

Social Media Policy

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(Draft for Discussion)



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1. Objectives and scope

- 1.1 Social media is any online platform or app that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. This includes social forums such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Social media also covers blogs and video and image-sharing websites such as YouTube.
- 1.2 Employees should be aware that there are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. Employees should follow these guidelines in relation to any social media that they use.

2. Personal use of social media at work

- 2.1 Employees are allowed to access social media websites from the Council's computers or devices at certain times (provided that they are not undertaking overtime). Employees must limit their use of social media to their official rest breaks such as lunch breaks.
- 2.2 Employees using their own computers or devices, such as laptops and palm-top and hand-held devices, should also limit their use of social media on their own equipment to their official rest breaks such as their lunch break. This is so that the use of social media does not interfere with their other duties as this is likely to have a detrimental effect on their productivity.

3. Using social media for work purposes

- 3.1 Employees may be asked to contribute to the Council's social media activities, for example by writing blogs, managing a Facebook account or running an official Twitter account. All such activities must be carried out in accordance with the Communications Social Media Policy which is available on the Council's intranet, Training and advice is available from the Communication's team on using social media for work.
- 3.2 Employees must be aware at all times that, while contributing to the Council's social media activities, they are representing the Council. Employees who use social media as part of their job must adhere to the rules below.
- 3.3 Any communications that employees make in a professional capacity through social media must not:
 - bring the Council into disrepute, for example by:
 - criticising or arguing with customers, colleagues or others;
 - making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups; or
 - posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content;
 - breach confidentiality, for example by:
 - revealing confidential or sensitive information
 - giving away confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or customer contact)
 - breach copyright, for example by:

- using someone else's images or written content without permission;
 - failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something; or
- do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, for example by:
 - making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age or any other protected characteristic;
 - using social media to bully another individual (such as an employee of the Council); or
 - posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content.
- 3.4 Employees should use the same safeguards as they would with any other form of communication about the Council in the public sphere. These safeguards include:
- making sure that the communication has a purpose and a benefit for the Council or residents of the borough;
 - obtaining permission from their line manager before embarking on a public campaign using social media;
 - asking a colleague to check the content before it is published; and.
 - seeking advice from the Council's Communications team
- 3.5 Some employees use social media in the course of their work for the purpose of gathering evidence to assist in the Council's enforcement activities (e.g. to detect benefit fraud). These employees must adhere to the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) (2000), when undertaking such activities.

4. Monitoring use of social media during work time

- 4.1 The Council reserves the right to monitor employees' internet usage during work time. The Council considers that valid reasons for checking an employee's internet usage include suspicions that the employee has:
- been spending an excessive amount of time using social media websites for non-work-related activity; or
 - acted in a way that is in breach of the rules set out in this policy.
- 4.2 The Council reserves the right to retain information that it has gathered on employees' use of the internet for a period of 12 months.
- 4.3 Access to particular social media websites may be withdrawn in any case of misuse.

5. Social media in your personal life

- 5.1 The Council recognises that many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity and outside of work. While they are not acting on behalf of the Council, employees must be aware that they can bring the Council into disrepute if they are recognised as being one of our employees. Employees should take care to check the privacy settings on any social media they use as in some cases information which the employee intended to be private is actually available publicly unless the privacy settings have been set accordingly.

- 5.2 Any communications that employees make in a personal capacity through social media must not:
- bring the Council into disrepute, for example by:
 - criticising or arguing with customers, colleagues or others;
 - making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups; or
 - posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content
 - breach confidentiality, for example by:
 - revealing confidential information owned by the Council;
 - giving away confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or customer contact) or organisation (such as a partner organisation); or
 - discussing the Council's internal workings (such as contractual arrangements with a supplier) or its future business plans that have not been communicated to the public
- 5.3 Employees are allowed to say that they work for the Council, which recognises that it is natural for its staff sometimes to want to discuss their work on social media. However, the employee's online profile (for example, the name of a blog or a Twitter name) must not contain the Council's name.
- 5.4 If employees do discuss their work on social media (for example, giving opinions on the way the Council operates), they must include on their profile a statement along the following lines: "The views I express here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer."
- 5.5 Employees should be aware that the Employees' Code of Conduct covers issues such as the requirement for all employees to be politically neutral in their work for the Council, conduct outside of working hours and use of information. Employees should have regard to the Code of Conduct when using social media in a personal capacity. Employees should be aware that any reports of inappropriate activity linking them to the Council will be investigated.
- 5.6 Employees who are in a politically restricted post are effectively prevented from having any active political role either in or outside the workplace and should take extra care not to breach this requirement when using social media.

6. Use of social media in the recruitment process

- 6.1 Unless it is in relation to finding candidates (for example, if an individual has put his/her details on social media websites for the purpose of attracting prospective employers), the HR team and managers will not, either themselves or through a third party, conduct searches on applicants on social media. This is because conducting these searches during the selection process might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics (for example, sexual orientation or religious beliefs) played a part in a recruitment decision.

7. Disciplinary action over social media use

- 7.1 All employees are required to adhere to this policy. Employees should note that any breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action.

- 7.2 Where there is a concern that an employee's use of social media (either during work time or in their personal life) has breached the principles of this policy or the Code of Conduct, then it may be necessary to carry out surveillance of an employee's use of social media. Such activity would generally fall outside of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act as it would not be criminal activity. However, before any such action is taken, approval must be given by the Head of HR and Organisational Development.
- 7.3 Serious breaches of this policy, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues through social media, or social media activity causing serious damage to the Council's reputation, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.