Procedure 5.10.2 Website and other online tools

Introduction

Bega Valley Shire Council has developed a website for the provision and distribution of services and information to local residents and to the broader community. The website can be located at www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au

The increasing demand on the World Wide Web as an effective method of providing information and online services has created the need to regularly review Council's website.

This procedure has been developed to provide a framework for the governing principles under which Council's website operates.

To be effective Council’s website must offer:

- **Immediacy** – the information supplied on the website must offer easily accessible, accurate, timely and fresh information.
- **Individualisation** – Council’s website should represent the culture of the broader Bega Valley Shire community and reflect the corporate branding and standards of Bega Valley Shire Council.
- **Interactivity** – In recent years, the demand on local government to provide interactive business and services online has increased.

Objectives

The objective of this Policy is to identify the purpose and governing principles as to how the website is developed and how information and services are posted on the Council website pages.

The objective of Council’s website is to:

- Improve access to Council information.
- Enable better communication between Council and the Bega Valley Shire community.
- Provide clear, timely, concise, educative and easily accessible information to the community on Councils services and activities.
- Provide efficient and accurate online service.
- Enable better governance through transparent decision making and through access to agendas, minutes, budgets and fees and charges schedules.
- Provide a public window to the scope and diversity of Council’s services.
- Provide a space to enable customer requests, complaints, compliments and feedback.
**Stakeholders**

The website should be designed for the primary stakeholders. The two primary stakeholders groups are:

- The residents and broader communities of the Bega Valley Shire Council area, businesses within the area, and community groups.
- The Council, Councillors and those involved in the decision making process of the local area.
- Council’s website can also provide information to a wider audience, and other stakeholders including:
  - Possible new residents, new businesses, education or tourism markets – potentially accessed locally, nationally and globally
  - Other government agencies.

**Governing Principles**

The principles under which Bega Valley Shire Council’s website is constructed and its pages updated are based on the following.

Bega Valley Shire Council’s website should:

- Be well managed, maintained and current.
- Be accurate and deliver timely information and services
- Comply with state and federal legislation.
- Provide a comprehensive corporate view of all of Council’s services and activities.
- Be accessible, user friendly and well designed.
- Offer interactivity for all users and the ability to grow/cope with advances in technology and user trends.
- Be cost effective.

**Procedures**

**Content**

All information posted to Council’s website should be consistent with the corporate image of Council and should represent Council as a responsible provider of online information.

The content of Council’s website should be updated regularly.

All material intended for public access should be made available online. Content should be original, accurate, current and appropriate to the intended audience. Information which is not easily electronically accessible must be discoverable through the website with a brief summary of the information and how to gain access to it.

Content should also be easily searchable using categories and key words, and linked where appropriate.

**Accessibility**

The website is designed for the use of the community to find information and services provided by Council. The website needs to follow a user-centric structure and information should be organised in a manner meaningful to the user and in common usage.

The user should not need to have an understanding of the internal structure of Council to find the information or service they require.
The website will comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to maximise accessibility of information and services to all users regardless of physical, environmental or technical circumstances.

Community Language Provision
The primary language of the website is English. With a growing multicultural population and access to a global audience, we are investigating options for providing a translation service to website contents and uploaded documents.

Consistent User Experience
Users of the website should be able to identify the information provided by Council and easily navigate in a logical manner through the site.

The Bega Valley Shire Council logo is a common feature on all Council web pages and will return the user to the home page.

All pages must include a footer with links to the following information:
- Council contact details, phone number and a readable email address.
- Copyright, privacy and disclaimer notices.

Web Branding
The Bega Valley Shire Council website and sub-sites will be appropriately branded with the Council logo and designed to establish an appropriate image for that sites’ intended audience.

The website will be branded with the Council’s Corporate Mark, plus generic branding if appropriate. The website will adhere to Council’s Style Guide and the Media and Communications Policy.

Legal Issues
The website must comply with the relevant provisions of appropriate Acts, Statutes and Australian Standards.

The management of the website must be supported by Council’s record keeping strategy and meet the requirements of the Australian Standard of Record Keeping in the Electronic Business Environment.

The website is copyright to Bega Valley Shire Council and should contain appropriate disclaimers.

Links
In general, all references to other organisations will be of a non-commercial nature. No commercial advertising of other businesses will be supported on the website. Possible links to other community based organisations include:
- Links to other state and federal government organisations and their sponsored events.
- Other Councils and their sponsored events.
- Local and regional non-profit, charity, community and educational organisations and related events or similar organisations and community groups
- General links to local Chambers of Commerce.
Local Community Groups, NFP Organisations & Government Agencies

Council will support the promotion of local and regional community groups including; non for profit organisations, charities, and educational organisations or similar through the:

- Inclusion of the organisations details where appropriate.
- Inclusion of an event in the events calendar where appropriate.
- Inclusion of the organisation’s statements and news within relevant Council media releases.

Council will also support links and information from government agencies, State owned corporations and their contractors, only where the information is relevant to the local community.

Council will not host web pages other than those belonging to its own sites and sub sites.

Events

Council will actively seek to locate all Council events, public diary, activities, functions and workshop information on the one centralised location within the website.

Events will be listed and posted to the home page events calendar by the date of the actual event.

Events should be searchable and easy to locate on the site.

Council will allow the promotion of commercial business logos for the purpose of sponsorship of community based events on specified events pages.

Council may on occasion use community networking sites for the purpose of a specific marketing program.

Provision of Online Services

Council will endeavour to constantly improve online services, functionality, navigation, accessibility, interactivity and design where appropriate on the website. The development and schedule of these online services form part of an annual Website Review and Action Plan, and recommendations will be implemented on a prioritised basis.

Customer Requests, Complaints, Compliments and Feedback

The Council website will be viewed as a primary communication and engagement tool between Council and its communities, and as such it will provide a facility to capture complaints, compliments, suggestions, polls and feedback as well as general customer requests for action. All comments are to be moderated by the Communications Coordinator in accordance with the Social Media Communications Policy.

Youth

Council acknowledges that youth communities are increasingly turning to community networking websites as a standard form of communication. Popular websites such as Facebook and Twitter offer Council a unique opportunity to directly communicate with its youth and to promote youth events.

However social networking sites by their very nature are open and can attract their share of problems such as cyber bullying and stalking. Therefore any use of these sites by Council must meet the Social Media Communications guidelines. Council’s corporate account on any community networking site will be managed by the Communications Coordinator, who will be responsible for all maintenance and updating, in liaison with appropriate staff.

RSS Feeds

RSS feeds (short for Really Simple Syndication) is a format for delivering regularly changing web content from other websites.
Council on occasion may choose to link to certain news and educational RSS feeds based on the relevance of the information and business case for doing so. Any information carried by a RSS link is the property of the original site owner.

Staff from individual groups are responsible for alerting the Communications team of any appropriate material for sharing via syndication.

**Web 2.0 and Social Media Tools**

The use of web 2.0 (interactive) tools used to present and disseminate Council related material for engagement purposes needs to be authorised by the Communications Coordinator. Also see procedure 5.09.7 Request for Non-core software if the tool involves the installation of downloaded software.

All authorised information provided in a social media site should when appropriate be linked back to the official Council website. When using social media tools online, an employee who clearly identifies their association with Council and/or discusses their work is expected to behave in ways that are consistent with Council’s values and policies, and in line with the Code of Conduct. For more information, see Policy and Procedure 5.10.4 Social Media Communications.

**Review**

To measure the effectiveness of this policy Council will conduct;

a. A periodic review of the website to measure the overall level of compliance and functionality.

b. A review of the policy and guidelines every 3 years.

Once reviewed, information found to out of date or in need of replacing may be archived where appropriate. Council will seek community feedback during the review process.

**Refusal**

The Communications Coordinator has the right to refuse any requests to post material to the website if it fails to comply with Council policies and procedures, the Code of Conduct or is in any way unlawful.

**Web content publishing guidelines**

**Roles and Responsibilities**

The following roles have been allocated to control the publishing of material on Council’s website.

**Communications Coordinator**

The Communications Coordinator is responsible for the strategic development of the website.

**Web Administrator**

The Web Administrator has the responsibility for the overall site creation, maintenance and publishing using the Communications Coordinator’s guidelines.

**Author(s)**

In addition to the Communications Coordinator and Web Administrator, Council utilises nominated Content Managers from individual groups.

A Group Manager may choose to nominate staff who can either a) write web copy and forward it on to the Web Administrator for uploading or b) write and self-load web copy. In both cases the role of the Web Administrator will ensure that the new material complies with this Policy and Procedure, is written in a user-friendly manner compliant with the BVSC Style Guide, and is located in the correct part of the websites’ structure.
Senior Staff

Senior Staff including the General Manager, Human Resources, Group Managers and Managers have the right to direct the removal of any content, which does not meet the publishing standards or is in breach of the Code of Conduct or in breach of the Web Policy and Procedure.

Legal and Ethical Standards

Copyright

Any material stored on the Council’s website belongs to Council or must be licensed to Council for its use. Any information written and published to the site by Council staff is deemed Council’s property. Any material written by external persons or organisations require written permission from the author before the material can be used on the site.

Only artwork and photography owned by Bega Valley Shire Council can be published on the website.

Anti-Discrimination

The NSW Anti-Discrimination Act prohibits the discrimination against any individual on the basis of the grounds of marital status, sexual preference, race, colour, religious identity, descent, age, or disability.

Material, which breaches this Act, must not be included on Council’s website.

Defamation

Facts about individuals and/or organisations must be verified for accuracy. Statements or opinions must not be published in a way that will cause damage to the reputation of an individual or organisation.

Privacy

The Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 provides protection for individuals against the unauthorised use of personal data stored electronically. Permission must be obtained from any individual prior to the publication of any information relating to them.

Code of Conduct

All content should abide by Council’s Code of Conduct.

Writing Standards

Spelling and Grammar

All documents must be checked for spelling and typographical errors prior to publishing.

Accuracy

All documents must be checked for accuracy of content and be approved before publishing.

Currency

All information on the website is to be reviewed continually. The integrity of external links should be checked regularly.

Contact Details

All pages should contain contact details including an email link. Personal email addresses should be avoided. Generic group email addresses can be arranged through the Information Services Help Desk.

Council’s contact details should be listed on each page by default.
Corporate Standards

To ensure consistency throughout the site all information and graphics must comply with Council’s corporate branding. Content should not be duplicated on the site and should be linked where appropriate.

Conflict

Council will post material to the website including community information on a without prejudice basis. If a conflict of Council’s interest occurs such as a breach of the Code of Conduct, the issue must be reported to the Web Administrator and the General Manager.

The General Manager or her delegate has the right to refuse any requests to post material to the website if it fails to comply with Federal and State law and Council’s policies, guidelines and the Code of Conduct.

Images & Files

Images and Videos

Only photographs owned by Bega Valley Shire Council, or which have the owner’s express permission are to be used on the site.

Photos and graphics can make a web page more appealing for visitors to the website; however graphics can very easily be overdone. Web pages should offer a balance between text and images.

At times, Council will post video and photographs onto the website for promotional and educational purposes. Video footage should be as short as possible (ideally less than two minutes). Longer video clips may be broken into smaller clips and posted on the website. To maximise storage space, videos will be removed from the website once the purpose has been achieved.

Posting of video and photographs to social sites such as YouTube and Flickr will be at the discretion of the Communications Coordinator. These videos are also to be linked to the main Council site.

The unauthorised posting of video to these sites which use Council’s Logo or identifying the contents as Bega Valley Council is not permitted. Permission must be obtained from individuals prior to the publication of any videos and photographs.

PDF Documents

Official Council documentation (including policies, procedures and reports) can be converted into a PDF file (Portable Delivery Format). PDF is a secure and reliable format for the distribution and exchange of documents. PDF is a universal file format that preserves the fonts, images, graphics, and layout of most source documents. It may be necessary for large PDF documents to be divided into a series of independent chapters in order to improve efficiency in accessing the information.

Some Council documentation is also available through online interactive flip books. The creation, upload and maintenance of these are the responsibility of the Web administrator.

Social Media

Social media is the term used to describe software tools that allow individuals and groups to generate and exchange content. Council’s social media sites should where appropriate be linked to via its website. For more information see Policy and Procedure 5.10.4 Social Media Communications.

Blogging

Blogs, or Weblogs, are online journals used to present information in diary format on specific projects or interests. They can be useful in providing regular information and updates on Council business.
Proposals for blogs for a project must be initially approved by your Group Manager and discussed with the Communications Coordinator to establish suitability and audience fit.

If approved, the blog will be setup and established by the Web Administrator. Blogs are ongoing web products. They have a start date but no end date and staff who are considering proposing a blog must be aware of the ongoing time commitment required to maintain audience interest at a satisfactory level.

Do not post material that is unlawful, abusive, defamatory, invasive of another’s privacy or obscene to a reasonable person. Copyright must also be adhered to.

All comments on the blog are moderated as per Appendix C of the Social Media Communications Policy and Procedure. Anything that is deemed unlawful, abusive, defamatory, invasive of another’s privacy or obscene to a reasonable person will not be published.