



# Social Media Policy

## Purpose

1. The purpose of this policy is to ensure the Council's social media activity is safe, appropriate, purposeful and legal. Specifically:
  - To minimise the reputational, legal and governance risks to the council and its employees arising from use of social media by staff in a professional (work related) capacity.
  - To enable the safe use of social media for the purposes of communication, engagement, customer service and service delivery.
  - To ensure a consistent approach is applied across the council, focused on achieving business objectives and improving customer satisfaction.

## Introduction

2. Social media is the term commonly given to online tools, channels and interactive media which allow people to interact with individuals, groups or organisations by sharing information, opinions, knowledge, interests and asking questions or participating in online discussion and conversations.
3. Social media includes a range of channels - such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Yammer, Flickr, YouTube, Instagram, blogs and forums – which are gradually replacing traditional media and mass communication methods. These tools present opportunities and challenges for the Council.
4. The Council understands the need to use social media channels to stay connected to and interact with residents, customers and partners – whether as individuals, groups or organisations. Social media is therefore a key method in the Council's **Corporate Communications Strategy**.
5. The ability for anybody with Internet access to instantly publish to the world brings with it professional responsibilities that all council employees need to understand, even if they don't use social networks for work purposes.
6. This policy has been developed in line with various best practice and guidance documents published by the Local Government Association (LGA), Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), the Government's Cabinet Office, Smart Insights and takes account of legal and regulatory requirements related to digital and social media.

## Context

7. This policy establishes a corporate approach, standards and guidance on the use of social media and helps manage risks around social media usage. The following risks are identified with the use of social media:
  - Damage to the Council's reputation
  - Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation
  - Disclosure of confidential information / breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal data
  - Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection / social engineering attacks (sometimes known as 'phishing')
  - Bullying or witch-hunting
  - Lost productivity as a result of personal use of social media during work time
8. These risks can be effectively managed through upholding the principles, commitments and key actions set out below. This policy informs the Council's **Social Media Strategy** which establishes

the Council's guiding principles on using social media as a key communications channel. More detailed guidance is available in the Council's **Social Media Guidelines** document.

9. Together, the Council's Social Media Strategy, Social Media Policy and Social Media Guidelines enable the Council to:
- Respond to the increasing public use of social media as a way to communicate
  - Engage with a wider range of audiences including young people
  - Further the Council's strategic vision, including promotion of key campaigns, projects and events
  - Oversee how the Council communicate messages to the public, while maintaining its public duties
  - Uphold the reputation of the Council and enhance the image of Nottinghamshire
  - Evaluate and measure the usage of social media and the impact this has upon cost savings of the Council
  - Ensure effective management of social media channels as a communications tool by relevant services (e.g. Communications and Marketing)
  - Establish open access from any device on the Council's network to view social and streaming media
  - Minimise risks associated with using social media

### **Scope of this policy**

10. This policy is designed to cover work-related use of social media, including:
- The Council's use of social media as a communications channel where the content, information, or services are being provided by or accessed, or on behalf of, the Council.
  - Access to social and streaming media sites by employees in the course of their professional duties from devices on the Council's network. Examples include, but are not limited to, monitoring feedback about a service (e.g. TripAdvisor reviews, Facebook comments) or accessing materials to support learning and development (e.g. training videos on YouTube).
  - Participation on social media sites not managed by the Council where contributions are posted directly in a professional capacity (e.g. contributing to a professional forum), or is by someone who identifies themselves as an employee, Member or any other person employed (or contracted either directly or indirectly) by the Council or working on the Council's behalf. Contributions include, but are not limited to, text, photographs and video.
11. This policy does not cover personal use of social media or streaming media sites by employees, Councillors, or other representatives of the Council. This is covered separately by the Council's:
- Employee Code of Conduct (section D35, appendix 1 paragraphs 31 and 42)
  - Code of Conduct for Members
  - Email and Internet Policy (section 5.5).
12. The Council's Social Media Guidelines document provides full and comprehensive guidance around the standards expected in relation to both work-related and personal use of social media.

### **Principles and commitments**

13. The Council will use social media in a safe, appropriate and purposeful way to engage and interact with the public, stakeholders, opinion formers, the media and employees in support of the Council's strategic vision and key policy objectives.

14. The Council will abide by any relevant or applicable laws, terms, and conditions, so that the County Council is not exposed to risks.
15. Council use of social media must be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Social Media Guidelines, Code of Conduct, IT Security Policy, Email and Internet Policy, Equality and Diversity Policy.
16. Use of social media sites will at all times be consistent with the County Council's duty to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults, in accordance with relevant statutory requirements and service specific protocols.
17. During the course of their work, employees using social media sites for business purposes must maintain political neutrality and not indicate individual political opinions.
18. The reputation and / or business of the County Council, service users, partners or others connected with the County Council must not be brought into disrepute through use of social media sites.
19. Council social media accounts will only be authorised by the Council's Communication and Marketing service with approval from the relevant Corporate Director.
20. The Council will make access to social and streaming media open by default from devices on the Council's network. Usage will be governed by appropriate HR and ICT policies and procedures to ensure it is appropriate and beneficial to duties.
21. Employees must act in accordance with the law and be aware of the risk of legal action against them individually and the Council as employer if social media is used inappropriately - including breaching any standards outlined in this policy.

#### **Key actions to meet the commitments set out in the policy**

22. Employees are responsible for upholding this Policy and should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any misuse of social media must be reported promptly to the employee's line manager.
23. Line managers will ensure that their employees are aware of this policy (and all other relevant policies and guidance related to the professional and personal use of social and streaming media). Line managers are responsible for ensuring that their employees act in accordance with requirements.
24. If any employee is found to have breached this policy, they may be subject to the Council's disciplinary procedure. If a criminal offence is considered to have been committed, further action may be taken to assist in the prosecution of the offenders.
25. The Council's HR service will maintain relevant HR policies and guidance to ensure individual access to social and streaming media from Council devices is appropriate to official duties. It will also provide advice to managers on any individual performance or conduct issues relating to the appropriate use of social media.
26. The Council's HR service will make available to all staff basic awareness training on digital and social media (e.g. through an elearning module).
27. The Council's Communications and Marketing service will maintain the Social Media Policy. It will also promote and maintain the Social Media Guidelines.

28. The Council's Communication and Marketing service will maintain a register of all authorised social media accounts. All corporate accounts will be accessed and monitored by this service.
29. The Council's Communication and Marketing service will co-ordinate Council-wide social media accounts on the most relevant social media sites. This includes providing access to services to deal directly with customer contact and/or other communications messages where there is a valid business case for services to do so.
30. The Council's Communications and Marketing service will provide initial advice on what to do if there are any reputational issues on social media no matter what the origin or nature of this may be. This will include signposting to other services such as HR and Legal Services for further specialist advice as needed.
31. The Council's Communication and Marketing service will utilise tools to appropriately monitor social media usage and interaction for the purposes of: brand and reputation management; and gaining information and customer insight to inform improvement to Council communications or services. This includes, but is not limited, to:
  - Public mentions of the Council
  - Data gathered through the Council's own social media channels
  - Data gathered on Council profiles on third party social media sites.
32. The Council's ICT service will also monitor the use of social media in relation to any access of inappropriate social media content and ensure that any appropriate blocking or filtering of access to inappropriate social media content is put in place from the Council's network, as per the IT Security Policy.

*This Policy was approved by the Council's Policy Committee on 11 November 2015.*