

# Social Media Policy

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| Policy Owner:            | Executive Manager Communication |
| Date approved:           | 3 June 2025                     |
| Next review date:        | 3 June 2026                     |
| Document number:         | 6339085                         |
| Required by legislation: | N/A                             |

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## 1 Introduction

Waikato District Council's Social Media Policy supports Council's Trust and Confidence Strategy as an enabler for Council's vision of liveable, thriving and connected communities. Social media is an effective way to connect communities.

Social media is a powerful two-way communication tool that helps us have direct dialogue with our customers. Online communication tools are a method of engaging with different demographics.

The demographics of social media users continue to evolve as platforms and online behaviours shift. Currently, Facebook is our largest channel, with more than 29,000 followers, primarily in the 25–34 and 50+ age groups. LinkedIn has over 7,000 followers, mostly professionals aged 30–49 who use the platform for networking and industry updates. Instagram has a smaller audience of more than 3,000 users, predominantly aged 19–29.

When used correctly, social media can enhance a customer's experience with, and perceptions of, Council and aid us in delivering on our organisational goals.

When used incorrectly, social media channels can create disengagement, distrust, and confusion around what we stand for.

It is therefore critical that these channels are governed well and managed strategically.

## 2 Purpose

This policy sets expectations and guidelines for election candidates when using social media in a personal and professional capacity, and the public who use social media channels managed by Council.

This policy also provides guidelines for Authorised Administrators of social media channels managed by Council.

### 3 Definitions

**Channel:** Social media accounts or pages on platforms, including but not limited to: Facebook; Instagram; LinkedIn; and X.

**Council staff:** Employees, contractors and supply partners.

**Elected Members:** elected members of council, including the mayor and councillors.

**Authorised Administrators:** Council staff who have access and manage council accounts, including affiliated social media accounts.

**Candidates:** Individuals being considered for a role as an elected member of Council during an election period.

**Public:** Members of the public or wider community who are not Council staff, Elected Members, Authorised Administrators or Candidates, who are engaging with council social media channels.

**Defamatory language/content:** a term used to describe statements or content that are untrue, slanderous or libelous, and that can cause real damage to a person's reputation.

**Discriminatory language/content:** words, phrases or content that tends to stereotype individuals, groups, races, or nationalities. Words to treat someone unfairly or put them at a disadvantage based on their race, age, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

**Offensive language/content:** language that is intended to upset or embarrass people, or that is harmful, hurtful, or discriminatory. Offensive language could include swearing, vulgarisms, discriminatory language, sexual expletives, and be based on factors like race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation.

**Threatening language/content:** language/content that expresses a sense of danger, harm, or aggression towards a person or group. It could be verbal or written, and could include intimidation, force, or an attempt to manipulate.

### 4 Application

- Members of the public who use social media channels managed by Council.

- Authorised Administrators who have social media responsibilities as part of their role.
- Candidates when using social media for the purpose of campaigning.
- Council staff and Elected Members guidelines and expectations relating to social media can be found in the ICT Acceptable Use Policy, Staff Code of Conduct and Governance Code of Conduct.

## 5 Relevant documents

The following legislation may be related to this policy:

- Privacy Act 2020
- Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987
- Public Records Act 2005
- Local Government Act 2002
- Local Electoral Act 2001
- Electronic Transactions Act 2002
- Copyright Act (including the Copyright (new Technologies) Amendment 2008)
- Human Rights Act 1993
- Employment Relations Act 2000
- Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015
- Meta Community Standards
- Any other relevant legislation or government policy

The following Council Policies/Guidelines/Processes are related to this policy:

- Records Management Policy
- Computer System & Cloud Computing Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Feedback and complaints policy
- Customer Service Charter & Standards

## 6 Policy statements

- The Public Records Act 2005 requires Council to create, maintain, update, retain and dispose (where appropriate) records, this includes online social media activities. Further, under Section 40 of the Public Records Act, specific records are classified as a protected record which Council cannot destroy or dispose of unless prior formal approval is obtained from the

Chief Archivist. Posts and conversation strings that meet the definition of a record must be recorded and saved.

- The Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA) requires Council to retain and appropriately store records in an approved repository, including social media posts, as they are considered public records. This means that any information shared on social media platforms by local government entities must be preserved and managed in accordance with legislation.
- The principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, as articulated by the courts and the Waitangi Tribunal, provide the framework for how we as a country should participate in our daily lives. These principles are often referred to as the 'three Ps' - partnership, participation, and protection.
- Council does not tolerate discrimination of any kind (including but not limited to age, sex, race, colour, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, citizenship, disability).
- Council does not tolerate defamatory, discriminatory, offensive or threatening language or content.

## **7 Social media platform requirements**

All of Council related social media accounts must include:

- The correct logo and spelling of the organisation OR Council approved logo
- A brief descriptor of the organisation
- State its relationship to Council.

Council does not permit the publishing of the following information:

- Intellectual property, confidential information, or customer data
- Company sensitive matters such as employment issues, In-Committee information, draft documents (strategies, policies, plans and publications) and embargoed announcements
- Information regarding candidates during an election period.

## **8 Social media management**

### **8.1 Social media management**

- Council owns all social handles related to Waikato District Council (including all groups and sub brands).
- Content and comments containing any of the following will not be allowed:
  - Offensive language or material

- Personal attacks or discrimination of any kind
- Considered spam, including potentially malicious links
- Sexual content or links to sexual content
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity
- Misinformation
- Defamation
- Breach of privacy - Posting your own or others personal, identifying, or confidential information.
- Content that is believed to be inappropriate will be assessed and recorded, including the reasoning, by the Communications team. Content deemed inappropriate will not be allowed.
- Council encourages constructive criticism and discussion through polite, honest, and professional engagement.
- Council will respond to both positive and negative comments in a timely manner when responses are expected. Responses will be clear and free of jargon.

## 8.2 Community Guidelines

These guidelines do not replace Community Guidelines. Policies and/or Codes of Conduct set out by social media platform owners (i.e. META). To ensure our social media channels are used appropriately and for the good of the community, we ask those that engage with our social media accounts to follow our community guidelines:

- **Be respectful.** Please use common courtesy and do not make comments that contain offensive, profane, defamatory, threatening language or which are otherwise inappropriate in a public forum. These comments will be removed in accordance with the Harmful Digital Communications Act.
- **Stay on topic.** Only make comments that are relevant to the topic or theme of the post.
- **Enabling connections.** We often share links to third-party websites to encourage thoughts and discussions. Waikato District Council is not responsible for the content on those sites.
- **Be yourself.** The registration of multiple accounts for the purpose of trolling or harassing other users or with the intent to disrupt the flow of conversation is prohibited. Engaging in this type of behaviour may result in all usernames being banned from Waikato District Council's social media communities.
- **Protect your own and others' privacy.** Never post comments containing personal, identifying, or confidential information such as account details or

other personal information including address, telephone number, email, passwords, etc.

- **No solicitation.** Do not post advertisements or solicitations on our comments section.

### **8.3 Breach of guidelines, offences and repercussions**

Council's social media channels are a safe place where users are encouraged to communicate respectfully. Those who participate in engaging through Council's social media channels are asked to be respectful of each other, Council staff and Elected Members.

All users should be aware that Authorised Administrators monitor all social media activity associated with Council. Council will comply with the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015.

Council has five levels regarding inappropriate commentary and repercussions. These levels indicate the severity of inappropriate behaviour, but they are not necessarily applied in sequence. Council may proceed directly to any level of consequence based on the seriousness of the behaviour.

They are:

#### **Level 1**

- Incorrect Information

Repercussion: Incorrect information will be addressed by Council once in the first instance to provide clarity; comment/s may be hidden; Council will then cease to communicate with the original commenter.

#### **Level 2**

- General name-calling
- Offensive language or material
- Personal attacks or discrimination of any kind.
- Solicitation
- Sexual content or links to sexual content
- Defamation
- Repeat breaches of level 1

Repercussion: The comment will be removed from public view.

### **Level 3**

- Personal attacks or discrimination of any kind
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity
- Breach of privacy
- Repeated breaches

Repercussion: The comment is removed from public view, and a direct message is sent to advise:

The comment has been removed from public view per Council's Social Media Policy. That a condition of use of Council's social media platforms is that users are respectful to each other, Council Staff and Elected Members. A further breach may lead them to be banned from the social media channel.

### **Level 4**

- Threatening or explicit commentary and/or images
- Users who regularly instigate conflict, hostility, or arguments
- Trolling or harassing behaviour
- Repeated breaches of Level 3

Repercussion: The post is removed from public view; a direct message is sent to the person advising they will be banned from the page for no less than 3 years.

Consideration will be given to alerting the appropriate authorities.

### **Level 5**

Council reserves the right to turn off comments should we receive a high volume of abuse, misleading or otherwise harmful content. Consideration will be given to alerting the appropriate authorities.

Council must explain the reason in the comments section before turning off comments.

## **8.4 Authorised Administrators:**

- Only authorised administrators may post on social media on behalf of Council.
- Only authorised administrators may create social media accounts on behalf of Council.

- Must conduct themselves as a representative of Council and in accordance with this policy and other Council policies.
- Are responsible for ensuring their posts are accurate, fair, thorough, and transparent. They must also maintain the confidentiality of information, including financial and business information, customer personal information, staff personal information, partners and/or supplier information, any information not generally available to the public.
- Monitor Council's social networking during working days to ensure postings that do not comply with the guidelines are noted and appropriate action is taken.
- Outside of working hours, the authorised administrators will monitor Council's social networking sites as required.
- Answer questions in a timely manner and should endeavour to respond to any questions as soon as possible and within the same working day.

## **9 Local Government election rules regarding social media**

### **9.1 Guidelines for candidates**

Candidates must comply with the following guidelines for social media use and presence related to campaigning:

- Election advertising, using any media, including social media, must identify the person under whose authority they have been produced - as is the case with all election advertising.
- Social media accounts managed by Council and Libraries, including but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and X, are not permitted to be used as a communications channel by anyone (candidates or members of the public) for promotion, electioneering or campaigning. It is the responsibility of candidates to check if a social media account is one of the Councils.
- Any campaign-related or electioneering content posted to the Council's platforms will be removed.
- Council will unfollow all candidate social media profiles three months before the election date. This protocol is in line with the Local Electoral Act 2001.
- Candidates cannot rate, review, check-in or tag Council's social media channels.
- Council's social media accounts will remain neutral. However, Council will promote nominations, enrolments and the elections.

### **9.2 Guidelines for the public**



During the four months leading up to any Local Government Election, Council will remove any post, statement or image in a comment that relates to a candidate whether they are a current Elected Member or not.

## **10 Policy review**

This policy shall be reviewed yearly or as otherwise determined by the Chief Executive or Executive Manager Communications.