

ELECTED MEMBERS’ MEDIA & SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL 2022

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Purpose

This Protocol has been written to provide Elected Members with guidance for managing interactions with media.

Elected Members and speaking to the Media

On occasion journalists may approach an elected member for comment as an individual member or because they hold a specific position on the Council, for example chair of a committee.

Speaking to the media as an individual

All elected members can speak to the media about Council matters. However, there is a difference between speaking on behalf of Council and speaking as an individual.

When commenting as an individual (including the Mayor):

- An elected member must make it clear that the views being expressed are personal and do not represent the views of Council.

- If an elected member is making a statement contrary to a Council decision or policy, then it must be made clear that the view being expressed does not represent a majority view.
- All media comments must be consistent with the Elected Members Code of Conduct.

If an elected member is approached by the media, it is recommended they let the Communications Manager or Head of Marketing and Communications know, so they can supply further information to the elected member if needed.

Speaking on behalf of Council

The Mayor is the spokesperson for the official Council view on any topic. If the Mayor isn't available, matters will be referred to the Deputy Mayor or relevant committee chairperson or portfolio holder.

At the Mayor's discretion, the Mayor might appoint Members as the Council spokesperson on a specific subject and direct media queries directly to them.

The Mayor may re-direct any query to the Communications Manager or Head of Marketing and Communications to seek a response from the Chief Executive or member of the Executive Leadership team.

With the Mayor's approval, councillors can comment on behalf of the Council.

Elected Members and Social Media

Social media is a great tool for engaging with and informing the communities we serve. Many people use social media these days, which makes it an effective tool to inform different communities about what Council is doing, be notified of concerns, encourage feedback or have conversations with the residents of Palmerston North. If Elected Members see questions about Council on community pages, they can tag the Council's official pages in to respond and the Communications Team will follow up with the relevant team for information for a response.

References to Council Staff

On Council's official pages Communications Team staff hide any comments that refer to Council staff for their privacy and security. It is recommended that elected members do the same, and instead refer to the role or the team in any responses.

Suggestions for Managing Social Media page(s)

Social media operates in a 24/7 world. If elected members are going to have social media pages, then members should set aside time to respond to comments and interact with people on their pages. Members should be conscious that whatever they post, or photograph can be screenshot or shared on other pages without their permission. People can also see if a post has been edited.

Differentiate between being an Elected Member and an individual.

- Elected members should consider having separate accounts or pages for when they are speaking or sharing opinions as an individual rather than as an elected member
- Be open about whether they are commenting or posting as a private individual or as an elected member.

Set expectations about social media channels and how people interact.

For your elected member's page(s):

- Model good behaviour and talk, treat and respond to people politely.
- Consider having clear guidelines on the page(s) about how it can be used and the behaviour expected (refer to Appendix 1 as an example)
- If members want to hide comments or block individuals, it is encouraged to make this clear in the page guidelines and what would trigger those actions.
- Members should only post what they would be prepared to say in person: making a comment in a social media post that can be viewed by anyone is similar to making a statement in a public gathering and members should not post anything online which they would not say to a public gathering.
- Please be mindful that anything members post on their councillor page(s) could be the subject of a LGOIMA request.
- Respond to misinformation with facts and consider tagging in the Council's social media pages to respond with accurate information too.
- Any advertising must meet advertising guidelines in New Zealand. Be aware that people can also see who you are targeting and may ask why. Elected members will also need to follow the terms and conditions of the social media providers.
- When commenting on the Council's official channels, please identify as an elected member.

Be conscious of safety and security

Members are personally responsible for their own social media channels as both an individual and as an elected member. Council staff cannot assist Members with their social media pages.

Members should be careful about their own personal security. Consider two factor authentication, have a strong password, keep software up to date, and think about your own safety and privacy when sharing information about your location in real time.

The role of an elected member is public facing and criticism is to be expected. Interactions will inevitably be robust, but they must be respectful. Policy differences are acceptable, personal attacks are not. Intimidation, abuse, bullying, threats or violence against elected members or staff should not be tolerated.

Under the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015, it is a criminal offence to cause serious emotional distress by posting a 'digital communication' intended to cause harm. If you are ever concerned about your safety take a screenshot or record the url of where this appears. Any immediate physical threat should be reported to Police, to NetSafe and reported to Council's Democracy and Governance Manager and Risk and Resilience Manager.

LGOIMA Requests

Any information elected members post in an official capacity is subject to the same rules as other public information (under LGOIMA).

Any information a member shares in their role as an elected member, is subject to official information requests, regardless of whether that information is shared on social media or on other platforms (such as by email or text).

Requests for official information must be responded to appropriately regardless of the channel from which they are received. Please send any LGOIMA requests to the Democracy and Governance Manager.

The Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct (the Code) sets out the standards of behaviour expected from elected members in the exercise of their duties. Expectations set out in this Protocol relate closely to the agreed value of 'respect for others' and standards of behaviour outlined in Section 5: Relationships in the Code. Failure to comply with this Protocol may not in itself be a breach of the Code but it could be used to substantiate a complaint under the Code.

Members should also be aware that any comments published to a closed group on social media could be re-posted and potentially become the subject of a code complaint.

Speaking to the Media during an Emergency Response

Council is not always the lead agency in a civil defence response, and often a regional media protocol is established. If a regional media protocol is established the Communications team will share it with you. A protocol may identify key messages, do's and don'ts, and identify key spokespeople. Please adhere to any regional media protocol that is in place regarding social media and the sharing of information.

In an emergency or Civil Defence response, please only share posts from official channels, including Council's page, the region's Civil Defence Page, DHB etc. By tagging a post back to Council, the Communications team will be able to help respond to any comments.

Appendix 1: Suggested preamble of expected behaviour when posting on page.

PNCC's Facebook Community Guidelines

*This can be adapted for use by Elected Members

We welcome your comments and encourage discussion.

We reserve the right to hide or remove harmful posts or comments from this page. This includes any post or comment containing disrespectful, rude, or abusive language; direct personal attacks or disclosure of private information or details of elected members or staff, other Facebook users or individuals; objectionable material; and unsolicited advertising, marketing or spam.

We will at times be limiting, or blocking, comments on posts regarding covid-19 updates. We respect your right to have your own opinion, but there are other channels available for you to do this. This decision has been made to ensure misinformation isn't shared on our social media pages and to protect the wellbeing of our staff who read and respond to comments on our accounts.

If your contributions repeatedly fail to comply with Facebook's terms, and/or the above rules, then you will be blocked from posting to this page.

We ask that you are polite and respectful with your comments and views. This Facebook page must not be used for electioneering. We will remove any post relating to your or someone else's nomination, intention to run for Council or election campaign.

Example from Auckland City Council

We openly welcome your comments and encourage discussion. We ask that you are polite and respectful with your comments and views.

We reserve the right to hide or remove harmful posts or comments from this page. This includes any post or comment containing disrespectful, rude or abusive language; direct personal attacks or disclosure of private information or details of elected members or staff, other users or individuals; objectionable material; and unsolicited advertising marketing or spam.

If your contributions fail to comply with this site's terms and/or the above rules, then you may be blocked from posting to this page.