



Social Media Policy and Guidelines

April 2020

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY AND GUIDELINES	
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Social Media Policy

Introduction

1. The Social Media Policy and the associated Guidelines apply to all employees and those acting on behalf the Council.
2. The Social Media Guidelines provide practical advice around the scope of using social media as an employee of the Council both during working and personal time. Adherence to both the policy and guidelines are for the protection of the Council and its employees. It is implied within an employee's contract of employment to comply with the principles and advice contained with these documents as well as other Council policies.
3. Whilst the world of social media is fast paced, the Council's stance and principles of using social media are likely to remain in line with this policy for some time. The policy and guidelines will, however, be reviewed on a periodic basis in line with new legislation, best practice or operational issues that emerge which impact on Council business continuity.
4. The objectives of this policy are to promote appropriate use of social media for Council business and the ability to use social media in as safe a manner as possible as a tool to positively promote the reputation of the Council and its services for the benefit of service users, residents, business partners and agencies.
5. Social media for the purposes of this policy applies in the widest sense. The Social Media Guidelines document outlines the definitions and commonly known social media platforms at the time of writing and implementation.

Policy Statements

6. The Council will use social media where this is a benefit to the Council's business. Employees can also assist and play a role in the promotion and sharing of good news to enhance the Council's business reach and reputation.
7. The use of social media for Council business, from corporate accounts and personal accounts, is permitted in line with the Social Media Guidelines.
8. Employees are under no obligation to use their own personal social media to promote the Council's business. Where employees chose to do so activity must be undertaken in a manner that does not infringe Council policy, portray the Council in a negative manner or harm the reputation of the Council, its employees or elected members.
9. The use of personal social media accounts for personal use is, of course, within the gift of individual employees to choose whether to use or not. However, where personal social media accounts are used directly or indirectly in a derogatory and or discriminatory manner and refer to the Council, elected

members or Council employees, and this activity becomes known to the Council, investigations will take place and appropriate action will be taken in line with Council policy. This may result in action up to and including dismissal.

10. Personal use of social media should be conducted in employee's own time and will not be authorised during work time (i.e. when signed in) whether using Council or personal devices (this does not include reasonable use of the staff forum on the intranet). The only exception is when promoting Council business in line with the Social Media Guidelines.
11. The Social Media Guidelines set out advice to employees regarding the use of social media in both a professional and personal capacity. This is for employees' protection regardless of whether they post for or on behalf of the Council in a corporate capacity, share Council social media posts or use social media in a personal capacity. The Council would like to ensure that employees are informed about the risks associated with social media generally and will offer support through its various employee support channels where employees have been negatively impacted by a social media post or activity.
12. Appropriate training, awareness and advice is available to employees regarding social media safety. As the functionality and use of social media platforms change regularly this will naturally impact on Council business, our services and our employees in various ways. Therefore, training, awareness and advice will be disseminated in various formats to the workforce. This needs to be timely and in an appropriate format to our diverse workforce who have different service and personal needs. It is however, important that employees take personal responsibility to ensure that their own personal data, social media and online activities comply with national guidance (for example, but not limited to, the Equality Act 2010 and the Data Protection Act 2018) and Council policy.
13. A joint approach and responsibility for business accounts will be taken to ensure that advice and awareness to the workforce is relevant and in the appropriate format. This responsibility will be between COE / COB, HR, ICT, Communications and other relevant key stakeholders, including where appropriate the recognised Trade Unions.
14. Individual managers are also responsible for ensuring information is disseminated to employees in a timely manner and be actively aware of any corporate activity on social media where relevant in their service.
15. Where personal social media concerns are raised regarding a member of their team, there is an obligation on managers to ensure that appropriate escalations are undertaken in line with Council policies for the safety of employees and the reputation of the Council.
16. The Social Media Guidelines offer frequently asked questions to assist with operational queries and act as a reference document to managers to and respond to employee questions.

17. This policy and the associated Social Media Guidelines have been approved by Chief Officers Board and the recognised Trade Unions. Both documents will be updated periodically, however the Guidelines documents are likely to be updated more regularly as it is an operational toolkit and will reflect business needs. The Council is also keen to ensure that social media developments are used in an advantageous and positive way to maximise engagement with our community and workforce so updates will be provided in the guidelines.

Social Media/HLW final

Social Media Policy Guidelines

Introduction

1. These guidelines apply to all employees and third parties engaged to work, or act, on behalf of the Council. For the purpose of the guidelines the aforementioned are referred to as 'employees'. However, this term is not intended to determine employee status.

Purpose and general advice

2. To provide employees with guidelines to assist them in complying with the Council's Social Media policy and to enjoy the benefit of social networking whilst understanding the standards expected by the Council.
3. These guidelines also aim to highlight that employees need to be familiar with privacy settings of social media platforms and should ensure that these are appropriate for both the content posted and intended audience. It is also important to acknowledge that social networking platforms are in the public domain. This means it is not always possible to control what is viewed, shared or archived and there can be no reasonable expectation that private posts will remain private as they may be passed on by other people either intentionally or unintentionally. Online material, may be publically available indefinitely.
4. Employees are responsible for their words and actions in an online environment and are advised to consider their use of language and phrasing, and whether any comment, photograph or video they post or share on a social media is something they would want colleagues and other employees of the Council, their manager or people outside the Council to see.
5. Inappropriate behaviour on social media may constitute harassment and bullying even if events are in personal time. Care must be taken where a link, either direct or indirect, can be made from what is posted to colleagues and / or the Council.
6. All social media activity must protect the Council's confidentiality. Employees must not post information that is not already in the public domain, for example, a service's financial position, internal policies and procedures, or performance unless authorised to do so. Photos may be taken in non-public areas of Council buildings however, where photos are taken the owner must ensure that no sensitive or confidential information is on display.

Definitions

7. **Social media** – any website or application that enables users to create or share content or to participate in social networking, this includes (but is not limited to);
 - Social bookmarking (e.g. Pinterest)

- Social news websites (e.g. Reddit, Propeller)
- Social networking (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)
- Social photo and video sharing (e.g. YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp)
- Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia, Wikia)
- Use of 'comments' facilities on websites (e.g. The Northern Echo, BBC news)
- Blogs

(**Appendix 1** has definitions of each platform)

Guidelines

7. This guidance document is separated into three sections;
 - a. use of social media using a Council service social media account
 - b. use of personal social media accounts to promote Council business
 - c. use of personal social media accounts for personal events with work colleagues
8. The Council stance on the use of social media varies depending on what social media is being used for.
9. Personal use of social media for personal activities is not permitted during work time whether you are using a Council or personal device, unless prior permission is sought from a senior manager. Employees can however, log out of work / use during flexi-time and use social media if service time and provision allows.
10. Using personal social media accounts for the benefit of a service, for example, promoting a Council vacancy, event or celebrating a team achievement, is permitted.
11. The staff forum on the intranet can be accessed, within reason, at any time during the working day as long as service needs are not affected.
12. The same standards of conduct should be applied to online activity as they would to offline activities or conversations with a colleague / customer.
13. **Appendix 2** has a number of frequently asked questions regarding social media .
14. A quick reference guide to 'dos and don'ts' relating to social media is attached at **Appendix 3**.

Use of social media using a Council / Service social media account

15. Social media is an effective way for us to engage with residents/customers and other audiences and to promote our services and events. It is important we present a professional image and issue consistent messages via our corporate accounts. The following guidelines reflect the Council's social media policy and provide context and more information to help you comply with the policy.

16. Anyone wanting to set up a social media profile for Council business must get authorisation from their Head of Service and the Communications team. The Communications team will need your admin passwords and may request that you undertake relevant social media training. Authorisation of the profile will be documented and will set out what the profile can be used for and who can use it.
17. Council social media profiles will be monitored by services and/or the Communications team. If you no longer require a profile, you should decommission it via the Communications team.
18. It is important that you do not post anything which could identify vulnerable children, or adults, or place them at risk of harm. Seek advice from the relevant Safeguarding team if you are unsure about anything you are posting. Also be aware that your social media post could encourage people to respond, so be mindful, don't post anything that will encourage vulnerable people to reveal information that would place them at risk of harm or to reveal personal information.
19. Social media must not be used during recruitment to inform selection decision, or to seek, or provide references.
20. As with any other interaction, as an officer, you must respect the privacy of individuals. It is vital that we protect the privacy and confidentiality of our customers, service users and staff. Failure to do so is likely to be a breach of the General Data Protection Regulations 2018, the Equality Act 2010 and/or the common law duty of confidence.
21. Equally important is the protection of the Council's confidentiality. Do not post any information that is not already in the public domain, for example your service's financial position, performance, political decisions, any legal related matters, litigation or any parties that the Council may be in dispute with etc. unless you have been authorised to do so by a senior member of staff.
22. Unless you are authorised to do so, do not respond to content on behalf of the Council, even if you are trying to defend the Council or your service. You may come across content on social media that you wish to respond to, for example, because it is derogatory towards the Council or because it is inaccurate. Please report this content to the Communications team and they will provide advice.
23. Respect copyright. You must not copy, digitise, alter or distribute any part of a copyrighted work without first obtaining the permission of the copyright owner. Be particularly careful when using images (logos, graphics and photos) found on the internet. The Council pays for a Copywrite licence to download copywrite images however, all copywrite information should be appropriately referenced.
24. There is a stock library of photographs held by the Communications team which can be used on corporate messages. Further details are available from the Communications team.

25. Watch out for phishing attempts, where a scammer may attempt to use deception to obtain information relating to the Council.

Use of personal social media accounts to promote Council business

26. It is your choice to use social media for personal purposes in your own time and generally what you do in your time is your business. However, activities that affect your performance at work, the performance of others, the Council's business, or reputation are covered by the Council's policies, procedures and guidelines. This applies whether you engage in these activities in or outside of work and whether you identify yourself as a Council employee or not.

27. We encourage employees to share content posted on official Council accounts on personal accounts, this can be a positive and effective way for Council services to be promoted widely. We are also aware that many employees are proud of their services and want to promote and celebrate successes or events on their own social media accounts – this is fine as long as consideration is given to the following guidance. Examples of case law and lessons learnt are provided in **Appendix 4** and you are strongly advised to read these to protect yourself and make you are aware of potential pitfalls with social media even if a post is shared or written in innocence. Any use of personal social media to promote Council business should reflect well on the Council.

28. When promoting Council business on your personal account, think about how you present yourself. Care needs to be taken to ensure that where you reference that you work for the Council or there is a linkage to any council business or council colleagues; personal profiles should be up to date and professional. The lines between public, private, personal and professional may be blurred on social media. Whether you identify yourself as a Council employee or not you should take care to ensure that your posts do not bring the Council into disrepute.

29. Messages should not be posted with status updates or links to material or content which is deemed to be inappropriate by the Council, this would include, but not limited to pornography, racial or religious slurs, gender-specific comments, information encouraging criminal skills or terrorism or materials relating to cults, gambling or illegal drugs etc. Inappropriate content or material also covers any text, images or other media that would reasonably offend someone on the basis of race, age, sex, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity or any other characteristic protected by law.

30. Any posting of hate speech, threats of violence, harassment or bullying will be in conflict with the Council's code of conduct and other policies and employees will be held responsible for what they say where there is offense, whether intentional or otherwise.

31. Social networking sites are not appropriate forums to express frustrations or concerns related to work or Council services and any such issues should be addressed via the appropriate procedures.

32. Be aware of posting images of staff, including yourself, in Council uniform. When you are wearing your uniform you are representing the Council, even if you are not in work. Ask yourself if your post could bring the Council into disrepute or negatively affect its reputation.
33. Understand and respect your audience. Even if your privacy settings are narrow, you have no control over who your posts may be shared with. Remember that people (including colleagues, elected members, customers, service users) are from diverse backgrounds and have a range of points of view. You can be yourself on social media, but you must be respectful. Do not post obscenities, personal insults, anything discriminatory or content that could bring the Council into disrepute. Do not get drawn into arguments, even if you are trying to defend the Council. If you come across something that you think the Council should respond to, speak to the Communications team and they can reply on behalf of the Council.
34. Respect the privacy of our customers and service users. Do not contact or accept contact from customers / service users using your personal social media accounts. Check your privacy settings and if a member of the public contacts you via your personal accounts do not reply; speak to your manager about using a corporate channel of communications to respond where appropriate. Consider removing any references to the Council from your personal bio on social media sites so it is harder for customers to identify you.

The Council has a duty to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults. Photographs or personally identifying information of service users or clients should not be posted on social media.

35. Make it clear on your personal social media accounts that you are writing in a personal capacity (for example, add a line to your biography stating 'all views are my own').
36. Do not use your Council email address inappropriately. Your Council email address has been given to you for business use, with reasonable personal use being allowed in your own time. This means that you should be aware of the implications of using your Council email address to sign up for social media sites as well as other online services such as mailing lists.

Use of personal social media accounts for personal events with / involving work colleagues

37. As mentioned above (*paragraph 26*) it is your choice to use social media for personal purposes in your own time and generally what you do in your time is your business. However, activities that affect your performance at work, the performance of others or the Council's business or reputation are covered by the Council's policies, procedures and guidelines.
38. There is a lot of advice in the public domain about making sure your social media content protects and works for you in a way that you want it to. You are strongly encouraged to consider your settings and the wealth of advice available.

39. You should take care when you make any comments either directly or indirectly about any work colleagues or the Council. Any statement which implies any discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation which then becomes public, will be treated seriously using the relevant Council policy, regardless of whether you have identified yourself as a Council employee or not.

Monitoring and Breaches of Policy

40. Use of Council social media profiles may be monitored and staff must recognise that there is no right of privacy in respect of their social media. The Council will not actively monitor staff use of personal social media profiles; however, it will not ignore activity suspected of breaching the Council's social media policy, or any other policy. Also, if something is brought to the Council's attention that cannot reasonably be expected to be ignored, it will be investigated.
41. If a breach of policy is suspected or observed, staff will be expected to co-operate with any investigation. Breaches of policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Appendix 1

Definitions of social media platforms:

- **Social bookmarking** is a way for people to store, organise, search, and manage bookmarked web pages. Users can save links to web pages that they like or want to share on a social bookmarking site
- **Social news websites** are sites that feature user-posted stories. Such stories are ranked based on popularity, as voted on by other users of the site or by website administrators. Users typically comment online on the news posts and these comments may also be ranked in popularity
- **Social networking sites** are dedicated websites and applications for users to interact or find people with similar interests
- **Social photo and video sharing sites** allow users to share photos and videos with other users they have connected with
- **Wikis** are websites which are created by users collaborating to create content
- **Comments** facilities on websites allow users to have their say on a specific post. Some comment facilities are regulated but many are not.
- **Blogs** are regularly updated websites or web pages, typically run by an individual or small group, written in an informal or conversational style, these could take written form or video images based

Social Media Frequently Asked Questions

Q What is Social Media?

A Social networking and social media sites are online, public communication sites for users to interact, engage, and share interests and activities. Commonly used social networking sites include Facebook, Flickr, Myspace, Snapchat, Instagram, wikis, Twitter, LinkedIn, personal blogs and YouTube. However, the world of social media changes rapidly and the Council's policy and guidance covers all social networking and is not limited to sites in existence today.

Q Can I use social media during working time?

A Personal use of social media is not permitted during work time whether you are using a Council or personal device, unless prior permission is sought from a senior manager. Employees can however, log out of work / use flexi time to use social media if service time and provision allows.

Use of a personal social media account for the benefit of a service, for example, promoting a Council vacancy or event or celebrating a team achievement, is permitted.

Q Can I use my Council email address for social media?

A Only for service accounts, not for personal social media accounts. Where you identify yourself using your Council email ensure that you have the appropriate authorisation from your Head of Service and the Communications team. If you comment on a work related matter using your personal social media account, ensure that you make it clear that you are not speaking in the capacity of, or representing Darlington Borough Council and that your views and advice is your own.

Q What do you mean by posting in a professional manner?

A This means presenting yourself or the image of yourself as a professional / competent employee of the Council. You should consider that social media sites are public and ask yourself would you want your colleagues family, future employers (*who may use social media as part of recruitment processes*), etc., to see the information you post? Being professional means being respectful to fellow employees, managers and ensuring that your posts are accurate. You should communicate avoiding anger, sarcasm, criticism, and any language that may be discriminatory, offensive, and defamatory (e.g., making negative comments about a group of services users, colleagues, managers).

Q My post is politically restricted and I am restricted to acts of ‘canvassing on behalf of a political party or a person who is or seeks to be a candidate and speaking to the public at large or publishing any written or artistic work that could give the impression that they are advocating support for a political party’. Does this include ‘liking’ / ‘sharing’ and supporting political posts on personal social media accounts?

A Yes, as with any written materials showing a political preference and advocating support or canvassing on behalf of a political party, liking or sharing a political party / parties materials on social media is a restricted activity.

Q Can I use the Staff Forum during working time?

A The Staff forum on the intranet can be accessed, within reason, at any time during the working day as long as service needs are not affected.

Q Can I use my own LinkedIn Profile to promote Council vacancies or business related events using my own profile?

A Yes. We encourage employees to share content posted on official Council accounts on personal accounts as this can be a positive and effective way for Council services to be promoted. We are also aware that many employees are proud of their services and want to promote and celebrate successes or events on their own social media accounts – this is fine as long as consideration is given to the social media policy and guidance document.

Q I have been asked to write a reference or recommendation for an employee / colleague on LinkedIn. Is it okay to write the recommendation?

A No. There is a standard reference procedure for all reference requests and if the recommendation is looking for knowledge of their work at the Council, this must be done via the corporate arrangement. Details are available on the HR pages of the intranet.

Q If I am on social media and see that someone has a customer service complaint or is bad-mouthing the Council should I respond?

A No, please refer the details to the Communications team who are trained to respond to customer service or other complaints on social media;
communications@darlington.gov.uk

Q Can I use Council logos / images, or the Darlington Borough Council name or other trademarks in my personal posts?

A No, unless you are sharing a corporate post.

There is guidance on using the Council's logo, if you are using it on corporate/ service account please seek advice first from the Communications team.

Q How do I make it clear that I am making my own comments about Council business rather than as an employee if I see something that I want to comment on as a resident using my personal social media?

If you make a comment ensure that you are clear that you are speaking as yourself and not on behalf of the Council. You can consider adding the following statement to your profile; *“This is my personal (account, blog, space, comment) and contains my own views, thoughts and opinions. It is not endorsed by Darlington Borough Council and is not an official communication of Darlington Borough Council”.*

Q I sometimes go out after work in my Council uniform. Am I allowed to post pictures of myself socialising in my uniform?

A Socialising in your Council uniform when you are not working, is not encouraged. If you post anything whilst in uniform you need to ensure you do not breach any Council policy. Pictures and posts must not violate the Council’s Code of Conduct and other policies and procedures and they must not be offensive or distasteful.

Q Can I post pictures of residents/clients/service users on personal social media page if they or their family agreed?

A No. You should not post any pictures of service users / residents even if the service user or the service user’s family agree. The only exception would be if you share a corporate post.

Q Can I discuss clients/service users on our personal social media pages if I don’t identify them in name?

A No. You should not discuss any service user on your personal social media pages even if they are not identified.

Q What should I do if a client/service user takes a picture of me and posts it on their social media site, and tags me so it shows up on my social media page?

A You should remove the picture so it no longer shows up on your profile. Service users are permitted to take pictures and post to their site as they are not covered by this policy. If appropriate, and you are comfortable you could also talk to the service user and explain the reasons why you are taking this action.

Q Can I say on my personal social media page that I have had a tough day at work?

A Yes, but you should not go into any details about the Council’s activities. You can talk about your personal reasons for your tough day but think about how you may be representing yourself as a Council employee with your postings.

Q What do I do if I spot a potential social media crisis?

A If you think something negative is likely to end up on social media, let the Communications team know in advance. It's useful to be able to allocate resources for responding to people and, where appropriate, prepare responses. If you become aware of a communications crisis happening with the corporate account, please leave it to the Communications team to respond. Rest assured, they will be dealing with the issue. If you are concerned something has been missed, please make contact; communications@darlington.gov.uk

Q **If I see something on the Council's website that I know is factually incorrect and/or has been picked up and promoted on social media what should I do?**

A Please contact the Communications team, your eager eyes are always welcome and the Communications team can make arrangements to correct the source document and make an appropriate response to the social media post. It would be great if you can send a copy of the information that you are referring to and any relevant social media posts even if this is just a screen shot. Send details to communications@darlington.gov.uk

Q **I have seen an incorrect fact on an external website which refers to a service that the Council delivers, or no longer delivers. I have the ability to amend, can I do this as I know that the fact is wrong and others will see it?**

A Responsibility for information created and updated by a third party is outside the control of the Council. Depending on what the information is the Council may be interested in reviewing the information and in some cases may need to take intervention to correct the information with the third party. Employees are under no obligation to action this themselves, but if you are able to inform the Communications team, this is useful.

Q **What is the guidance regarding editing online encyclopedias?**

A If you edit online encyclopedias at work this will show that the Council has amended the record. Before editing an online encyclopedia about the Council (or related to the Council and its services) in a work capacity ensure that the edited entry is correct, free from bias, conflict of interest and that you have the appropriate authorisation from your Head of Service and the Communications team.

Editing information about the Council on a third party website, in your personal time, as part of any research or browsing that you conduct is of course your choice to edit. However, please consider the nature of why you may edit. If you want to edit the fact as you know it to be incorrect as you are confident from your professional role at the Council or simply you know the fact to be incorrect as it would be common knowledge as an employee of the Council.

What you do in your spare time is your own choice. You are free to amend as a general member of the public expressing that your views are your own. If you wish to amend as a Council employee, please seek advice from the communications unit (communications@darlington.gov.uk)

Q As a team can we use social media to share ideas, seek views and discuss work?

A No. Social media can be used to informally keep in touch with team members but should not be used as a formal staff communication for work matters.

Appendix 3

Dos and Don'ts to Social Media Posting

Talk to the communications team – they are here to help you but here are a few dos and don'ts

Work social media accounts dos and don'ts at a glance	
Do	Don't / Avoid
Get approval from the communications team before setting up any new account – there has to be a business case for using a brand new account versus an established well-resourced corporate account (the form to set out your business case is on the intranet)	Assume that social media will look after itself – you will need to invest time, enthusiasm and energy to make it work. And don't leave your accounts unattended for long spells, you need to monitor your accounts regularly and respond to questions in a timely manner
Be responsible and respectful at all times and share and credit other people's helpful content and links	Post content which will embarrass the organisation or yourself. Do not post anything which will bring the Council into disrepute
Share your corporate passwords with the communications team. If you look after an organisational social media account you are duty bound to share your passwords with the communications team and especially when you change them	Share your passwords with anyone other than the communications team
Adhere to HR policies and procedures and ICT guidance	Forget that social media is 24/7 – just because you leave at 5pm doesn't mean the world stops or that residents won't be active. If your account is only staffed 9-5 then you should say so on your profile.
Have a plan for your account – agree your objectives and then understand what content is needed and when. Create and share information at the times your audience is most likely to be on the channel. The communications team can help with this. Have a clear plan for how to resource your account – and who looks after it when you are on leave. Have a rota where appropriate – share the load and you'll get more from your accounts	Use your named work email address on social media accounts, use generic email addresses or links so residents can't email you directly
Ensure that your social media is effectively embedded into the Council's emergency plan and your service contingency plan where appropriate	

Personal Social Media Accounts Do's and Don'ts when promoting Council Business	
Do	Don't / Avoid
Remember, it is your choice to use social media in your personal time. However, activities that affect your performance at work, the performance of others or the Council's business or reputation are covered by the Council's policies procedures and guidelines. This applies whether you engage in these activities in or outside of work and whether you identify yourself as a Council employee or not.	Messages should not be posted with status updates or links to material or content which is deemed to be inappropriate by the Council, this would include, but not limited to pornography, racial or religious slurs, gender-specific comments, information encouraging criminal skills or terrorism or materials relating to cults, gambling or illegal drugs etc. Inappropriate content or material also covers any text, images or other media that would reasonably offend someone on the basis of race, age, sex, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity or any other characteristic protected by law
Feel free to share content posted on official Council accounts on personal accounts.	Do not post obscenities, personal insults, anything discriminatory or content that could bring the Council into disrepute.
Do think about how you present yourself when promoting Council business and don't bring the Council into disrepute	Do not get drawn into arguments, even if you are trying to defend the Council. If you come across something that you think the Council should respond to, speak to the Communications team and they can reply on behalf of the Council
Understand and respect your audience and their privacy. You can be yourself on social media, but you must be respectful.	Do not contact or accept contact from customers / service users using your personal social media accounts. Check your privacy settings and if a member of the public contacts you via your personal accounts do not reply and speak to your manager about using a corporate channel of communications to respond where appropriate. Consider removing any references to the Council from your personal bio on social media sites so it is harder for customers to identify you.
Make it clear on your personal social media accounts that you are writing in a personal capacity (for example, add a line to your biography stating 'all views are my own').	Do not use your Council email address inappropriately. Your Council email address has been given to you for business use, with reasonable personal use being allowed in your own time. This means that you should be aware of the implications of using your Council email address to sign up for social media sites as well as other

	online services such as mailing lists.
Do protect the Council’s confidentiality. Employees must not post information that is not already in the public domain, for example, a service’s financial position, internal policies and procedures, or performance unless authorised to do so.	Post photos taken in non-public areas of Council buildings where sensitive or confidential information may be on display

Personal Social Media – general advice	
Do	Don’t
Make sure that your social media profile works for you and protects you as you wish it to.	Stray into negative comments about work colleagues either directly or indirectly. Any statement which implies any discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation will be treated seriously using the relevant Council policy, regardless of whether you have identified yourself as a Council employee or not.
Consider your settings and use the wealth of advice available on the web regarding social media safety.	

Social Media Case Law and Understanding Risks

Although, an employee may argue that their personal use of social media is private, a court may take the view that, once data is in a public forum, the individual has lost control of it and therefore, does not have a reasonable expectation of privacy.

This could be the case even if the employee has high privacy settings and has restricted who can see their comments, not least because it only takes one person in the network to forward the comments on.

Employees who disclose material about the Council, which includes information about colleagues in their network, should be aware that the Council may not reasonably be expected to ignore it. Generally information should only be used for the purposes for which it was obtained but, where the disclosure suggests an employee has committed an act of misconduct or has the potential to damage the Council's reputation, it is likely to be reasonable for the Council to take appropriate action including disciplinary action.

Here are a few actual cases which have been in the UK Tribunals

Creighton v Together Housing Association Ltd

The Creighton v Together Housing Association Ltd case highlights the potential permanency of comments made on social media. Mr Creighton was a line manager who had a grievance raised against him by an employee he managed. Part of the complaint was that Mr Creighton had made derogatory comments towards other employees on his open Twitter account. The investigation found tweets posted two or three years previously and Mr Creighton, who had almost 30 years' service, was dismissed as a result. The tribunal rejected his claim that he had been unfairly dismissed.

Weeks v Everything Everywhere Ltd

In *Weeks v Everything Everywhere Ltd*, Mr Weeks published a number of posts on his Facebook page that compared his workplace to “Dante’s Inferno”. His comments included: “No Dante’s Inferno for this happy fatty today” and “Another day at Dantes [sic], fat lad living the dream, hope you all have a better day than I’m going to have”. When confronted by his line manager, he refused to refrain from making these types of posts in the future. He subsequently made similar comments online and was dismissed for breaching the

company’s social media policy. Mr Weeks claimed unfair dismissal. The tribunal concluded that the comments, which had been made over a long period of time, were “likely” to cause reputational damage if they continued and that the employer’s response had been reasonable.