

23 June 2023

Howard Coates

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Kia ora Howard,

### **Social Media Post 16 June 2023**

Thank you for your request made under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (the Act), received on 18 June 2023 relating to a social media post on the Council's Facebook page dated 16 June 2023. You requested the following information:

- Copies of any WCC guidelines, policies, or training material on political neutrality?
- The names and job titles of the staff involved in producing, publishing, reviewing, or approving the social media post?
- Details of any political related conflicts of interests that the staff had declared prior to the post being published

Wellington City Council has partly granted your request for information.

The Council uses social media to inform Wellingtonians about issues, initiatives, and opportunities that impact them. It's an essential communication tool that aims to increase public participation in Council activities, services, and discussions, raising awareness about where rates are invested, and communicate critical public information such as civil defence updates, disruption and city works.

The Social Media Team consists of two full-time Social Media Advisors (a Senior Advisor Social Media and Advisor Social Media) who manage the Council's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, YouTube and Neighbourly channels. They are responsible for creating and publishing the content on these channels, moderating, and responding to comments and messages.

I am unable to provide you with the names of our Social Media Advisors due to privacy reasons and as such this part of your request has been refused under section 7(2)(a) of the Act, as it would identify personal information about private individuals, however their job titles have been provided.

With the advancement of technology, in particular the field of natural language processing – which is a tool driven by artificial intelligence (AI) technology that allows people to have human-like conversations with AI chatbots – the Council's Social Media team had received comments from social media users suggesting that AI technology was running the Council's social media platforms.

Given the value of the role the Council's Social Media team has in being a source of communication and engagement between the Council and the public, it was important for the

team to assure the public that real people are listening, responding, and engaging with the public over the Council's various social media platforms.

Your request refers to a Facebook post made by the Council's Social Media team on 16 June 2023 in which they acknowledged comments made by some users suggesting the team is 'run by AI'. To quash these suggestions, the post included a photo of the Council's Social Media Advisors holding a copy of 'The Post' newspaper published that morning. Being Wellington's local paper, this newspaper was used, the post made no reference to the material that happened to be printed on the front page on that day, for clarity I have pasted the posts caption below:

*Kia ora Pōneke 🙌*

*We've been getting a few comments recently asking if our social media is run by AI. So to squash any rumours, here is a photo of our little Social Media Team with today's paper - we are human we promise!*

*Have a lovely Friday ❤️*

I can confirm the Council's Social Media team have declared no political related conflict of interests prior to this post being made.

The below is an excerpt from the Council's Code of Conduct regarding political neutrality:

#### **Political Neutrality:**

Remaining politically neutral Wellington City Council staff are expected to be politically neutral when performing their role at the Council. It is important not to let personal views or interests influence their advice or behaviour at work.

Staff have the same political rights and freedoms as other New Zealanders. They may stand for office, research and support candidates, and vote as private individuals. However they must remain politically neutral while working with the current Council as well as any future Council. It is important they talk to their manager or team leader if they put in a nomination to stand for office. They may be required to take leave, and if successful, they will need to resign.

Remaining politically neutral maintains the public's trust and confidence in local government and protects staff against any inappropriate political pressure that could be brought to bear on them at work. It doesn't mean staff shouldn't take a personal interest in politics. It means behaviour either at work or outside of work shouldn't compromise their work at the Council. This may be more relevant in some roles at the Council than others.

Political activities, including researching candidates, commenting on issues and attending candidate meetings, should take place in personal time and should not use the Council's resources (including computers and mobile phones). Specific guidelines regarding the conduct of employees, contractors or consultants in an election period will be issued in advance of every triennial election.

#### **Right of review**

If you are not satisfied with the Council's response, you may request the Office of the Ombudsman to investigate the Council's decision. Further information is available on the Ombudsman website, [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz).

Please note, we may proactively release our response to your request with your personal information removed.

Thank you again for your request, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Kind regards

Ollie Marchant  
**Official Information**