

## Use of Social Media by Councillors

### [Version Information](#)

### Scope

This guideline applies to all councillors.

### Purpose

This guideline is to assist councillors to:

- Use social media effectively as a tool to share information and engage their electorate in a two-way conversation.
- Comply with their obligations under the *Local Government Act 2009*, the Code of Conduct for Councillors and other relevant Council policies and guidelines.

### Definitions

**Social media** is a group of online applications such as social networking sites, forums, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video, photo and audio sharing sites that allow people to publish, share and discuss content. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Flickr.

**Defamation** is the publication of material that is likely to lower a person in the estimation of others, or cause injury to a person's reputation by exposing them to hatred, contempt, or ridicule, and is without lawful excuse.

### Actions and responsibilities

Below is a list of responsibilities for councillors when using social media. These responsibilities include and expand on those already existing within the Code of Conduct for Councillors and support the responsibilities and requirements of councillors as outlined in the *Local Government Act 2009* and other relevant Council policies.

### Councillors must:

- Respect the democratic process and publicly represent Council decisions when speaking on behalf of Council. (Council's Media Relations Guideline GL-3072-001 details these authorisations which include the Mayor, Portfolio Leader and Divisional Councillor.)
- Only disclose and discuss publicly available information.

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- When communicating with the public or media, make it clear when they are expressing a personal opinion and when they are speaking on behalf of Council. The use of a generic disclaimer on the social media page will suffice.
- Ensure that all content published is accurate and not misleading.
- Comply with any corporate internal communication guidelines that have been approved by the Council's chief executive officer.
- Be polite and respectful to all people they interact with.
- Adhere to the Terms of Use of the relevant social media platform/website, as well as copyright, privacy, defamation, contempt of court, discrimination, harassment and other applicable laws.

## **Councillors must not:**

- Post material that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, breaches a Court suppression order, or is otherwise unlawful.
- Use, disclose or release any confidential or personal information obtained in their capacity as a councillor.
- Imply they are authorised to speak on behalf of council unless approved to do so.
- Use Redland City Council logos or insignia that may give the impression of official Council support or endorsement of their personal comment on non-council related issues.
- Publish video, photographs or audio of council staff on social media unless approval has been provided by the staff member and their group manager. (An exception applies where permission is implied, e.g. the taking of photographs at an awards ceremony.)
- Take or publish photos of children without the express permission of their parents based on an understanding of what the councillor intends to use the picture for.

## **Benefits of social media**

Social media is free and accounts cost nothing. Social media allows councillors to:

- Have conversations with a range of people that they would never be able to physically meet and who do not traditionally seek out their local representatives.
- Find out what people are talking about locally, their concerns and interests.
- Find out about breaking news, the latest research or publication or the latest policy announcements from political parties.
- Make the electorate more aware of the work they do.
- Communicate immediately, pass on information and receive opinions in minutes.
- Promote their messages to the media instantly, wherever they are.
- Upload pictures and videos to show their role in local events - a picture tells a thousand words.
- Receive immediate feedback on ideas and modify proposals in line with local thinking.

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### CMR Team use only

## Defamation

High profile defamation cases have highlighted the pitfalls associated with the use of social media, and councillors are urged to take extreme caution when using such sites. Councillors should never post anything that could be considered defamatory or allow others to post potentially defamatory comments on their sites. If such a situation occurs, the councillor should remove the post immediately and seek independent legal advice.

## Reference Documents

This Guideline has been developed to support the application or administration of policy POL-0248 Code of Conduct for Councillors.

## Associated Documents

- *Local Government Act 2009*
- POL-3037 Complaints Management Process Policy
- POL-3096 Conduct and Performance of Councillors Policy
- GL-3072-001 Media Relations Guideline

## Document Control

- Only the Council can approve amendments to this guideline. Please forward any requests to change the content of this document to the Manager Communication, Engagement & Tourism.
- Approved amended documents must be submitted to the Corporate Meetings & Registers Team to place the document on the Policy, Guidelines and the Procedures Register.

## Version Information

Version No.	Date	Key Changes
1	26 November 2014	New document

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### CMR Team use only

**Department:** Organisational Services  
**Group:** Communication, Engagement and Tourism  
**Approved by:** General Meeting  
**Date approved:** 26 November 2014

**Effective date:** 26 November 2014  
**Version:** 1  
**Review date:** 30 November 2017  
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