disrepute.
- Imply the City's endorsement of personal views.
- Disclose confidential information.
- Make disparaging or derogatory comments of the City, colleagues, customers, clients or competition.
- Compromise effectiveness at work (e.g. through excessive use).

This policy is intended to guide employees and contractors who use social media as either part of their job or in a personal capacity. It applies any time an employee is using social media in relation to the City, and:

- It's products or services.
- It's people; and
- Its competitors and/or other business-related individuals or organisations.

Depending on the circumstances, non-compliance with this policy may be a breach of employment, misconduct, harassment, discrimination, bullying or some other unlawful behaviour.

Those who fail to comply with this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including instant dismissal.

Social Media for Business Purposes

This position applies if you have been approved to represent the City through one of its existing social media platforms or pages.

- The City is represented by the relevant City of Albany platform profile and more commonly facility pages (ALAC Facebook Page, Arts & Culture Instagram Page, City of Albany Facebook Page etc.).
- If you are given access as an administrator or editor of a City social media page you post, react and respond as that page, not an individual person.
- You can only disclose publicly available City information. You must not comment on or disclose information confidential to the City. If you are unsure if the information is confidential then consult with the Communications Team and/or the Governance & Risk Team.
- You must not be the first to make an announcement unless specifically authorised to do so.
- You should only comment on your approved area of expertise/responsibility.
- You must ensure that all content published is accurate and not misleading.
- You must ensure that your comments are respectful and that you do not post or respond to any material that is obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, discriminatory or hateful to another person or entity including the City, its employees, contractors, clients, volunteers, customers and competitors.
- You must adhere to the terms of use of the relevant social media platform.
- Any social media channel developed by an employee during company time/and or in company-owned equipment belongs to the City.
- Any content written, used, received, developed or saved during company time and/or in company-owned equipment belongs to the City.

The following are a few real-life examples of inappropriate use of social media:

- *A councillor in a Perth local government who ran a Facebook page in his capacity as a councillor engaged in this unprofessional and heated exchange with a ratepayer about rates that generated media attention and backlash that forced the councillor to shut down his profile:*
 - **Councillor:** "You say 'we' can't afford it. Who is 'we'?? You??"
 - **Ratepayer:** "Council clearly. Or they wouldn't need to increase rates by 5%."
 - **Councillor:** "That's illogical! The cost of two cars is greater than a heater! As I said in an earlier post, if you feel you cannot afford to live here, you have one choice – Gosnells."
 - **Councillor:** "Do you know the difference (dollar-wise) between 3% and 5% on your rates over 12 months????"
 - **Ratepayer:** "Don't love it leave hey. Nice. And you're a councillor. I meant we have two cars out of necessity. Not in England. Save your patronising tone for schoolkids."
 - **Councillor:** "Then save your 'arguments' for a chat page and not my Councillor page which is for community information (not argumentative whingers). Feel free to delete yourself. The next time you want to have your say about rates, get off your backside and run against me for council for the measly \$30k per year and take all the whingers with it. Have a nice evening."
- *Revealing personal opinions on behalf of the council is unprofessional and can be highly embarrassing for the council. In 2010, a council was forced to suspend its Twitter account after its administrator published a comment attacking the abilities of a journalist, claiming a "squirrel could have run rings" around them."*
- *In 2012, a council launched an investigation after a member of staff used the council's social media page to poke fun at a Minister, complete with the politically loaded hashtag: #saveusfromtheposhboys.*
- *The council did not see the funny side.*

- *Taking to social media – especially an official company or council page – to vent frustration about aspects of your workplace, no matter how challenging, is not smart.*
- *This company employee who had access to their company’s official Twitter page posted these tweets following news about staff redundancies. Fair to say they probably blew any chance they had of surviving the redundancies:*
 - “Just overheard our Marketing Manager (he’s staying, folks) ask “How do I shut down Twitter?”***
 - “Sorry, we’ve been quiet for so long. Under contract, we’ve been unable to say a word, or – more importantly – tell the truth.***
 - “There are over 60 of us being fired at once! Mass execution of loyal employees who love the brand.***
- *Humour is a good way to generate engagement on social media, but making jokes about race, no matter how witty or harmless they seem, is not funny.*
- *A taco shop employee who posted this to his shop’s official social media page learnt the hard way: “I hate tacos, said no Juan ever!”*
- *Carelessness can be disastrous, as a car company employee in the US discovered when he lost his job after accidentally posting this insult about drivers on the company’s official social media page:*
 - “I find it ironic that Detroit is known as the #motorcity and yet no one here knows how to f***ing drive.”***

Personal Use of Social Media

The line between personal and professional use is easily blurred on social media.

What you say online is public, even when you are speaking in your own personal profile. Anything you say has the potential to have consequences for the City of Albany (the City) and your employment.

This policy position outlines how to conduct yourself in a social media platform if you are referring to the City, its products or services, its people and/or its competitors and/or other business-related individuals or organisations.

- You must not include the City logos, trademarks, or your work email address in your personal postings.
- You must not engage in online conversation in your personal capacity with members of the public that relates to the City’s operations, or comment in relation to the City on public pages or posts that are unkind, argumentative or fuelled by opinion and emotion.
- You can only disclose publicly available City information through an existing City platform to which you have approved access, in accordance with policy position B of this Policy.
- Be respectful and do not post or respond to any material that is obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, discriminatory or hateful to another person or entity including the City, its employees, contractors, clients, volunteers, customers, competitors and elected members in any way that could be perceived that you are commenting for the City, or in your capacity as an employee.
- You must not make any comment or post any material that might damage the City’s reputation or cause it harm in any other way.
- You must adhere to the terms of use of the relevant social media platform.

- Subject to the above policy conditions, if you make any comment on social media in relation to the City, you must state where can be clearly identified that you are an employee of the City and that the stated views are your own and not those of the City.
- Excessive use of social media during work hours is not permitted and will result in disciplinary action that could also lead to dismissal.
- You are personally responsible for the content you publish in a personal capacity on any form of social media platform.

The following are a few real-life examples of inappropriate use of social media:

- *In 2012, a council employee caused a headache for his employer and subsequently lost his job when he suggested on his personal Twitter feed that one of his local streets should be given the “napalm” treatment. Tasteless and in direct contradiction to his day job where he was paid to promote the council and its local improvement work.*
- *One of the most notorious social media faux pas of all time involved a former PR executive who posted what she thought was a joke on her Twitter profile – which identified her as an employee at her (now former) company – before hopping on a plane to Africa.*
“Going to Africa. Hope I don’t get AIDS. Just kidding. I’m white!”
- *Facebook is not the place to express opinions about your employer, or work, as the employee who posted these comments to his profile discovered when he lost his job for misconduct:*
“Chipper training today and supposed to go home after it. W** supervisor told the trainer to keep us as long as he could. The f***** don’t even pay you for this.”**
“Hard to sleep when the joys of another week at work are looming NOT.”
“It’s not the work it’s the people who ruin it, nasty horrible human beings”
“On standby tonight so only going to get half p*** lol. I’m on vodka and apple juice, first time I’ve tried it, not too shabby.”**
- *An employee decided to apply for a promotion and subsequently decided to “unfriend” some of her colleagues on Facebook. In apparent retribution, her colleagues placed an image of a witch on her work PC’s screensaver – they were dismissed for their conduct.*
- *This employee seriously crossed the line on his personal Facebook page when he was not paid properly and was subsequently dismissed:*
“Wonders how the fk work can be so *f*****g useless and mess up my pay again. C**** are going down tomorrow.”**

The following are a few real-life examples of inappropriate use of social media:

- *Two employees who posted photos on Facebook of them “planking” at work were dismissed, and each was subsequently fined \$1500 in court for breaching safety laws.*
- *A truck driver who photographed traffic accidents with his mobile phone while driving a heavy vehicle, uploading them to Facebook, was dismissed by his employer for breaking road rules and putting other road users at risk.*
- *A council employee came under investigation over vile comments on his Facebook page directed at opponents of plans to build detention basins in two parks and which were published by a local newspaper:*
“You are all f*wits get over it and start protesting about more important s*** than grass and trees you hippy ***** raping d***heads.”**
- *An employee was dismissed by his employer for excessive use of social media during working hours. The employee had logged thousands of Google Mail chats in a three-month period.*

Managing Content

By its nature, social media commentary can be robust, negative, inflammatory, defamatory, emotional, and even offensive or illegal.

For that reason, all content submitted by non-City of Albany contributors must be reviewed and vetted by an approved City moderator.

In the case of any particular comment, four possible actions might be taken:

- No action at all – the comment is allowed to stand as is. This is by far the most common “action” taken.
- An answer or response may be provided to a contributor’s query or comment.
- The comment may be drawn to the attention of the Communications team for consideration or action.
- The comment may be deleted.

Discipline

Inappropriate use of social media will not be tolerated in the City. An employee who engages in any conduct in breach of this policy will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including instant dismissal.

Any manager who is made aware of any of the behaviour outlined in this policy and who does not deal with the conduct appropriately or report the conduct to the appropriate officers will also be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including instant dismissal.

Identification of inappropriate use

If you notice inappropriate content on any form of social media in relation to the City, its employees, volunteers, clients and/or competitors then you should report it to your direct line Manager, the Communications Team, or the People & Culture Team.

Managing a complaint

Every allegation will be looked at by the city in accordance with the City’s Grievance Procedure. If after the investigation it is found that an employee has breached this policy then appropriate disciplinary action will be taken up to and including instant dismissal.

Prior to lodging a complaint an employee may seek the support of an appropriate person to talk through the situation. An appropriate person could be internal to the City, such as a Grievance Officer, Manager or a member of the People & Culture Team, or external to the City such as the Employee Assistance Program.

At any stage in the process an employee may choose to make a complaint external if it breaches laws applicable to the workplace such as discrimination, harassment and bullying.

Victimisation

Any employee who has made a complaint, or is a witness to a complaint in relation to a breach of this policy will not be discriminated against or suffer any other disadvantage for having made a complaint in good faith.

Vexatious Complaints

If a complaint is made and is subsequently found to be a frivolous or vexatious complaint (no merit to the complaint) then the person who made the complaint will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including instant dismissal.

Retention of Social Media Content

In accordance with the *State Records Act 2000*, the City acknowledges the requirement to maintain the City's social media records in a readable format and retain them for the appropriate period in accordance with their subject matter, as specified in an approved Disposal Authority.

Legislative and Strategic Context

This policy relates directly to the following elements of the Strategic Community Plan:

- **Leadership:** A well-governed city that uses resources wisely to meet local needs.
- **Outcomes:** Strong workplace culture and performance.
- **Objectives:** Provide strong, accountable leadership.

Legislative Context: *Local Government Act 1995*, section 2.8, in part:

- The Mayor is the principal person authorised to speak on behalf of the local government.

This function is also delegated to designated authorised employees.

Review Position and Date

This policy and procedure are to be reviewed every three years.

Associated Documents

Documents that have a bearing on this policy and that may be useful reference material for users of this policy, follow:

- *Social Media Guidelines*
- *Delegations & Authorisations Register*
- *Employee Code of Conduct*
- *Grievance Management Policy & Procedure*
- *Managing and improving unsatisfactory performance and workplace behaviour*
- *State Records Act 2000*
- *State Records Office of Western Australia – Records Management Advice – Social Media Content as Government Records*
- *Work Health & Safety Act 2020*