



## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Type:	Council Policy – Media, Marketing and Events		
Owner:	Communications and Engagement Officer		
Responsible Officer:	Chief Executive Officer		
Approval Date:	28 February 2023	Next Review:	1 June 2026
Records Number:	177253	Council/CEO Decision:	Council
Legislation Reference:	N/A		

### 1 PURPOSE

Online communication and new social media tools are important communication channels that provide Katherine Town Council with the opportunity to engage with the community and stakeholders. These tools can be used to inform the community about Council's services; to provide information about programs and to create new channels for a two-way conversation and consultation, for example on aspects upcoming events, projects, local news, and programs in Katherine and the Big Rivers region.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for Elected Members and employees in their personal use of social media and outlines protocols for using social media for official Council business.

### 2 SCOPE

This policy applies to Elected Members, Council employees, contractors, and volunteers associated with Katherine Town Council and relates to all social media platforms.

### 3 DEFINITIONS

**Social media** means the wide and evolving range of online interactions and behaviours on many different online platforms including social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or Reddit; professional networking sites like LinkedIn; video sharing sites and apps like YouTube and TikTok; blogs; online forums and communities and comments sections on news articles.

**Online social media activity** means posting content, uploading pictures (including themed 'frames' or captions for these on some sites); participating in online petitions and fundraisers; commenting on posts, blogs, Instagram photos or YouTube videos; sharing memes; 'liking' other people's content; and sending direct or private messages on networking platforms.

Social media is now a fundamental part of how people connect and engage with one another. It has become central to the way people share news, ideas, and interests; maintain relationships; and express identities and roles in our communities.

Elected Members and Council employees have a right to participate in online society, just as they have rights as citizens of Australia to engage in community life. Elected Members and Council employees are entitled to private lives, personal views, and political opinions.

At the same time, the unique nature of being an Elected Member or a Council employee means expressing personal views can reflect not only on people as individuals, but on Council as a whole. Personal behaviour can ultimately affect the confidence of the Katherine community and the Northern Territory Government in the integrity of Council.

This policy seeks to provide guidance to Elected Members and Council employees to understand and assess the risks that personal online behaviour can pose to public confidence in Council and strike a reasonable balance between rights as individuals and obligations as Elected Members or Council employees. A failure to comply with this Policy may constitute a breach of the relevant Code of Conduct.

In this policy, reference to ‘posts’, ‘comments’, or ‘posting’ on social media is taken to mean a shorthand way to cover the full range of online activity.

### **EXPECTED BEHAVIOURS**

All Elected Members and Council employees are bound by their relevant Code of Conduct. These codes set out obligations and standards of behaviour, with the ultimate purpose of maintaining public confidence in the integrity of Council. When action is taken to address suspected misconduct, or to sanction proven misconduct, its purpose is to maintain, or, where necessary, restore that confidence.

It is the responsibility of each Elected Member and Council employee to use reasonable and sound judgement while at work or when undertaking activities that may reflect on Council.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Only the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer, other Elected Members and officers authorised by the Chief Executive Officer, may speak to the media and comment publicly on Council business.

If an individual is asked to comment on any Council matter via the media (including social media) or other public forums and they are not authorised to do so, they should decline and refer the matter to their manager or the Chief Executive Officer.

### **ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA AT WORK**

Access to social media sites (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) on Council’s computer resources is provided to employees on the condition they abide by the Council’s “Computer, email, internet and telephone use policy”. Reasonable personal use is permitted.

### **OFFICIAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

Council has official social media accounts used to share information with the community and answer general queries. Official use of Council’s social media accounts will be in accordance with Council’s “Media policy” and only authorised staff can respond on Council’s behalf on social media.

Council’s Communications Officer will manage Council’s official social media accounts and all content will have received approval.

## INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR ON SOCIAL MEDIA

When undertaking online social media activity, employees must be careful not to imply they are authorised to speak as a representative of Council, nor give the impression that the views expressed are those of Council.

Employees are asked not to promote a brand or business on social media when identified as a Council employee, such as wearing a uniform or mentioning Council in that post. This also includes with an identifiable Council building in view, even if not in uniform. Council cannot be seen to endorse or promote one brand or business over another.

The following types of behaviour are inappropriate for personal online social media activity if they can be connected to Council:

- Posting unlawful or confidential material
- Posting, reposting or 'liking' content that falls far outside the norms of acceptable social behaviour—e.g. hate speech; threats or encouragement of violence or harassment; personal attacks or derogatory comments about individuals or groups within the community; etc
- Creating or sharing a petition in protest of a decision by Council
- Establishing an online community that is critical of Council, or which encourages or endorses harassment or defamation of individuals including Elected Members, colleagues, members of particular communities, public figures; etc., and
- Airing significant workplace grievances on social media.

## ANONYMITY, ALIASES AND DISCLAIMERS

While the risk is greater if a person identifies themselves on a social media platform as an Elected Member or Council employee, the risk may not be eliminated if they do not.

Elected Members and Council employees can be identified online in a range of ways, even if they post anonymously or using an alias—and once the individual has been identified and connected to Council, their behaviour can affect public confidence regardless of the intention to keep posts 'private'.

In some cases, it may be useful to include a disclaimer on the profile or on an individual post to indicate that the views are personal and do not represent Council. This may be appropriate, for example, on professional networking sites such as LinkedIn. However, a disclaimer may not be sufficient to eliminate all risks.

## MECHANISMS TO ADDRESS CONCERNS

Consider the official mechanisms available to address any concerns, rather than posting about them on social media.

If an employee disagrees with a decision of Council, they are encouraged to raise this with their supervisor/manager or the Chief Executive Officer in the first instance. It is entirely appropriate to raise concerns, and propose alternative approaches, if the employee does so respectfully and with the understanding that it may not always be possible or reasonable to implement changes.

If an employee believes that an individual is not acting in accordance with Code of Conduct, discuss the issue with the Chief Executive Officer. A range of formal and informal mechanisms may be available to address your concerns, including reporting the matter as a suspected breach of the Code of Conduct, or dealing with the issue in another way.

If an employee disagrees with a decision relating to their employment, a range of formal and informal approaches are available, from discussing the matter with your manager to seeking a review of action.

If an employee has an interpersonal dispute with a colleague, a wide range of options are available to help resolve or manage it, including talking to your supervisor/manager or another trusted senior person or raising the matter with HR, or seeking alternative dispute resolution.

## 5 ASSOCIATED POLICIES/DOCUMENTS

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- Employee Code of Conduct
- Computer, email, internet and telephone use policy
- Media policy
- Privacy policy

## 6 REFERENCES AND RELATED LEGISLATION

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- *Local Government Act 2019*
- *Information Act 2002*

### Revision History

Version	Approval date	Details of change	Responsible officer
1	27/08/2015	Created	
2	26/04/2017	Revised	
3	23/01/2023	Revised and on new template	CEO