



Social media policy

October 2017

CITY OF YORK COUNCIL

Social media policy

Part 1

Introduction

City of York Council strives to be an open and honest organisation which actively engages with our residents, businesses, visitors and partners. Our communication with stakeholders should be a two-way process, so everyone's views can help shape the services we provide. We are a listening council.

This policy is intended to provide clear guidance regarding the acceptable use of electronic communications and social media both within, and outside, of work.

The policy covers you if you are:

- One of our employees
- An agency, temporary or contract member of staff working for us or on our behalf
- Staff of third party suppliers contracted to and/or providing services to the council
- Volunteers working with us on our projects
- Students on work placements with us.

Councillors should consult the Local Government Association's [social media best practice](#) guidelines and refer to our own [code of conduct](#) document.

We acknowledge that social media is a reality and, when used effectively, can support council business and the services we provide.

There is increasing use of social media for work related purposes, be this posting proactive messages about our services or activities; dealing with queries, complaints or comments; uploading audio and video material or professional/peer networking.

Understanding the risks of social media

Exceptional care should be taken when using any social media tools. Most social media sites work on the principle of 'broadcast-by-default', which means it is not always possible to control who may, or may not, see the content.

Even where such sites allow users to set up privacy settings and to block unwanted contacts, the content published may be broadcast beyond a controlled audience.

The terms and conditions of such sites give powers and, in many cases, ownership of the published content to the social media site itself, and not to the originator.

Clear legal precedents have now emerged whereby the misuse of social media can result in both civil and criminal action. Users of digital communication channels need to have due regard for such consequences. Recent high profile cases have shown

the legal dangers posed by social media and led to both significant fines and, in some cases, imprisonment.

The Data Protection Act applies to the use of digital communications. Therefore, whether using social media for work or personal purposes, you are advised to follow the principles of this act when referring to any other living individual.

Failure to do so could lead to enforcement action and potential civil or criminal action against the council and/or against you as the individual responsible.

Acceptable use and monitoring social media

This policy should be read together with the council's other policies, and, as such, the employee code of conduct and electronic communications policy and the duty and obligations they impose, also apply. Employees should pay particular attention to professional requirements, for example, case management rules.

Any activity using social media, which could be deemed a breach of the code of conduct or electronic communications policy will be subject to investigation in the same way that similar action would be in other circumstances, for example, verbally in the work-place, on the phone or in public.

No data about individuals or organisations collected for the council's business use should be published or distributed via social media because:

- We cannot control or secure the potential audience
- We cannot ensure ownership of this data remains with the council
- We must comply with UK and European laws which state all data must be held on servers in 'approved locations' (we cannot do so for social media providers)
- We must comply with relevant laws before sharing data with partners
- We have a duty of care to the data 'subject'.

We reserve the right to monitor and maintain audit trails of electronic communications (including, but not limited to, content on social media sites, or other digital communication channels and/or email sent using the council's email system).

We do not monitor use of electronic communications or social media set up by individuals and not in the name of City of York Council. However, where items are published electronically referring to the council, our business, activities or services, or to named employees in their council role, we may respond where it is brought to our attention.

Official communications

Our policies and procedures for official communications, and for issuing media statements, apply equally to digital communications and social media.

Only those with delegated authority to issue such statements should use electronic communications and social media to do so.

Before any official public statement or post intended as a news release or in response to an enquiry from the media is issued, it must be checked with the communications team.

Official communications prepared in advance, with an embargo set, must not be published using a digital or social media channel before the embargo date and time.

It is also important we continue to have effective internal communications which allow us to share information with staff and others on a basis of trust and in confidence.

No content published or distributed as an internal communication or as a communication with or between trusted partner(s), may be copied or republished via a digital or social media channel without prior authorisation.

Social media for work use

We allow, and encourage, the use of social media and digital channels of communication for business purposes as defined in this policy.

Examples may include:

- To engage residents (or other stakeholders) who prefer to use social media
- To engage partner organisations who use social media
- To participate in peer and professional body networks
- To access business-related content posted or published via social media.

We have a duty to protect ourselves and our reputation and want to use social media in a way that is consistent with our overall communications strategy.

If you want to set up a new social media or digital channel(s), you need to clearly justify the need to do this and gain approval from the communications team after consultation with your line manager. The team will provide advice on what is required and how the site(s) should be branded. The use of such sites will be monitored and passwords must be shared with the communications team.

Social media accounts should make it clear in the description that they are provided by the City of York Council. Our logo must be used as the profile image for service-led accounts unless agreed otherwise with the communications team.

You should not use a separate social media site for content that could (and should) be published on our corporate Twitter or Facebook sites or the council website.

If you wish to extend the reach of relevant content, it should be published on the council website first, before a link to the material is posted to social media.

If you are signing up to any social media facility for work use, you should use your council email address and give your job title.

Our customers and others have a right to transparency and openness. Don't forget you represent the council when posting to social media or digital platforms. Any content you publish or post (and any material you access) must be relevant to your role at the council and could be understood to be made on behalf of the council.

In the same way that you are responsible for your actions by email, on the telephone or when wearing your council ID badge or uniform, you are entirely responsible for your actions, views, opinions and any published comments on social media.

Your personal use of social media

The council does not want to prevent or restrict your use of social media in your own time and for your own purposes.

However, we need to make you aware that if your personal use of social media conflicts with your duties for the council, or your obligations as an employee, as a contracted supplier, a volunteer or councillor, then we may take action.

No private information you have as a representative of the council should be copied, published or commented upon when using social media for personal use.

Our standards and codes of behaviour extend beyond the workplace in respect of your actions or communication(s) that could bring the council into disrepute.

Use of social media at work

We do not block access to social media sites at work but will restrict access to sites whose purpose or content are not consistent with our values and policies.

Personal use of social media sites is only permitted in your own time.

If you are suspected of using social media for personal use during working time, just as carrying out other personal activities in work time, you may be subject to investigation and potential disciplinary action.

Your use of social media and other electronic communications, whether for work or personal use, must be consistent with the standards of behaviour expected by the council at all times, and must be legal.

Part 2

The acceptable use of social media by customers and residents

Introduction

We recognise that social media has an important role to play in how we communicate with, engage and promote dialogue with our residents.

For some people, sites like Twitter and Facebook are their preferred method of interacting with the council.

We are pleased to be able to offer this method for people to get in touch, to ask us questions, reporting issues and to seek our help or support. We have an existing process for dealing with complaints via the 'have your say' section [on our website](#).

We acknowledge that everyone has a right to free speech. This is enshrined in law.

But, a right to free speech must be balanced with UK laws covering matters such as libel and defamation, contempt of court, harassment, the Communications Act, Computer Misuse Act and what is generally acceptable.

As a council, we also have a duty of care towards our employees and councillors.

What is and isn't acceptable

We know that there will be times when people will be unhappy with what the council does (or doesn't do) or the decisions it takes.

Criticism is a fact of life and we know organisations like ours are in the public spotlight. In fact, we encourage public debate and it's good that people are free to share their views about the city and the council.

We have no intention of stifling discussion about us as an organisation.

But, we do draw the line at posts or messages, on whatever channel or social media site, that cross the line in terms of acceptability. This includes targeting named members of staff with direct, unacceptable, criticism.

We will reserve the right to take action in relation to social media posts or messages which:

- Are abusive
- Are harassing
- Are threatening
- Use sexist, racist or other unacceptable language/swear words which are intended to cause concern/harm
- Are defamatory or libellous

- May be in contempt of court
- Break any other law (such as hate crime)
- Are spam
- Contain inappropriate material (photographs or video)
- Incite someone/people to break the law.

How we will deal with unacceptable behaviour

In the first instance, the Communications Team will issue a written warning to the author in private via a direct message, or email if appropriate and any inappropriate material removed immediately from the council's social media feeds.

The Communications Team will make all efforts to identify the person responsible, but where they cannot, or, in the case unacceptable content continues to be published, they will remove posts, messages or content considered to be unacceptable, from the council's social media feeds.

If unacceptable behaviour continues the council will consider blocking users from interacting with the council's Twitter feed.

A decision to block a user will be made by the chief executive in consultation with an independent member of the council's Standards Committee.

If a block is imposed, the chief executive will write to the person concerned, explaining the reasons and setting out the terms of when the council will review the block. The chief executive will use their discretion and a decision whether to continue blocking a user will be made on a regular basis.

When considering how the council manages unacceptable behaviour on social media, it will also refer to the 'Dealing with Abusive or Vexatious Customers' policy.

Unacceptable behaviour may also be addressed by restricting the way someone can communicate with the council, or their participation/attendance at meetings.

We may also report the matter to the police where behaviour amounts to abuse or harassment or a criminal offence is suspected. All decisions on these matters will be made by the chief executive in consultation with an independent member of the standards committee.

And, the council reserves the right to take whatever legal action that may be necessary in the case of libellous or defamatory posts/messages.

Queries relating to the application of this policy should be addressed, in writing, to haveyoursay@york.gov.uk.