



# BITOU SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINE October 2022



I use social media as an idea generator, trend mapper and strategic compass for all of our online business ventures.



—Paul Barron, CEO, futurist, speaker, exec producer, author, filmmaker, and creator of Foodable Network

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to set out the framework, requirements and processes that form the basis of how the Municipality will use social media to interact and engage with its citizens. This policy sets out key guidelines for how to maintain a social media presence and it forms the basis for the strategy, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation documents.

### **1.2. Scope**

This policy covers all facets of social media with regards to the Municipality's use thereof, as well as the values, responsibilities, content guidelines, employee interactions, citizen conduct and brand compliance. These are all aspects that must be adhered to, and it is the scope of this policy to define exactly what is expected from each of these key areas.

### **1.3. Background**

Social media has become an acceptable means of communication with citizens over the course of the last few years. Social media has afforded governments the opportunity to engage with users using a personal and more direct approach, narrowing the gap between government and communities.

As social media has become, in most cases, the chosen medium for communication, it is only natural that Local Government take a step towards this form of communication. This would be to take advantage of the two-way discussions that social media caters for.

By adopting social media as a form of communication it can help municipalities to better understand, respond to and attract the attention of specific audiences. It also enables interactive communication that is not possible via other platforms. Such interactivity allows for the exchange of information, perspectives, and opinions among multiple audiences. It also allows effective and efficient communication to take place where those conversations are already occurring.

Considering that the Western Cape Government in particular has embraced a "better together" philosophy, social media brings forward the opportunity for joint responsibility and participation between government and citizens in the province.

Social media provides the platform that enables joint responsibility, which is dependent on citizens, government and business working together. These platforms are drawn on to enhance participation and communicate responsibilities to all involved and relied on to help the Municipality to work as effectively as possible. It is ultimately the responsibility of the Municipality to inform its citizens of the role they can and should play in actualizing the “better together” philosophy. What is most important, however, is for the Municipality to inform the citizens how it will take responsibility in bringing this belief to fruition. Social media provides that very platform to clearly spread that message.

## **2. Regulatory Framework -National and Provincial legislation:**

- 2.1. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996
- 2.2. Constitution of the Western Cape, 1998
- 2.3. Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000
- 2.4. Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 2000
- 2.5. Public Service Act, 1984
- 2.6. The Protection of Information Act, 1982
- 2.7. The Copyright Act, 1987
- 2.8. Electronic Communications and Transactions Act, 2000
- 2.9. Protection of Personal Information Act, 2021

## **3. Why is social media important?**

Social media is about conversation with the community: sharing government information and listening to our communities. Responsiveness, openness and mutual respect are essential at all times. The role of social media is to:

- 3.1. Connect the Municipality with the communities they serve in a cost-effective way that promotes good relationships.
- 3.2. Strengthen government and civil society.
- 3.3. Improve service delivery.
- 3.4. Improve relationships between municipalities and key sectors of the community.
- 3.5. Allow two-way dialogue.

## **4. Social media accounts management**

- 4.1. Municipal Departments must submit approved content they require posted on social media platforms to the Municipal Communicator and/or Communication Team.
- 4.2. Each Department is responsible for ensuring that content on all social media platforms is always updated and relevant.

- 4.3. The Municipal Communicator and/or dedicated Communication Team is expected to respond to positive or negative developments from engagement via their social media accounts on the respective social media platforms.
- 4.4. The Municipal Communicator and/or Communication Team will be responsible for the monitoring and reporting of the respective social media accounts.
- 4.5. The Municipal Communicator and/or Communication Team will be required to manage their own content on the various social media accounts.
- 4.6. The Municipal Communicator and/or Communication Team should refer to the Western Cape Municipal Social Media Playbook as a best practice and guideline document for managing social media accounts.

## **5. Social media code of conduct**

### **5.1. For Municipal Employees**

- Nothing about social media changes the responsibilities and obligations of employees or contractors of the Municipality.
- It does not matter if employees or contractors use a private account or access social media outside of work hours – their obligations in terms of their contract of employment, the Code of Conduct, and all other applicable policies apply to all their conduct on social media.
- Employees or contractors of the Municipality have a legal duty to act in good faith towards the Municipality. They may therefore not do anything that damages the reputation of the Municipality and must always act in its best interests. This duty extends to their use of social media. For example, employees may not comment negatively on social media about anything associated with the Government and/or the Municipality.
- Everything employees do and say on social media reflects on the Municipality and its reputation. In conducting themselves on social media, it is important that employees use sound judgment and common sense, act with professionalism and integrity, and adhere to the Municipality's values.
- Employees who violate any terms set out in this policy will be subjected to Disciplinary Processes.

### **5.2. For Political Principals**

- Everything Councillors do and say on social media reflects on the municipality and its reputation. In conducting themselves on social media, it is important that Councillors use sound judgment and common sense, act with professionalism and integrity, and adhere to the Municipality's values.
- Councillors should restrict party political messages and campaigning to their personal pages. The Municipality will not share or endorse any political content on

any of its social media platforms at any time.

- Councillors who violate any terms set out in this policy will be subjected to Disciplinary Processes.

## **6. Skills Development and Resources**

- 6.1. All employees using social media on behalf of the Municipality must undergo relevant training before gaining access to any social media accounts. It is the Municipality's responsibility to provide training to such employees. This training is facilitated by the Western Cape Government, Department of Local Government: Municipal Communication team. Training from an accredited service provider is also acceptable.
- 6.2. Communicators must be provided with the necessary tools to manage municipal social media accounts on desktop/laptop computers and mobile/smartphone. These tools include access to social media platforms; budget and/or cell phone allowance to manage municipal social media platforms remotely (i.e. airtime and/or data to manage social media via smartphone).

## **7. Content approvals**

The nature of social media means that responsiveness is vital. Therefore, it is not feasible to subject every post or response to comprehensive approval processes.

Employees responsible for updating municipal social media accounts should be empowered to respond appropriately as they see fit, and to exercise good judgment in accordance with the social media code of conduct above. Employees should refer to the Western Cape Municipal Social Media Playbook for appropriate responses to members of the public in a variety of situations.

## **8. Appropriate content for municipal representatives**

No employee of the municipality is permitted to share the following:

- Any content that is unlawful, defamatory, racist, sexist, homophobic or insulting.
- Anything that is untrue.
- Any content that features explicit political messages or branding (for example, a councillor wearing a party political T-shirt)
- Content which is harassing, threatening, obscene, pornographic, indecent, lewd, suggestive or otherwise objectionable.
- Content that criticises individual community members by name.
- Content which infringes the privacy of others.

- Content that is the property of someone else, without permission to use it.
- Spam (unsolicited sales messages)

The same applies to content posted by members of the public on municipal platforms. If any comment by a member of the public contravenes these rules, it can be deleted. Comments that are critical of the Municipality or its officials should be allowed to stand, provided they do not contravene any of the rules outlined above. Accusations will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Communicators can refer to the Western Cape Municipal Social Media Playbook for advice on how to proceed/respond to various types of queries.

## **9. Content Neutrality**

- 9.1. All content must not discriminate in any way and must not be seen to be biased.
- 9.2. It is the Municipality's responsibility to remain impartial yet informative when communicating with the public about political matters.
- 9.3. The Municipality is not to share political opinions of any office bearers on any of the department's social media platforms. However official statements made by office bearers which can be published on the Municipality's website can be shared on social media platforms.  
The Municipality must not share content of a party-political nature. Office bearers must use their personal accounts to publish party political statements.

## **10. Personal social media accounts**

- 10.1. Where Municipal employees use social media platforms and wish to provide personal comments on platforms, they could contravene the accepted Code of Conduct and bring the public service into disrepute or be misinterpreted as being an official representative of the Municipality. All employees must always adhere to the Municipality's Code of Conduct.
- 10.2. Any personal social media accounts, or accounts unrelated to the Municipality, that currently exist or will be created in future, are not to be registered using a Municipal e-mail address. This applies to any social media platform that requires an e-mail account to register. These accounts must make use of private e-mail addresses and contact details.
- 10.3. Officials cannot use municipal-related usernames or handles when using or setting up their personal accounts, e.g. Public Servant Lisa, Mayor Phillip

## **11. Confidentiality**

It is critical that any information shared on the various social media platforms is not sensitive or confidential in any way. Municipal employees must refer to internal departmental policies and guidelines on what is considered confidential information and ensure that these policies and guidelines are enforced on social media.

## **12. Use of devices in council meetings**

- From time to time, representatives from the media or members of the public may wish to be present in council meetings to view proceedings. Because these meetings are held to conduct council business, the public has a right to be present.
- Mobile devices with internet access and cameras will therefore be capable of sharing information publicly, in real time.
- Media or members of the public will not be prevented from tweeting, updating, photographing proceedings, or taking video footage.
- Anyone who intends to share proceedings to social media platforms undertakes to inform all present of their plan to do so.

## **13. Principles to always remember**

- If Communicators are unsure about what or how to post, they can refer to the Western Cape Municipal Social Media Playbook which includes templates, how to guides and suggested content. Communicators may also contact the Department of Local Government: Municipal Communication team for support.
- Nothing is private on social media platforms. If individual staff members share something on any social media platform, even their own, they cannot claim that their privacy has been violated.
- No politics on municipal pages, including photographs of party-political T-shirts and branding.
- Employees should keep their tonality professional, while not losing the personal touch. They are people talking to the community they serve.
- Employees should obtain permission before sharing personal details. This applies to photographs as well.
- All posts should be relevant to the community.