

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

11 November 2022



[MSTN.GOV.T.NZ](https://www.mstn.govt.nz)

 [@MastertonDC](https://www.facebook.com/MastertonDC)



CONTENTS

Contents	1
Purpose.....	2
Scope.....	2
Context	2
Social media platform requirements.....	2
What is not permitted.....	2
Council officer’s personal use of their own social media	3
Principles of social media use.....	3
Breaches of policy and consequences of breach	4
Local government election campaign rules regarding social media	5
Roles and responsibilities.....	5
Review of Policy	5
Related Documents	5
References.....	5
Version Control.....	6
Appendices	7
Appendix 1: The council’s social media management guide	7
Appendix 2: Guidelines for personal use of social media by officers of the council.....	7
Appendix 3: The council’s social media guidelines for candidates	8
Appendix 4: The council’s community guidelines for users	8

POLICY NUMBER MD0047	
First Adopted	10 November 2022
Latest Version	10 November 2022
Adopted by	Strategic Leadership Team
Review Date	10 November 2025

PURPOSE

This policy provides clear guidance and rules on the use of Council social media accounts, officers of the Council using personal social media to discuss Council business, and our approach to comments from members of the public who interact with posts on Council social media accounts.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all officers of the Council who

- post to social media platforms managed by the Council
- have social media responsibilities as part of their role
- use personal and Council social media to discuss council operational activities, council employees, or any business related to the Council.

Guidance and rules for Elected Members use of social media are detailed in their Code of Conduct.

Included in this document as appendices are:

- the Council's social media management guide
- guidelines for personal use of social media by officers of the Council
- the Council's social media guidelines for candidates standing for election to the council as part of Local Elections.
- The Council's community guidelines for users

CONTEXT

The Council acknowledges the importance of social media as a key communication tool that supports our commitment to open access to information and to transparency. Social media platforms:

- allow access to up-to-date information directly to a person's phone or home
- enable two-way communication – the public can interact with the Council
- form part of the Council's communication toolkit.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM REQUIREMENTS

All the Council social media accounts must include:

- the correct logo and spelling of the organisation
- a brief description of the organisation
- a statement addressing the relationship to Masterton District Council (for example, elected members personally run Councillor social media profiles)
- public Conditions of Use linked to this Social Media Policy on the Council's website.

WHAT IS NOT PERMITTED

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

- intellectual property used without permission from the content owner¹, confidential information, or customer data
- company sensitive matters such as employment issues, information discussed in Council meetings held with the public excluded, draft documents (strategies, policies, plans and publications – unless we are consulting on a draft document) and embargoed announcements
- information regarding candidates during an election period.

COUNCIL OFFICERS PERSONAL USE OF THEIR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA

The lines between personal and professional can be easily blurred. What is said online is public, and there are potential consequences. It is considered that you are using social media in a professional capacity if you are:

- discussing the business of the Council via a Council-managed social media platform
- sharing professional opinions or discussing the business of the Council via a public personal social media account where you have stated or could reasonably be known to be an officer of the Council
- discussing company sensitive matters such as employment issues, information discussed in Council meetings held with the public excluded, draft documents (strategies, policies, plans and publications – unless we are consulting on a draft document) and embargoed announcements
- publishing information regarding candidates during an election period.

If references to employment or connection with MDC are made on a public personal social media profile, or if a person's employment at MDC is likely to be widely known, the following actions must also be taken:

- do not use any MDC-owned images or logos (except when sharing MDC-owned posts)
- do not include contact details or photographs of service users or staff without their express permission.

Additional to this, officers may not act as spokesperson for Council using their own social media profiles without the express permission of a member of the Strategic Leadership Team. This includes responding to positive or negative comments regarding Council and Council activities.

As set out in the Communications and Media Policy, officers of the Council must not use social media, professionally or personally, in any way that:

- compromises the integrity of MDC or the wider public sector
- negatively affects relationships at work e.g. making comments about a colleague, making bullying comments etc
- results in the unauthorised disclosure of any MDC information.

As set out in the Council collective and individual employment agreements, sexual, racial, or other harassment, intimidation, bullying or unwelcome behaviour towards members of the public or other employees and management may be considered serious conduct, and will be subject to the Council disciplinary procedures.

PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE

¹ In line with the guidance from the Intellectual Property Office permission should be obtained in writing from the content owner. More information on this is available [here](#).

The following principles were created to guide officers of the Council who are responsible for posting and responding on social media:

- Be credible – accurate, fair, thorough and transparent.
- Be consistent – encourage constructive discussion, be cordial, and courteous.
- Be responsive – respond to posts, questions and issues within a timely manner. For specific issues, suggest direct message or calling the Council so that the issue can be dealt with one-on-one.
- Be integrated – align online activities with offline communication activities.
- Be professional – maintain professionalism, be transparent and refer those who post political questions to the elected members.
- Be conscientious – regularly monitor social media activity.
- Tone – use a casual but professional tone of voice. Embrace the opportunity to use te reo Māori where possible.
- Sharing – share content across the Council social media accounts where appropriate to that channel to increase reach and engagement.
- Sourcing – provide sources through hyperlinks, video, images and other references where required.

BREACHES OF POLICY AND CONSEQUENCES OF BREACH

The Council's social media channels are a 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. The Council has three categories regarding inappropriate commentary. They are:

- **Minor Level** – off-topic commentary or spam commentary, general name calling, and inflammatory, derogatory or disrespectful comments. Action – comments will be hidden.
- **Major Level** – unacceptable language, inappropriate imagery or repeated Minor Level infringements. Action – the comment will be deleted, and the commenter will be sent a direct message saying *"Your comment has been deleted per the Council's Social Media Policy. A condition of use of Council's social media platforms is that users adhere to our social media guidelines, are respectful to each other, officers and elected members. Further breaches may lead to a ban from the social media channels."*
- **Extreme level** – threatening or explicit commentary and/or images, or a breach following a direct message as a result of Major Level Action – the comment is deleted, and the person will be banned from the page. Consideration will be given to alerting the appropriate authorities:
 - o Illegal activities to the New Zealand Police.
 - o Racism and xenophobia to the Race Relations Commissioner.
 - o Discriminatory behaviour including, but not limited to, sexism, homophobia, religious discrimination to the Human Rights Commissioner.
 - o Privacy breaches to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

The Council will publish their expected levels of behaviour onto their social media sites and will remind users of them periodically as part of that channels content plan. (See Appendix 4)

Pseudonyms – the Council will not actively engage with accounts where a pseudonym is used. This is because pseudonyms are often used to make derogatory or critical comments without any public accountability. Comments and Posts will likely be ignored or deleted, with repeat offenders being blocked.

Trolls – the term Troll relates to social media account users who regularly instigate conflict, hostility, or arguments in an online platform. If troll-like behaviour is observed, then the account user will be banned from the social media account.

Spam – obviously spam commentary will be removed and that user will be blocked. Repeatedly posting off-topic commentary on Council social media posts will be considered to be spamming, the comments will be deleted, and the user will be banned from the page.

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.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Manager Communication and Engagement is responsible for all Council social media accounts and activities. The activation and operation of the Council's social media accounts is carried out by officers of the Council both within the Communications and Engagement Team and the Library Team.

The Manager People and Culture is responsible for investigating any activities on social media by council employees which may be considered misconduct.

Officers and elected members are responsible for the conduct, content and moderation of their personal social media.

REVIEW OF POLICY

This policy will be reviewed on a three yearly basis.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

[Communications and Media Policy.](#)

Elected Member Code of Conduct

MDC Tikanga

[Masterton District Council Collective Agreement](#)

REFERENCES

- Local Government information:
https://taituara.org.nz/Attachment?Action=Download&Attachment_id=1596/
- Government Information Services
- Office of the Privacy Commissioner
<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](#)

- The Public Records Act 2005 requires officers to maintain records, which includes online social media activities. Posts and conversation strings should be recorded and saved.
- The Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act (1987) applies to all official information, which includes online social media activities. Social media activity, including posts that are hidden, should be included for consideration as part of any information request.

VERSION CONTROL

Version	Date	Summary of Amendments	Approved By
1.0	10/11/22	New policy	SLT

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: 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 Masterton District Council:

- All social media posts that officially represent the Council come through those who manage the Council's social media presence to ensure a consistent voice. Other officers are encouraged to suggest content, through the Digital Advisor.
- As a representative of the Council, you must act with honesty and integrity and in line with Council's values in all matters. Those who manage the Council's social media presence must be aware of the Privacy Act, the Public Records Act 2005 and the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act.
- Remember you are there to help and inform the public.
- 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 concerns or doubt, do not post it. If you feel unsure about how to respond to a post, seek advice from your manager.
- When using another party's content ensure that they are credited for it. Do not use the copyrights, trademarks, publicity rights, or rights of others without permission.
- Once information is published online, it is a permanent record, even if you remove/delete it later or attempt to make it anonymous.
- Provide links to Council's website when more information is available.

APPENDIX 2: 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 that you post on a personal account that can potentially damage the Council's image or lead to non-compliance with legislation will ultimately be your responsibility. When participating in the social media space, exercise sound judgement and common sense.
- Officers are responsible for their words and actions. 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 feel unsure about how to respond to a post, please seek advice from your manager.
- The Council respects the free speech rights of its officers, key partners and representatives, but you must remember that the public, 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 Masterton District Council's interests may lead to a disciplinary process.

APPENDIX 3: THE 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.
- Masterton 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.

APPENDIX 4: THE COUNCIL'S COMMUNITY GUIDELINES FOR USERS

Masterton District Council is active across several major social media platforms. We use them to provide information about the Council and other relevant information to the public.

We encourage interaction with our pages but reserve the right to remove posts or comments that breach our community guidelines or the platforms' terms and conditions (see below).

To ensure our social media platforms are used appropriately, we ask that people follow our community guidelines:

- Be respectful. Please be courteous and do not make comments that contain offensive, profane, defamatory, or 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. Please keep comments relevant to the topic or theme of the post. If you disagree with our view on something, that's fine - but if you decide to make that point every time we post, your comments will be considered spam and will be hidden, and you may be banned from the page.

- Protect your own and others' privacy. Don't post comments containing personal, identifying, or confidential information such as account details or other personal information including address, telephone number, email, passwords, etc.
- Electioneering. Electioneering is strictly prohibited from any of our social media platforms. Any post - positive or negative - made by any individual relating in any way to their own or someone else's nomination, intention to run for Council or election campaign, will be removed immediately.

Masterton District Council reserves the right to:

- determine what constitutes inappropriate content
- edit or entirely remove inappropriate content
- ban users from its social media communities.

We may delete posts that contain:

- language or content that is harmful, defamatory, racist, sexist or discriminatory, insulting or offensive
- confidential information (including contact details and personal or health information)
- misinformation, disinformation or spam
- commercial activity, including advertising
- unapproved use of Masterton District Council's brand
- off-topic comments or information irrelevant to the thread of conversation
- nudity, pornography or child abuse
- violence
- content that is illegal, gives instructions for illegal activity or advocates illegal activity.

When active on our social media pages, you are expected to also comply with the terms of service for each platform:

- LinkedIn User Agreement: <https://www.linkedin.com/legal/user-agreement>
- LinkedIn Community Policies: <https://www.linkedin.com/legal/professional-community-policies>
- YouTube Terms of Service: <https://www.youtube.com/static?template=terms>
- Instagram Terms of Use: <https://help.instagram.com/581066165581870> Facebook Terms and Policies: https://www.facebook.com/policies_center

Our social media accounts are monitored between 9am and 5pm on business days, and periodically in the evenings and on weekends and public holidays. We try to reply to questions within 24 business hours.

Masterton District Council is politically neutral. We do not advocate for a particular political party and our social media channels will not be used to promote any party's political messages or other content. We reserve the right to remove any comments that may compromise our obligation to maintain political neutrality.

Masterton District Council does not implicitly or explicitly endorse any individual or organisation by creating a social media connection, regardless of the terms used by social media providers. We may maintain social media connections with individuals and organisations that are critical and/or have opposing views. We do not hold any responsibility for the content of such profiles. We do not necessarily endorse a particular person or organisation when we follow, share, or 'like' content from them.

Disclaimer - The content of our social media channels is intended for informational purposes only. We will not accept any liability for loss or damage suffered by any person or body due to information provided on this site or linked sites. The information on our social media channels is provided on the basis that anyone accessing it takes responsibility for assessing the relevance and accuracy of its content.

Contact us -If you find content on one of our official pages which you feel breaches these guidelines, please let us know by emailing communications@mstn.govt.nz