



## **Social Media Policy**

### **1. Definition of Social Media**

For the purposes of this Policy, Social Media is a type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. This includes online social forums such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Social media also covers blogs and video / image-sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr.

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. Use of Social Media at Work**

The Council's approach to social media use is enabling and encouraging rather than prohibitive. As such, employees are encouraged to make use of social media safely, providing they understand and adhere to the Council's Social Media Strategy and Toolkit, the Employee Code of Conduct, the ICT Acceptable User Policy, the Data Protection Policy, the ICT Corporate Information Security Policy, and the Council's Corporate Equality Objectives.

The Council therefore encourages employees to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites as part of their work. It is an important part of how the organisation communicates with its customers, promotes its services and allows communication between staff.

Employees contribute to the Council's social media activities, for example by managing a Facebook account or running an official Twitter account for the Council.

Employees must be aware at all times that, while contributing to the Council's social media activities, they are representing the organisation. Employees who use social media as part of their job must adhere to the guidelines below. In addition, detailed guidance about the Council's approach to the use of social media and how to operate it safely can be found in the Council's Social Media Strategy and associated Social Media Toolkit.

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;
- Obtaining permission from a manager before embarking on a public campaign using social media; and
- Getting a colleague to check the content before it is published.

Any communications that an employee makes in a professional capacity through social media must not:

- **Bring the Council into disrepute, for example by:**
  - criticising or arguing with customers, colleagues or service users;
  - 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 trade secrets or information owned by the Council;
  - giving away confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or service user) or organisation (such as a partner organisation); or
  - discussing the Council's internal workings (such as contracts under review or its future business plans that have not been communicated to the public)
- **Breach copyright, for example by:**
  - using someone else's images or written content without permission; or
  - failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something
- **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 or age;
  - 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

Staff responsibilities as employees of the Council apply to their online participation. When operating social media channels, the Council expects the same standards of conduct and behaviour from its employees as it does in all other aspects of the Council's business.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's Social Media Strategy and Toolkit, the Employee Code of Conduct, the ICT Acceptable User Policy, the Data Protection Policy, the ICT Corporate Information Security Policy, and the Council's Corporate Equality Objectives.

### **3. Excessive use of Social Media at work**

Employees should not spend an excessive amount of time while at work using social media, even if they claim to be doing so as part of their work. This is likely to have a detrimental effect on employees' productivity and the level of service to their customers. They should ensure that use of social media does not interfere with their other duties. A Social Media Project Plan and guidance on planning social media activity effectively is included in the Social Media Toolkit.

### **4. Monitoring use of Social Media during work time**

The Council reserves the right to monitor employees' internet usage, but will endeavour to inform an affected employee when this is to happen and the reasons for it. The organisation 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 for non-work-related activity; or
- Acted in a way that is in breach of the rules set out in this policy.

The Council reserves the right to retain information that it has gathered on employees' use of the internet for a period of one year.

Access to particular social media sites may be withdrawn in any case of misuse.

### **5. Social Media in your personal life**

The Council recognises that many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity. While they are not acting on behalf of the Council, employees must be aware that they can damage the organisation if they are recognised as being one of our employees.

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.

If employees do discuss their work on social media (for example, giving opinions on their specialism or the sector in which 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."

Any communication that an employee makes in a personal capacity through social media must not:

- **Bring the Council into disrepute, for example by:**
  - criticising or arguing with customers, colleagues or service users;
  - 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 trade secrets or information owned by the organisation;
  - giving away confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or service user) or organisation (such as a partner organisation); or
  - discussing the Council's internal workings (such as contracts under review or its future business plans that have not been communicated to the public)
- **Breach copyright, for example by:**
  - using someone else's images or written content without permission; or
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- **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 or age;
  - 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

## **6. Use of Social Media in the Recruitment Process**

Unless it is in relation to finding candidates (for example, if an individual has put his / her details on social media sites for the purpose of attracting prospective employers), HR and managers should conduct searches, either themselves or through a third party, on social media only when these are directly relevant to the applicant's skills or claims that he/she has made in the recruitment process. For instance:

- A prospective employee might claim that he / she has used social media in his / her previous job (for example, as a publicity tool); or
- A prospective employee's social media use may be directly relevant to a claim made in his/her application (for example, if he/she runs a blog based around a hobby mentioned in his/her CV or a skill in which he / she claims to be proficient).

There should be no systematic or routine checking of prospective employees' online social media activities, as 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. This is in line with the organisation's equal opportunities policy.

## **7. Compliance**

All employees are required to adhere to this Policy.

Employees should note that any breaches of this Policy may lead to disciplinary action being taken against them. Serious breaches of this policy, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the Council, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.

## **8. More Information and Help**

For more information and help please contact HR Services on 215662 or via e-mail on [hrenquiries@southend.gov.uk](mailto:hrenquiries@southend.gov.uk)