

Social media policy

Process for managing unacceptable behaviour

Introduction

The vast majority of people who use social media are decent, intelligent, inspiring people. The problem comes with a small minority who make it harder for everyone else. This process is to protect our employees, councillors (and residents who are commenting on council social media accounts) from unacceptable use of social media.

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 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 people are free to share their views about the city and the council.

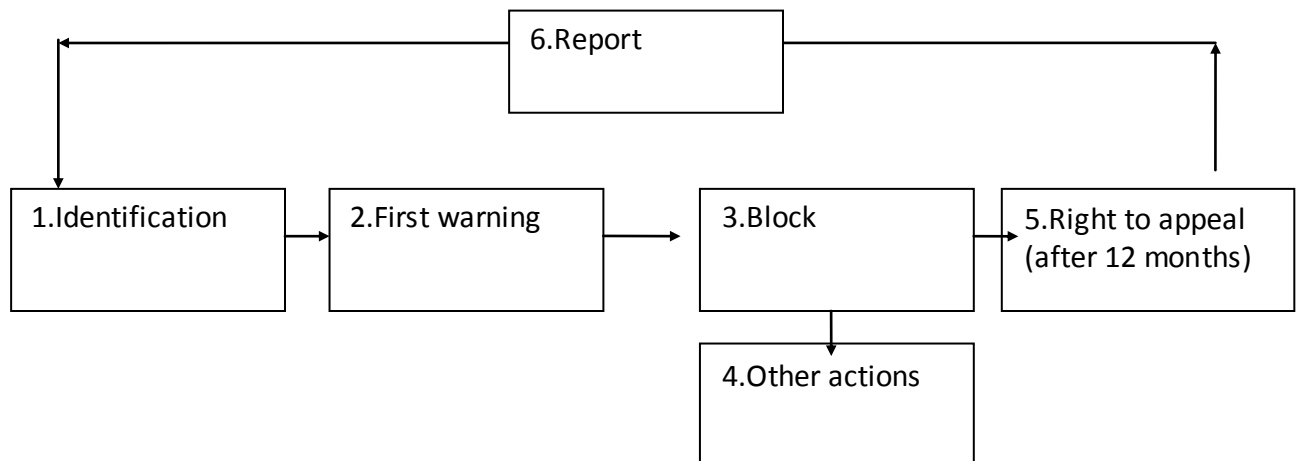
We have no intention of stifling discussion about us as an organisation.

But, we do draw the line at posts or messages, on social media sites that cross the line in terms of acceptability. This includes targeting named members of staff with direct, unacceptable, criticism or personally attacking citizens who have posted opposing views on our social media sites.

We 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 deal with unacceptable behaviour



1) Identification

- a) The Communications Team monitors CYC main social media accounts daily. If they see unacceptable behaviour they will first record the name and handle of the account, the date, the social media post, and why it is unacceptable.
- b) For all other CYC accounts, CYC individuals are expected to apply this process, and provide details to Communications to help advise and provide consistency.

2) First warning

- a) Once unacceptable behaviour has been identified, the Communications Team will confirm whether it is inappropriate with the Head of Communications. Once a decision has been made, they will issue a written warning to the author in private via a direct message, or email sent from the newsdesk email address, if appropriate. The warning will link to the social media policy and remind the individual of acceptable behaviour. It will be a standard message.
- b) The inappropriate material will be removed immediately from the council's social media feeds.
- c) Unacceptable behaviour that has been identified from other CYC accounts will be logged on the central record.
- d) Before issuing a warning, the central record will be checked to assess whether this is a first warning or whether the individual is now blocked (see 4)..
- e) Extreme unacceptable behaviour will result in a block (see 4).

3) Blocking users

- a) If unacceptable behaviour continues after the one warning, or if the behaviour is extreme, the council will consider blocking users from interacting with the council's Twitter feed.

- b) The communications team will provide a report to the chief executive outlining the details collected above (1a), the dates of the written warning and any subsequent response.
- c) A panel comprised of the chief executive (or representative if appropriate), an independent member of the council's Standards Committee and the head of communications will be convened to discuss. The chief executive, or representative, will take the final decision to block an individual.
- d) 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 citizen will have the opportunity to ask for an appeal (after the block has been imposed for 12 months).

4) Other actions taken when blocking an individual

- a) The council manages unacceptable behaviour according to the 'Dealing with Abusive or Vexatious Customers' policy.
- b) A blocked social media account could also lead to restricting the way someone can communicate with the council, or their participation/attendance at meetings.
- c) 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.

5) Right to appeal a blocked account

- a) After 12 months, the blocked account owner can appeal the decision to block. To request an appeal, they will need to provide evidence that they are no longer posting messages that are unacceptable. Evidence will include screen shots from their account to demonstrate understanding of acceptable behaviour.
- b) On receipt of a request to appeal, a review meeting comprised of the chief executive, an independent member of the standards committee and the head of communications will be convened who will review the evidence provided.
- c) Individuals who are unblocked will be regularly reviewed to ensure behaviour remains acceptable.

- d) The panel will review the tone, sentiment and approach taken by the blocked account holder's evidence to assess whether their behaviour remains unacceptable.
 - e) Should the account holder remain blocked, CYC will write (via email or direct message) to the account holder to explain the decision.
 - f) Should the account holder be "unblocked", they will be notified in writing by the chief executive.
- 6) Reporting unacceptable behaviour by citizen's who have posted comment on CYC accounts
- a) Citizen's who respond to CYC posts have the right to express their opinion without fear of retribution or unacceptable behaviour.
 - b) If citizen's are uncomfortable with any post directed at them on a council social media account, they have the right to report the post to the communications team, who will investigate.
 - c) The process described above will be followed if the event of unacceptable behaviour directed at residents who are commenting on council social media accounts.
 - d) Communications will contact the citizen to let them know the outcome of the investigation and any actions taken.

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.

If your account has been blocked, you can request a right to appeal by providing evidence, including the date you were blocked, by emailing newsdesk@york.gov.uk