

# Social media recordkeeping for councillors

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Social media is an effective tool to communicate in an accessible and informal format to a wide audience. It enables councils to interact and share information with the community instantaneously – providing a quick response to community issues. For councillors it provides the opportunity to publicise achievements, campaign for elections, and address constituents beyond traditional formats.

## What is social media?

Social media can be defined as online platforms and applications which allow users to easily create, publish, collaborate, and/or share content. Examples include:

- Social networking sites: Facebook, LinkedIn
- Media sharing sites: Instagram, YouTube, SoundCloud, Vimeo, TikTok
- Microblogging and activity stream sites: Twitter, Yammer
- Online surveys: SurveyMonkey and Google Drive
- Instant messaging: SMS, Messenger, WhatsApp

## Local government, councillors, and social media

Any social media accounts established by councillors are the responsibility of the councillor. While these accounts are not regarded as the **official** social media accounts of the council, a councillor's social media accounts may need to conform to the policies and guidelines issued by the Office of Local Government (OLG).<sup>1</sup> The OLG states that elected councillors need to review and adhere to the social media policies and guidelines of the council they represent. OLG provides a framework (Model Social Media Policy) for the administration and management of social media platforms for council officials and councillors.

[1] Councillor's social media accounts may need to conform to the policies and guidelines issued by the Office of Local Government if their accounts are representation or enact on their role as councillor. Social media accounts which are used for personal use alone may not be required to adhere to OLG policies and guidelines.

## Social media posts are State records

Social media content created, sent, and received during a councillor's term of office and in relation to council business are State records. Social media content that concerns political activities, election campaigning, or is of a personal nature are not State records.

Section 3 of the *State Records Act 1998* defines a record as "any record made and kept, or received and kept, by any person in the course of the exercise of official functions in a public office, or for any purpose of a public office, or for the use of a public office".

Any content recognised as having 'continuing value' and are identified as State records must be disposed of according to an authorised retention and disposal authority (State Records Regulation 2015, Schedule 2, Part 8).

## Examples of social media content identified as State records

- Private messages (direct messages/DMs) related to any aspect of council's official business
- Re-posting, re-tweeting, or sharing of content from the council's social media accounts which has additional comments or amendments
- Any content that commits the council to an arrangement or business deal
- Content that approves or authorises council's actions or decisions

Beyond these considerations, the following questions should be considered when reviewing your social media content/correspondence:

- Did I write, receive, or use this during my business dealings?
- If I left my role tomorrow, would my successor need to know this?
- Is this matter likely to be reviewed or audited (i.e., controversial matters - formal inquiry or intense media scrutiny)?
- Am I required to act on it?
- Could this possibly have wide community interest?

# Common retention and disposal periods of social media content

Social media content kept as a State record must be retained according to the General Retention and Disposal Authority (GA39) – Local Government Records.

It is best to consult with your social media coordinator/council records officer for further advice.

Some common retention periods for social media:

Description	Disposal Action	Recommended Action
Sharing standard marketing messages to your clients and user community.	GA 39, 2.11.1 Retain minimum of 5 years after action completed, then destroy.	Retain in social media platform for same period.
Conversations with your social media followers where complaints or suggestions are received and responded to with a routine response or referral to another organisation.	GA 39, 6.5.2 Retain minimum of 2 years after action completed, then destroy.	Retain in social media platform for the same period.
Posting requests for submissions, comments or feedback on particular matters or issues in the community.	GA 39, 2.5.1 Retain minimum of 5 years after action completed, then destroy.	Retain in social media platform for the same period.

Consulting with your community regarding significant development applications.

GA 39, 7.2.1;  
7.2.2  
GA 39, 5.3.1;  
5.3.2  
Revise  
disposal  
action  
accordingly to  
the  
description of  
the situation.

Consult with social media coordinator and records officer about the comments – as council may need to capture them as a record.

## Councillor social media examples

Knowing when to capture social media content as a record can appear complicated. Below are a few councillor social media scenarios and what to do:

Scenario	What to do?
Shared a link or a post (originally created by the council's Facebook page) of a recent improvement to a local park.	Retain in social media platform. The original post created by the council's Facebook page will be retained as a State record. See GA39, 2.11.2 (retain until withdrawn, superseded or reference use ceases, then destroy).
Responded to a complaint by redirecting them to the council's appropriate channel. The response may be via a social media post or direct message.	Retain in social media platform for 2 years. See GA39, 6.5.2.
Created a post with an update of the recent council meeting including a link to the council minutes. The post includes comments on how you voted and voiced the opinions of the community at the meeting.	There is no need to keep a record of your post – as the council meeting minutes will be created and managed by the council. Council meeting minutes are also required as State archives.

Received direct messages via Twitter, or a comment via Facebook. A constituent has asked you to personally investigate a development application.

Retain in social media platform for 2 years. See GA39, 6.5.2.

You respond to the constituent's message and refer them to the appropriate council web address.

Shared an Instagram post of you and your dog on a morning walk via your official councillor Instagram account.

It is private and does not need to be retained as a State record.

Announce on Facebook that you are stepping down as a councillor.

This is a State record.

Contact the records officer at council to ensure the necessary recordkeeping requirements are met. Some of the content found in your social media account may need to be retained as a record. Continue to retain social media accounts - as this will allow for accessible reference use; or if required for litigation reasons.

A user/follower has not adhered to the House Rules displayed on the social media platform. The user/follower has constantly been trolling the site and intimidating other members of the public with inappropriate content.

Make a file note of conversations, content, and if any content is to be removed from the site.

Contact the council's social media coordinator and records officer for further advice.

Received a SMS from a constituent regarding a request for you to action official council matters. The text has been sent to your private number.

Create a record. Any correspondence received or sent related to council administration or business will need to be forwarded to your official councillor account. The texts can be screenshot or copied into an email. It can then be submitted into the council's records system.

## Options to capture social media

Social media content is continually changing and evolving. Information shared via social media platforms can easily be taken by others to use and reuse. For accurate recordkeeping, it is essential that the 'original' content of the post is recorded. This will

generally involve capturing the posts and then submitting them as a record in your council's records management system, or other endorsed system. Consult with your council's records officer for appropriate business practices.

There are varying options on how to capture records on social media. Methods suggested will depend on what, how, where, and why the record needs to be captured, and in consultation with the council's approved records management policies and practices. For example: a weekly post via Facebook may be captured differently to a month-long conversation via WhatsApp.

Options to capture social media include:

- At regular intervals
- Ad hoc basis, or
- Within the platform.

## At regular intervals:

A Councillor may decide to capture all social media content on a regular basis such as weekly, fortnightly, or monthly. This can be completed in two ways:

1. Export/download from the platform
  - a. Locate the export/download option in the platform or app. Select the data range, information type (post, messages, photos, videos) or file formats to download.
  - b. Once downloaded, in a suitable format such as CSV, Excel or HTML, save locally before uploading to the council's records management system.
2. Use third-party software
  - a. There are varying third-party software solutions for managing social media such as archiving platforms, or apps for specific social media platforms (such as Hootsuite). These tools allow for the user to sort, select, download, and save social media content. Some platforms have the option to generate customised reports regarding social media activity – these should also be included.
  - b. Download the requested content, save to a local location, and upload to the council's records system.

## Ad hoc basis:

If a councillor is an infrequent user or has minimal content production; capturing a record ad hoc may be suitable. Records can be captured:

1. Screenshot

Screenshots can be taken on various devices including PC, tablets, and mobiles.

- a. Take a screenshot of the relevant information, for example: a Facebook comment regarding an action you intend to do in response to a comment from a constituent. It is important for the screenshot to include the entire post including author, date, and timestamp of the original post.
- b. If taking a screenshot on a tablet or mobile device: forward the image to your official councillor email account. Then the email can be submitted to the council's records system.
- c. If the screenshot is on a PC, make use of the standard software (such as Print Screen or Snipping Tool), or a third-party tool. Save the screenshot and submit to your council's records system.

## 2. Create a file note

Outline the communications in a file note. If it comprises of multiple interactions, provide a list with the supporting documentation (for example, a spreadsheet).

Any file notes created will need to include the following identifying information: author of the social media content; date of content creation; title or subject; and content/s.

If social media content is to be removed – provide the following information: date of deletion; who is responsible for deletion; and reason(s) for its removal. Before the removal of any social media content, refer to the council's Social Media Policy, as a record of the content will need to be created before deletion.

Submit the file note and any supporting documentation to the council's records system.

## Within the platform:

Most social media content created during a councillor's term of office can be retained within the platform. Any content requiring a longer retention period (e.g. more than 5 years), will need to be captured and submitted into the council's records system.

Content that is required for a short duration (less than 5 years) and all content post-term of office, it is recommended to reside in its active platform (i.e., do not delete the account or its contents – allowing the account to remain publicly accessible). For ease of accessibility and keeping content in its original format – retaining in its platform is a suitable option. It is important to note that deciding to leave the information in its native social media application – must be a risk-based decision (see Strategies for Managing Social Media Information for the possible risks involved).

**Published October 2021**

