



ABERDEEN
CITY COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYEES

Background

Aberdeen City Council recognises that there are many benefits and opportunities to be found by using social media. The Council currently uses Facebook, Twitter and other social media applications to promote, communicate and inform. It's also recognised that as an employee of the Council you may use social media in your personal life and as a Council employee there are things that are important to consider when using social media.

You have the right to participate in the public life of your community and this needs to be balanced with your responsibilities to the Council as your employer.

You should take account of both your rights and responsibilities when interacting with others, while working and also the times when you are not working. This applies at any time, even when you are at home on your own computer or using another electronic device such as a smartphone.

This guidance applies to all Council employees and is designed to:

- Ensure that you protect yourself, others and the reputation of the Council when using social media.
- Clarify what your responsibilities are when using social media in your personal life.
- Demonstrate what the Council considers to be acceptable and non-acceptable use of social media.
- Outline possible outcomes if this guidance is not followed.

Related policies and guidance

This guidance supplements other Council policies and guidance, including:

- Employee Code of Conduct
- Managing Bullying & Harassment Policy & Procedure & Guidance
- Managing Discipline Policy & Procedure & Guidance
- Social Media and Online Participation Policy and Guidelines (if you use social media for Council business)
- ICT Curricular Team Guidance on Professional Use of Communications Technology (for adults who work with children and young people in educational settings)
- ICT Acceptable Use Policy

This guidance supplements other external policies and guidance, including:

- Scottish Social Services Council Guidance on Using Social Media (for those employees who are SSSC registered or who work within social care)
- General Teaching Council Professional Guidance on the Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media (for those employees who are GTC registered)
- Any other relevant professional codes of practice.

What is social media?

For the purposes of this guidance, social media currently includes but is not limited to:

- Social networking sites (for example Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, Bebo, Yammer)
- Video and photo sharing websites (for example Flickr, Youtube)
- Blogs, including corporate and personal blogs
- Blogs hosted by media outlets (for example 'comments' or 'your say' features)
- Micro-blogging (for example Twitter)
- Wikis and online collaborations (for example Wikipedia)
- Forums, discussion boards and groups (for example Google groups, Whirlpool)
- Vod and podcasting
- Online multiplayer gaming platforms (for example World of Warcraft, Second Life)
- Instant messaging
- Email
- Geo-spatial tagging (for example Foursquare)
- Aberdeen City Council intranet (the Zone)

So if you use Facebook, contribute to an online book club, or use any other type of social media – this guidance applies to you.

All employees of the Council are expected to demonstrate core behaviours of communication, customer focus, professionalism and respect. These behaviours apply to how you carry out your role as an Aberdeen City Council employee, and also to your behaviour when you are using social media, both within and outwith work.

Even if you are using social media in your own time this could still have repercussions in your work life. The following are examples of what would be considered as inappropriate and a breach of Council policy or the Code of Conduct:

- Sharing information which is confidential or which you have access to due to your job.
- Sharing personal details such as addresses, phone numbers or photos of service users or colleagues.
- Sharing any views which breach Council policies such as the Diversity & Equality policy or the Employee Code of Conduct.
- Making derogatory or offensive comments about your place of work, colleagues or service users, even if you do not mention them by name.
- Inciting, supporting or promoting an activity which is illegal.

Communication

When using social media, consider the following:

- Is your communication clear? When others read it, is your message and intent going to be understood, or could it be interpreted in another way?
- Even if you don't find it offensive, could another individual reasonably take offence at the content of your message? If so, do you still want to post it?
- Does the content potentially have any relationship with your job at the Council, and/or are those that read it likely to think it does? Could it be interpreted as being endorsed by the Council?
- What method are you using to communicate? Is social media the most appropriate one? Social media is a public, not a personal, space. Once something enters the world of social media it is practically impossible to retain control of it. Links get forwarded, photos shared and comments posted on other sites.
- If you are angry or upset, be cautious about how you use social media.

Customer Focus

You will come into contact with many people in your work life, and sometimes you will form friendships with them. Prior to requesting or accepting a friend request online you should feel secure that:

- The friendship could not be viewed as inappropriate, for example an adult requesting or accepting a friend request from a child they have met through their work or a support worker befriending a service user. This is regardless of the actual intent of the relationship.
- There are no potential conflicts of interest, business wise, in being friends with the person.
- You are comfortable sharing information with this individual, and also you are comfortable with the information they share with you.

Remember that not everyone linked to your page is actually your 'friend'. Avoid putting personal information online e.g. where you work, your phone number, your home or work address etc.

There may be cases where your job at the Council requires you to communicate with service users or others via social media. This does not mean you should have a relationship with them beyond work.

Professionalism

Be responsible for the way you behave and for what you post; use common sense and judgement. Whether or not you share details of your job and/or your employer on social media, as a Council employee you should maintain the expected standards of the Council at all times. Social media should not be used to:

- Incite violence.
- Spread malicious stories.
- Share commercially sensitive or confidential work related information.
- Make negative comments about the Council, your colleagues, other Council employees and/or service users and customers.

The Council recognises that you as an employee may also be a citizen of Aberdeen and/or a user of Council services. As such there may be times when you want to comment on social media in response to Council decisions as a citizen of Aberdeen. As a citizen you may wish to express your views about the Council and if you do so, you should feel secure that:

- You are not mixing your professional and personal life in ways likely to bring the Council into disrepute. With this in mind, consider stating that your comments about the Council are your personal opinion and not your professional opinion.
- You are comfortable with the information or photos which your friends are posting about you. If they post something which you are not comfortable with, ask them to remove it.
- You are not undermining your effectiveness at work by bringing your own professionalism or credibility into question.
- You are not implying Council endorsement of your personal views or implying that you are speaking on behalf of the Council.
- You are not criticising the Council as your employer.

You should bear in mind that:

- The way your message is interpreted may be different to how you intended it to be understood.
- Even if you use an online identity which distances you from your work or personal identity, you are still responsible for the information which you post and so this does not mean that you can post inappropriate material.

Respect

When using social media, consider the following:

- You are responsible for any information posted in your name. So you should lock the screen or log off when you leave the computer, to avoid someone else being able to post information in your name.
- You are responsible for the information that you choose to forward on (e.g. emails), re-post or comment on. Even if you didn't write the original information you will be linked to it.
- Social media should not be used as an opportunity to criticise the policies and decisions which affect you at work. If you have concerns about these, you should speak to your Line Manager or Trade Union representative if you have one.
- You have a responsibility to ensure that the language you use online is not offensive or discriminatory in any way.
- Any form of bullying and harassment is unacceptable. If you ever experience any bullying or harassment by another employee you should raise this matter with your Line Manager as soon as possible.

Potential consequences of misuse of social media

As with all other forms of communication, there may be circumstances where your participation with social media is brought to the attention of the Council. This may be due to someone making a complaint or via some kind of publicity. In these circumstances and depending on the nature of the complaint or situation this may require further investigation and you could be subject to the Council's policies e.g. Managing Discipline or Managing Bullying & Harassment procedures.

So you should be aware that even if you're at home, or using an electronic device outwith work, making comments about your work, colleagues, employer or any other work related matters may have implications for your employment with the Council. Any concerns or complaints may be investigated and you should be aware that serious breaches of Council policy or Code of Conduct may result in dismissal. For those registered with a professional body such as the GTC or SSSC, you may also be investigated by the professional body and may be removed from their register.

Social Media Guidance Overview

- Ensure that the meaning of your communication is appropriate and not open to misinterpretation. It may be that your intent is well-meaning, but your approach could mean that others misunderstand or miscommunicate this.
- Ensure that you are only 'friends' with appropriate individuals, and do not accept or request online friend requests from people who could be seen as vulnerable or in conflict with your role. This will ensure that you keep yourself safe and free from any allegations of inappropriate relationships.

- Ensure that you uphold the behaviours of communication, customer focus, professionalism and respect expected of Council employees when using social media, both within and outwith work.
- Remember that once it's posted you are no longer in control of who sees that information, or even where that information ends up.
- Remember to check your personal security settings. To keep your accounts private choose settings that mean only the people on your friends, followers or contacts lists can see your information and posts.

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