

RANGITĪKEI DISTRICT COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

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Date by which review
must be completed: August 2023

Version number: 1.0

Social Media Policy

PURPOSE

This document has been created to provide clear requirements, guidance and rules to:

- the public who use social media platforms managed by the Council
- officers of the Council who have social media responsibilities as part of their role.
- all officers of the Council when using social media in a personal capacity.

CONTEXT

Social media platforms:

- enable two-way communication – the public can comment and connect with the Council, and the Council can broadcast its messages out into the community
- increasingly require paid-for advertising
- are part of the Council's communication toolkit.

1. THE POLICY

1.1. Relevant Acts of Parliament

The Public Records Act 2005 requires officers to maintain records, this includes online social media activities. Posts and conversation strings should be recorded and saved. While the public can access all online conversations on social media it could be that a request regarding the Council's social media activities is made through the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act (1987).

1.2. Social media platform requirements

All of the Council related social media accounts must include:

- The correct logo and spelling of the organisation
- A brief descriptor of the organisation
- State its relationship to Rangitikei District Council
- Public Conditions of Use linked to the Council's website where the Social Media Policy is.

1.3. What is not permitted?

The Council does not permit the publishing of the following information:

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

1.4. Requests for Service made via Messenger receive an automated response directing the person to the Council's online Fix It Form.

1.5. Civil Defence

During an emergency event, the Council's social media content is the responsibility of the Civil Defence Public Information Manager. Social media channel activity increases significantly during an event, so other officers will help respond to requests.

1.6. Council Officer's personal use of their own social media

The lines between personal and professional are easily blurred. What is said online is public, therefore, it has the potential to have consequences. The Council considers you to be using social media in a professional capacity if you are:

- discussing the business of Council via a Council-managed social media platform
- sharing professional opinions or discussing the business of Council via a personal social media where you have stated or could reasonably be known to be an officer of the Council.

Please refer to Appendix II which was created to help officers navigate social media.

1.7. References and Resources

- Local Government information:
https://taituara.org.nz/Attachment?Action=Download&Attachment_id=1596
- Government Information Services
Office of the Privacy Commissioner | Home
<https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/resources/social-media-guidance/>
<https://www.dia.govt.nz/Social-media-platforms>
<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2015/0063/latest/whole.html>
[Requests made online: A guide to requests made through fyi.org.nz and social media | Ombudsman New Zealand](#)

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles were created to guide officers of the Council who have delegation to post and respond on social media:

- Be credible – accurate, fair, thorough and transparent
- Be consistent – encourage constructive criticism, be cordial, courteous and professional
- Be responsive – respond to posts, questions and issues within a timely manner (even if it is just an acknowledgement). For specific issues in isolated cases, consider asking them to direct message the Council so that the matter can be dealt with one-to-one
- Be integrated – align online activities with offline communication activities
- Be an Officer of the Council – maintain professionalism, be transparent and refer those who post political questions to elected representatives
- Be a good custodian – monitor social media activity regularly and consistently
- Tone – respond in a casual yet professional tone of voice, the use of Te Reo is encouraged as are colloquialisms and word contractions
- Sharing – sharing of content from the Council social media accounts is encouraged
- Sourcing – Provide sources by including hyperlinks, video, images, or other references.

Please refer to Appendix I to for the full guide.

3. PROCEDURE

3.1. Offences and repercussions

The Council's social media channels are a safe place where users are encouraged to communicate respectfully. Those who participate in engaging through the Council's social media channels are asked to be respectful of each other, officers and Elected Members. All users should be aware that officers monitor all social media activity associated with the Council. The Council will comply with the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015. Council has three categories regarding inappropriate commentary and repercussions. They are:

1. **Minor Level** – general name-calling – Repercussion: The comment will be hidden
2. **Major Level** – unacceptable language, inappropriate imagery or repeated breaches of Level 1 – Repercussion: the comment is deleted, and a direct message is sent to advise:
The comment has been deleted per the Council's Social Media Policy
That a condition of use of Council's social media platforms is that users are respectful to each other, officers and Elected Members
That a further breach may lead them to be banned from the social media channel
3. **Extreme Level** – threatening or explicit commentary and/or images, or repeated breaches of Level 2 – Repercussion: The post is deleted, 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:
 - illegal activities to the New Zealand Police
 - racism to the Race Relations Commissioner
 - privacy breaches of an individual to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner
 - sexism or homophobic to the Human Rights Commissioner.

Pseudonyms – the Council does not have to actively engage with accounts where a pseudonym is used – Repercussion: the account is either blocked or the post is ignored.

Trolls – The term Troll relates to social media account users who regularly instigate conflict, hostility, or arguments in an online platform – Repercussion: If troll-like behaviour is observed then the account user is banned from the social media account for a period no longer than three years.

3.2. Local Government Election Campaign rules regarding social media:

During the four months leading up to any Local Government Election, the 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. Please refer to Appendix III for Elected Member social media guidelines.

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Group Manager Democracy and Planning is responsible for all of the Council social media accounts and activities. The activation of the Council's social media accounts is carried out by officers of the Council both within the Democracy and Planning Team and Libraries.

5. BREACH OF SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Breach of this policy by officers of the Council may be addressed as a disciplinary matter.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: The Council's social media management guide

The following is a guide for officers with social media responsibilities as to how to post on behalf of, and represent the views of Rangitikei District Council:

- All social media posts that officially represent the Council, come through those who manage the Council's social media platforms to ensure a consistent voice. Other officers are encouraged to suggest content – for example, project updates, interesting facts about something they are working on, or an interesting photo they have taken during the day
- As a representative of the Council, you must act with honesty and integrity in all matters. In addition, those who manage the Council's platforms must be aware of the Electronic Communications Policy which defines acceptable use of the internet, the Privacy Act, the Public Records Act 2005 and Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act
- Remember you are here to help our customers
- Be respectful of all individuals, races, religions and cultures
- Keep records of posts and conversation strings
- Use sound judgement and common sense, and if there is any doubt, do not post it. If you ever feel unsure about how to respond to a post seek advice from your manager
- If you are using another party's content, make certain that they are credited for it. Do not use the copyrights, trademarks, publicity rights, or other rights of others without permission
- Once information is published online, it is essentially a permanent record, even if you "remove/delete" it later or attempt to make it anonymous
- Provide links to our website when more information is available there.

Appendix II: Guidelines for personal use of social media by officers of the Council

- All officers are subject to the Council's policies. In addition, legislation such as the Privacy Act and Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act (LGOIMA) govern the disclosure of information
- Anything you post on a personal account that can potentially damage the Council's image will ultimately be your responsibility. We do encourage you to participate in the social media space but urge you to do so properly, exercising sound judgement and common sense
- Officers are personally responsible for their words and actions, wherever they are. It is your responsibility to ensure that your posts are accurate, do not mislead, or reveal sensitive or confidential information about the Council, our ratepayers/residents or officers. If you ever feel unsure about how to respond to a post, seek advice from your manager
- If you come across positive or negative remarks about the Council, please share them with those who manage our social media platforms
- The Council respects the free speech rights of its officers, key partners and representatives, but you must remember that customers, colleagues and managers often have access to online content you post. In personal posts, titles and logos of the Council must not be used – unless you are sharing a story from a social media platform managed by the Council platform that includes these
- We encourage everyone to exercise sound judgement and common sense to prevent online social media sites from becoming a distraction at work
- Do not post about sensitive or confidential information such as public excluded reports, contract agreements and/or commercially sensitive information
- Be aware that taking public positions online that are contrary to the Rangitikei District Council's interests may lead to a disciplinary process
- Keep use of social media platforms at work to a minimum.

Appendix III: Rangitikei District Council's Social Media 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 the Council and Libraries, including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, 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
- Rangitikei District 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 the Council's social media channels

The Council's social media accounts will remain neutral. However, the Council will promote nominations, enrolments and the elections.