Mobile phone usage

Department | Strategy & Business Services
Responsible Officer | Manager | Business Services

Preamble

Mobile phones are assigned to Bega Valley Shire Council (BVSC) employees and Councillors whose need for mobile telephone service is of an essential nature in the conduct of Council business.

Mobile phones are to be used in instances where regular telephone service is not accessible, and as a back-up during emergencies when regular telephone service is not available. The mobile phone can also be used as a pager for receipt of SMS messages.

Objective

This procedure defines the boundaries for the “acceptable use” of Council-provided mobile phones. Mobile phones purchased, maintained and provided by the organisation are to be used only for the conduct of Council-related business. By using the organisation’s mobile phone, employees and Councillors assume personal responsibility for their appropriate use and agree to comply with this policy and other applicable company policies, as well as state and federal acts and regulations.

This policy is to be used as an enabling guide so that mobile phones are used appropriately and efficiently.

Mobile phone handsets and services

All mobile phone handsets and service numbers are and shall be deemed Council property. All mobile handsets and services must be used in compliance with applicable licenses, notices, contracts, and agreements.

Purchasing

All purchasing of mobile handsets and services shall be centralised through the Information & Communications Technology (ICT) section to ensure that all handsets and services conform to corporate communication standards and strategies, and are purchased at the best possible price. Centralised purchasing ensures that warranties and service standards are consistently applied.

Purchase must be requested through the appropriate department Group Manager. A relevant general ledger number must also be provided for the purchase and ongoing service costs to be charged and assurance that funds are available to cover all charges.

Each handset and service must be assigned to a responsible officer. If a handset and service is to be shared amongst a workgroup, the nominated officer is responsible for its use at all times.

Handsets or services purchased independently will not be supported by the ICT section. Such purchases will be considered a breach of council policy and will be reported for appropriate action.

Billing and charging

On a monthly basis, mobile phone service charges are allocated to relevant cost centres. Council’s Finance department posts the charges against the general ledger account codes.

Group Managers will receive monthly reports of their group’s mobile phone usage with three months history for trend comparison. It is the responsibility of the Group Managers to discern which employee’s (if any) they wish to
investigate further. If an employee is requested to verify their account by the Group Manager, BVSC reserves the right to request reimbursement for private calls. Each quarter, Finance will audit a random sample of mobile phone accounts. These accounts will require the employee validating all call usage and possibly reimbursing council for any personal usage of the phone.

Regular Private Use: The Group Manager must approve the use of a mobile phone for personal calls, as well as any arrangements to reimburse Council for personal calls. Any employee’s on this arrangement will have their monthly account sent to them for validation. Private calls will be reimbursed to BVSC. These arrangements will be effected through Finance and payroll deductions.

In the event of team members sharing a phone, it is responsibility of the nominated officer to ensure that respective team members advise details of private calls and sign for the costs they have individually incurred.

Lost, stolen or misplaced mobile phones

Due to the high incidence of mobile phone theft and misuse after loss, a mobile phone service must be cancelled immediately it is determined missing.

The theft or loss should be reported to the nearest police station, and Council’s ICT section.

If ICT cannot be contacted a message should be left on the ICT Help Desk voice mail on (02) 6499 2125 and Telstra Mobilenet should be contacted immediately on 125111 to have calls barred.

If the phone is found or recovered, the number can be reinstated; however it is imperative to report loss or theft as soon as possible.

Use of mobile phones while driving

Council prohibits mobile phones should not be used when operating a vehicle without hands free and the user should safely park the vehicle before taking or making a call.

Under no circumstances are employees to use SMS messaging whilst driving.

The following is an extract from the NSW RTA website in regard to Mobile Phones as at 9 July 2010. It is an individual’s responsibility to update their knowledge with regard to the laws and restrictions regarding the use of mobile phones whilst in control of a motor vehicle.

Mobile phones and driving

It is illegal to drive or ride a vehicle while using a hand-held mobile phone. The penalty is a significant fine and three demerit points.

This means that talking, sending or receiving text messages, playing games or taking photos are illegal when using a hand-held phone. It is also illegal to perform these activities when your vehicle is stopped but not parked, for example when you are waiting at traffic lights.

A hands-free device can reduce the physical effort to make and receive calls but it doesn’t necessarily make it safe to use a phone while driving. It is illegal to use a hands-free phone while driving if it causes you to lose proper control of your vehicle. The penalty is a significant fine and demerit points.

If you must talk on a hands-free phone while driving

- Make sure it is a hands-free phone that is set up and working before you start driving.
- Keep the conversation short. Don’t engage in complex or emotional conversations.
- Tell the person on the other end that you are driving and may have to end the call.
- Never text message (SMS) while driving.
• End the call if it is distracting you from driving.

Remember, if you don't have proper control of your vehicle because you are talking on a hands-free mobile phone you are guilty of an offence.

**No mobile phone use by learner and P1 provisional drivers and riders**

From 1 July 2007, learner and provisional drivers and riders must not use a mobile phone while driving or riding. This includes phones in the hands-free mode or with loud speaker operating, sending or receiving SMS messages, playing games or any other function on your phone.

The penalty for mobile phone use is three demerit points (or four if the offence occurs in a school zone) and a fine.

Learner and P1 drivers and provisional riders are developing their vehicle control, hazard perception skills. Mobile phone use can distract the novice drivers and riders from the driving task. Studies have found that using a mobile phone while driving is dangerous as it slows reaction times and interferes with a driver’s perception skills and increases the chance of having a crash.

**In-car installations**

In-car installations are arranged through Vehicle Plant at the depot (not through ICT), as the equipment is considered a car accessory, not a phone accessory. Users requiring in-car installation should arrange through the depot administration staff.

**General usage policies**

• A mobile phone should never be used for Council business when a regular phone is available.

• A mobile phone is an easy target for theft. Users should take the same precautions with a mobile phone as they would with their house/car keys or wallet.

• A mobile phone case should be used to enable phone attachment to the user’s belt or handbag. This will also help reduce the risk of dropping or losing the phone. A case will also help to protect the phone if it is dropped.

• Employees are not permitted to use mobile phones or services in an illegal, illicit or offensive manner.

**Staff or councillor departures**

The relevant Manager is responsible for collecting the mobile phone, charger, spare batteries and any other accessories from a staff member departing Council. If the vacant position is to be filled immediately, the Manager may decide to retain the phone and service number, advising the ICT section of the new user’s name and ensuring the new user signs the mobile phone policy acceptance document. During transition, the Manager should either have the phone answered or messages regularly checked for continuity of service.

If the position is no longer required, or will take some time to fill, or will change significantly, the Manager should return the phone and all accessories to the ICT section. In these instances, the service number is cancelled and a new number issued when requested. Callers dialling the discontinued number will contact Council for an alternative rather than connect to an unattended phone.

Departing staff members may apply to have their Council service number transferred to their handset to a non-Council account. All costs associated with the transfer remain the responsibility of the staff member.
WHS issues

The World Health Organisation (WHO) acknowledges more research is required to assess the health risks associated with mobile phone use, and that any adverse health effects, no matter how small, could have major implications for public health around the world, due to extensive usage.

The health risks of mobile phone use may also be more immediate. According to an editorial in the 13 May 2000 edition of the British Medical Journal, the risk of an accident when using a mobile phone while driving—even with a hands-free device—is equivalent to that of driving with a blood alcohol level of 0.05 per cent. The implication is that the conversation on the mobile phone distracts the driver.

With these risks in mind, users should follow these guidelines:

- A mobile phone should be a phone of last resort.
- Use a landline where it is possible
- Avoid extended mobile phone use.
- Hold the phone as far from the head as possible.
- Car kits are provided for vehicle use; even so, the user/driver should park safely before using a mobile phone.
- Always switch the mobile phone off in the following circumstances:
  - when refuelling a vehicle (or anywhere near fuel or chemicals).
  - when in a hospital or near any medical equipment.
  - when in an aircraft.
  - where blasting is in progress.

Users should direct concerns to their OHS representatives; they should also discuss usage with their team leaders or managers.

Care of mobile phones

Users should read the care and maintenance instructions in the User Guide included with their phone set. Mobile handsets range from $200 to $500, not including administrative costs, and therefore it is important to act responsibly in order to reduce replacement costs.

The main care factors are:

- Keep the handset dry – take care around liquids (sinks, toilets, oceans, wet grass, coffee)
- Do not subject the handset to extreme temperatures.
- Do not drop, knock, or shake the handset.
- Do not attempt to open the housing, except for battery replacement according to the User Guide instructions.
- To clean, wipe only with a soft cloth slightly dampened in a mild soap-and-water solution.

Other relevant documents

This procedure is to be read in conjunction with policy 5.09 Information Technology, 5.02 Behaviour of Councillors and Staff, and 5.04 Conditions of Employment.

It is also to be read in conjunction with procedure 5.09.1 Internet, Intranet and e-mail Acceptable Use and procedure 5.09.3 Computer hardware & software acceptable use.
Accountability process

Violations and penalties

Violations of the Mobile Phone Usage Policy will be dealt with individually and vary according to the nature and severity of the specific violation. Any employee or councillor who violates the Mobile Phone Usage Policy will be subject to:

1. Disciplinary action as described under Council's Code of Conduct, including but not limited to reprimand, suspension, and/or termination of employment.
2. Civil or criminal prosecution under federal and/or state law.
THIS PAGE LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY
I, (print name) ___________________________________________ acknowledge I am being granted use of a Council provided Mobile Phone in order to carry out my work and agree that my use of the Mobile Phone will be conducted in a manner that ensures compliance with this policy.

I agree that any personal use of the provided Mobile Phone, excluding emergency personal calls, will be monitored on a monthly basis, and I may be required to reimburse Council through Payroll Deductions.

I understand that I have been given notice in accordance with section 10(2) of the Workplace Surveillance Act 2005 (NSW); and that Council will be entitled to, and shall commence monitoring, all my personal and business use and communication facilities, and that monitoring will be in accordance with this policy and that inappropriate usage may be cause for disciplinary action including but not limited to written warnings, revocation of access privileges, including removal of provided mobile phone, reprimand, suspension, and/or termination of employment or Civil or criminal prosecution under federal and/or state law.

I understand by signing this document, I acknowledge I have read and understood this document. I further understand it is my responsibility to seek advice regarding any questions I might have regarding this document or policy prior to my signing.

Signed _______________________________ Date __________________

Witness name _______________________________ Witness signature _______________________________