



Councillor Social Media Policy 2025-2029

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1. Purpose

To provide a clear set of guidance to assist Councillors to comply with the standards of conduct under the Model Code of Conduct (Model Code) in their use of Social Media.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Councillors of the City of Wyndham in relation to their use of Social Media in performing their role as a Councillor in accordance with section 28 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act). Noting that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between acting as a Councillor and acting as an individual, this policy also provides guidance on the use of personal accounts.

3. Policy Statement

From 26 October 2024, all Councillors must observe the Model Code made under section 139 of the Act. The Model Code is prescribed in regulations and sets out the individual standards of conduct expected to be observed by Councillors in the course of performing the role of a Councillor. Conduct that does not meet these standards can disrupt council business and prevent councils from serving the interests of their communities.

Social media is an important channel that enables Councillors to communicate with their communities. This policy aims to ensure that Councillors, in their use of Social Media, do not breach the standards of conduct set out in the Model Code by:

- Providing clear guidance on the appropriate use of social media by Councillors in the performance of the role of a Councillor;
- Recognising the rights of a Councillor to express an independent view consistent with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006; and
- Providing guidance to ensure Councillors make it clear when they are expressing an independent view that their comment is their personal view and does not represent that of Council.

Under this policy, Councillors **must**:

- Adhere to codes of conduct, policies and procedures referred to in this policy.
- Behave with courtesy, honesty and respect.
- Comply with relevant laws and regulations and ensure confidentiality of information defined as confidential under Section 3(1) of the Act or Council information as defined by Section 58(b)(ii) of the Act.

- Operate in good faith by not promoting misinformation or misrepresenting information.

Under this policy, Councillors must **not**:

- Mislead the public or community or misrepresent the views of Councillor colleagues.
- Publish or share confidential information.
- Engage in trolling, bullying or harassment, nor operate anonymous or fake accounts in relation to Council matters and not be involved in misleading behaviour.
- 'Like' or otherwise endorse material that, if posted by the Councillor, would constitute a breach of the standards of conduct.

Example 1: Councillors operate in good faith by not promoting misinformation or misrepresenting information

A social media post by a councillor that is not made in "good faith" could involve misinformation, manipulation, or a personal attack, potentially harming public trust or community relationships. They could involve unsubstantiated claims or allegations and promote misinformation that could be harmful or even defamatory.

Example

"Looks like the mayor is at it again, making backdoor deals to line his own pockets. I wouldn't be surprised if this new park project is just another way to funnel ratepayer money to his friends."

Example 2: A Councillor must not engage in trolling.

Trolling is when someone posts comments online that are either deliberately wrong or designed to upset others. An example of trolling by a Councillor on social media would involve deliberately provocative, inflammatory, or disruptive behaviour intended to upset or agitate others rather than contribute to constructive dialogue. It can involve a mocking tone, belittle others, and provoke anger and disillusionment. Rather than contributing to a meaningful discussion or offering solutions, the councillor is using sarcasm and hostility to escalate conflict.

Example

"Here we go again! Another whiny complaint from the same group of entitled people. If you don't like Council's decision, maybe pack up and move to another municipality. Problem solved."

Example 3: An example of liking a post that constitutes a breach of the standards of conduct

If a councillor "likes" a post that violates standards of conduct, it can be seen as endorsing or supporting inappropriate content. It can also result in sanctions against the Councillor.

Even though the councillor may not have written the post, liking it implies approval, which can be just as damaging. A "Like" may endorse discriminatory views, could violate anti-discrimination policies and could alienate groups within the community, damaging public trust.

Example***Original Post:***

"Immigrants are just a drain on our community, taking jobs and resources. We need to put our people first and stop letting them in. #CloseTheBorders"

Councillor response:

"The Councillor "Likes" the post, signalling their support and endorsement of the position."

4. Definitions

Confidential information	has the same meaning as at section 3(1) of the <i>Local Government Act (Vic) 2020</i>
Council information	Has the same meaning as at section 58(b)(ii) of the <i>Local Government Act (Vic) 2020</i>
Councillor Code of Conduct	has the same meaning as at section 3 of the <i>Local Government Act (Vic) 2020</i>
Defamation	means communicating false statements about a person that injure their reputation
Digital Media	means any online platform where people may interact with the author and/or others, including commenting, contributing, creating, forwarding, posting, uploading and/or sharing content. This includes Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube or other digital communication platforms
Personal use	means using social media privately, whether during business hours or outside of business hours
Professional use	means using social media when acting as a representative of Wyndham City Council, whether during business hours or outside of business hours
Social Media	means forms of electronic communication through which people create online communities to share information, ideas and personal messages, videos, and other content
Trolling	trolling is when someone posts comments online that are either deliberately wrong or designed to upset others.

5. Policy

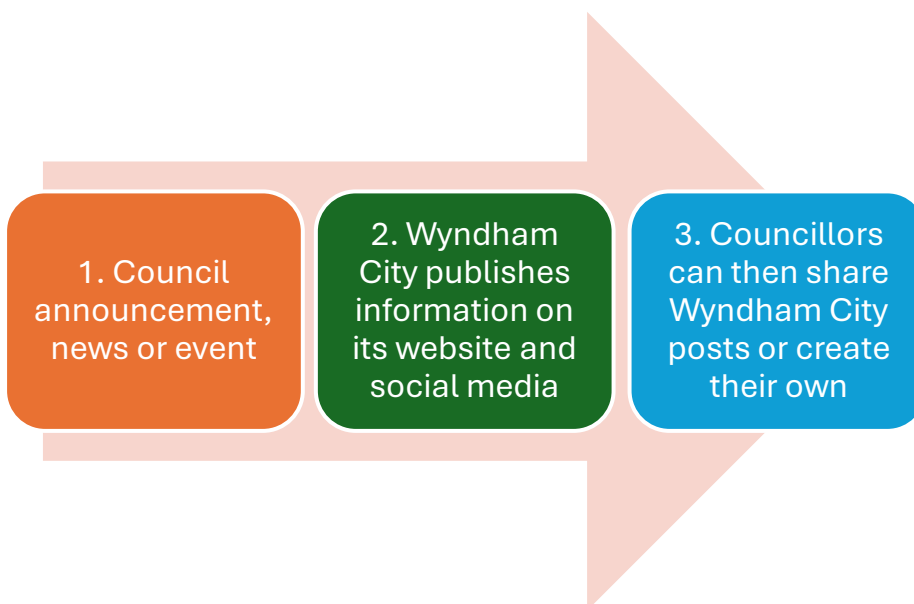
Wyndham City use of Digital Media

Wyndham City supports the use of Digital Media as part of an integrated approach to communication, marketing and community engagement. Council uses Digital Media to:

- Promote, inform and educate the community on policies, projects, services and activities of Council.
- Provide a timely and accessible way for the Council to communicate with residents.
- Promote and market council's major events and tourism attractions.
- Provide essential updates to the community during a crisis or emergency.

Council First Approach

Council adopts a 'Wyndham first' approach to the posting of content online, with content first appearing via an official Council site, before being posted by another party (this includes Council staff, Councillors and Council contractors). Once content has appeared on an official Council site, it can then be shared or reproduced, including by Councillors.



6. Councillor use of Social Media

Councillors are permitted to have their own official Councillor Social Media pages to promote their activities and fulfill their representative role.

Councillors do not require organisational permission to create or post to these accounts, although it is recommended that Councillors use the naming convention set out in section 10 of this policy when setting up their pages. Councillors are solely responsible for the content that appears on pages set up by them.

In managing their social media, Councillors must have regard to the Councillor Code of Conduct, this policy and any other relevant Acts and Council policies mentioned in this document, specifically noting the 'Council first' approach to social media and any relevant confidentiality requirements.

To enable Councillors to share content from Council's official social media accounts, they are encouraged to follow these accounts.

Appendix 1 of this document provides Councillors with tips and tricks to maximise their social media usage.

7. Content not permitted

The following content is **not** permitted on Councillor social media sites at any time:

- Abusive, profane or sexual language.
- Content which is false or misleading.
- Confidential information about Council or third parties unless otherwise obtained or released by a government authority through a formal process.
- Copyright or Trademark protected materials.
- Discriminatory material in relation to a person or group based on age, colour, creed, disability, family status, gender, nationality, marital status, parental status, political opinion/affiliation, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, race or social origin, religious beliefs/activity, responsibilities, sex or sexual orientation.
- Material which would breach applicable laws (defamation, privacy, trade practices, financial rules and regulations, fair use, trademarks)
- Material which would bring the council into disrepute.
- Personal details or references to councillors, council staff or third parties, which may breach privacy laws.
- Spam, meaning the distribution of unsolicited bulk electronic messages.
- Statements which may be considered to be bullying or harassment.

8. Right to express an independent view

Councillors have the right to express an independent view consistent with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

When expressing a personal view, Councillors should make it clear that the view they express is their own and does not represent the official position of Council.

Example

Council has attracted significant online and media attention following a decision to close a community centre. A Councillor who did not support the decision comments on a social media post:

“We’ve made a big mistake here and the sooner we reopen the community centre the better.” This post may give some in the community the impression that the Councillor is speaking for Council on a changed position.

If the Councillor wished to comment, the Councillor could write: “Speaking for myself, I think the Council has made a big mistake but sadly, this is the position that was endorsed by the majority.”

9. Public vs Personal

All social media activity on a Councillor’s social media page is posted in a Councillor’s official capacity and subject to the standards of conduct.

Any public forum where a Councillor’s identity is apparent (whether or not they have specifically identified themselves as a Councillor) is considered public and official.

Social media use could be considered private if a Councillor has a personal Facebook page. A personal Facebook page allows a person to choose who they add as ‘Friends’ and who can view certain posts via the page settings. However, Councillors should be aware that “Friends” could share personal posts in a more public setting.

It is worth noting that all information and messages communicated on social media is admissible in court and subject to the Acts outlined in this policy, regardless of privacy settings.

To mitigate risk and reputational damage, Councillors should disclose on their personal page or account: “I am an elected Councillor at Wyndham City Council and comments made by me on this page and elsewhere using this account are my own views and may not represent the position of Council.”

From time to time, Councillors may be subject to trolling, bullying or harassment online, and it remains the absolute right of the Councillor to delete comments, block individual users or delete posts and threads. This remains the responsibility of the Councillor – not Wyndham City.

10. Naming conventions

Councillor Facebook pages should have a consistent name.

For example:

1. Councillor John Smith or
2. Councillor John Smith – Wimba Ward Wyndham City Council

11. Support for the Mayor and Councillors and posting protocols

Wyndham City’s Councillor Support and Strategic Communications Departments own and manage the Mayor’s Facebook page.

Councillors are responsible for managing all content on their own Councillor Social Media pages, taking into account all elements of this policy.

Councillors can write their own social media posts. Councillors are also provided with a ‘Social Media Pack’ each week, containing social media content, including images.

From time to time, Council officers will provide social media content and tiles for use by Councillors on their Councillor-managed sites. For example, Tiles and content will be provided for the Annual Plan and Budget.

As a publisher of material, Councillors must remain aware they are individually responsible for material published on their sites, including comments from third parties, which have the potential to be defamatory or in breach of Acts outlined in this policy.

12. Resident requests

It is the responsibility of the Councillor to manage and respond to comments or requests posted in the comments section of their Councillor managed social media pages. It should be noted that Councillors are under no obligation to respond to comments on their Facebook pages.

Councillors should encourage residents raising operational requests through social media to raise them through Council's customer portal or Councillors can raise them through the portal on the resident's behalf.

Customer requests received via the Mayor's Facebook page will be managed by Cr Support.

13. Councillors must notify Wyndham City of Social Media Pages

It is required that Councillors notify Wyndham City of any public social media pages they establish or maintain, where they are the primary administrator. Councillor Support/Governance will maintain a register of Councillor-managed/owned social media sites.

14. Groups or Committees established under the auspice of Council

Councillors cannot establish or manage a social media page for a group or organisation established under the auspices of Council (such as a committee or Advisory Group).

15. Technical Support and Training

Wyndham City Departments including Councillor Support, Strategic Communications and Information Technology can provide limited support to assist Councillors setting up their Councillor accounts. Professional advice and training can also be provided.

16. Related Documents

- *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*
- *Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)*
- *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012 (Vic)*
- *Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)*
- *Crimes Act 1914 (Cth)*
- *Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)*
- *Defamation Act 2005 (Vic)*
- *Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012 (Vic)*
- *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*
- *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)*
- *Wyndham's Staff/Councillor Interaction Policy 2024*

DOCUMENT CONTROL	
DOCUMENT NAME	WCC – Councillor Social Media Policy
OBJECTIVE ID	A4873137
OWNER	Manager Corporate Affairs
APPROVER	Council
DATE OF ADOPTION	22 July 2025
NEXT REVIEW DATE	July 2029

Social Media

Tips & Tricks

Length of Post:

Keep the length of your post text short, clear and to the point to ensure your message gets across. No one wants to read a big wall of text. Best practice length of posts:

- Facebook: 50-80 characters
- Instagram: 125 characters
- LinkedIn: 140 characters

Produce appealing content:

Make sure that the content you are generating meets the needs of your audience.

Don't reinvent the wheel:

Share posts/messaging from channels.
eg: Wyndham City accounts

Ask questions:

Get your followers to engage and ensure you engage with them. Engagement is the key to a successful social media account, not the number of followers or likes.

Creative/Image:

Always have a creative/image attached to your social media post to get your audience attention and increase engagement. Don't crop posters or other collateral.

Image size:

Across all channels, square is the best option for newsfeed posts – 1200 x 1200 pixels.

@tag:

Any businesses/organisation or person in your post

Call to action:

Drive followers to a website/social media account for further information.

Videos:

Short – under 45-60 seconds and have captions if speaking.

Add Terms and Conditions to your page

(below)

Comments:

You can hide or delete comments on your account if they don't comply with your terms and conditions. These can be added to the about section, regularly remind followers of these and also pin to the top of your newsfeed if required.

Hiding a comment on Facebook provides immediate results. The comment disappears from public view right away, so a typical user can't read or reply to it. The negative Facebook comment still remains visible to the original poster and all their friends. But they won't know that you hid their Facebook comment.

Social Media Terms and Conditions

Users may not post any material that is: abusive, threatening, defamatory, or obscene, fraudulent, deceptive, or misleading -in violation of any intellectual property right of another -in violation of any law or regulation -otherwise offensive or inappropriate -not suitable to all ages -discriminatory or offensive (particularly in reference to an individual's race, age, gender, sexuality, religion or disability)