



North Tyneside Council



# POLICY

## Social Media

Version 1, February 2014

<b>Effective date</b>	
<b>Review date</b>	
<b>Revision number</b>	
<b>Purpose</b>	<p><b>‘Social media</b> can be defined as web-based services that allow individuals to do any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construct a public or semi-public profile on the internet</li> <li>• Build a list of other users with whom they share a connection</li> <li>• View and interact with their list of connections and those made by others</li> <li>• Interact by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests</li> </ul> <p>Such interaction includes blogs, message boards, social networking websites (such as <a href="#">Facebook</a>, <a href="#">Twitter</a>, <a href="#">Bebo</a>, <a href="#">MySpace</a>), content sharing websites (such as <a href="#">Flickr</a>, <a href="#">YouTube</a>) and many other similar online channels.</p> <p>Although this technology brings with it new methods of communication, it also brings with it increasing risks relating to appropriate usage. These guidelines aim to provide managers and individual employees with information to consider before participating in social networking, whilst maintaining a safe professional environment and protecting themselves as well as the Council.</p>
<b>Scope</b>	<p>This policy applies to all employees of North Tyneside Council except those who are subject to separate local management or school arrangements. Non-employees (e.g. agency workers, contractors and consultants) are also excluded as they are subject to separate arrangements from their primary employer. This policy covers personal responsibilities for the participation in or use of social media as well as the use of social media for official Council purposes, including sites hosted and maintained by specific service areas or teams.</p> <p>All Council representatives should bear in mind that information they share through social networking applications, even if they are on private spaces, is still subject to copyright, data protection and Freedom of Information legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and other legislation.</p> <p>This policy outlines the standards we require staff to observe when using social media (even if they are on private spaces) and the action we will take in respect of breaches of this policy. The policy does not replace or take priority over other policies issued around safeguarding or IT Security, but is intended to both supplement and complement such policies.</p>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	
<b>Related documents</b>	<p><a href="#">Code of Conduct</a>  <a href="#">Discipline Procedure</a>  <a href="#">Whistleblowing Procedure</a>  <a href="#">ICT Security Policy</a>  <a href="#">NORTH TYNESIDE COUNCIL Terms &amp; Conditions of use - Facebook</a></p>
<b>Alternative formats</b>	<p>Alternative formats of this document may be available upon request e.g. Braille, large print (18 point) and audio. If you would like a copy of this document in one of these formats please contact Human Resources.</p>
<b>Document status</b>	<p>This document does not form part of an employee’s terms and conditions of employment and can therefore be reviewed, amended and withdrawn at the discretion of the Council.</p>

## Key Policy Principles

### 1. Personal Use of Social Media

- 1.1 General use of the internet, including access to social networking sites, will be permitted on designated Council based equipment (where available) either before or after work or during designated lunch periods. Access to social media during work time for personal use is not permitted via PCs, thin clients or mobile devices. For more details regarding acceptable use of Council equipment please see the ICT Security Policy.
- 1.2 As a Council employee, it is important to be aware that posting information or views about the Council cannot be separated from your working life. Any information published online may be available for anyone to see and individuals are personally responsible for any content they publish. It is important to remember that when posting in a personal capacity you may still easily be identified by others as working for North Tyneside Council even if you don't state it.
- 1.3 Although the personal use of social networking sites does not require approval, it is expected that workers covered by this policy will adhere to the following principles while engaged in such activities:
- Understand your online privacy settings – Check your settings and understand who can see the information you publish and your personal information.
  - Review your social networking sites to ensure that information available publicly is accurate and appropriate (e.g. photographs that may cause embarrassment to the employee and the Council should be removed).
  - Do not use North Tyneside Council email addresses and logos on personal social networking sites
  - All employees should be aware of and follow the Council's Employee Code of Conduct.
  - If you do talk about the work you do, or a Council service you are associated with, you should make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of North Tyneside Council. Only the North Tyneside Council Communication Team is permitted to post material on a social media website in the name of and on behalf of North Tyneside Council.
  - When commenting, uploading or posting links within social networking sites, remarks must never be derogatory, discriminatory, offensive, reflect negatively on your professionalism, or which may be deemed to bring the Council into disrepute.
  - Do not let the personal use of social media interfere with your job and only access it in your own time.
  - When using Council equipment to access social media sites in your own time the ICT Security Policy must be adhered to.
- 1.4 Your relationship with social media changes as soon as you identify yourself as a North Tyneside Council employee. However, stating that your views are personal is still no insurance against negative media or other publicity. On personal social networks – even closed ones like facebook – you should be aware that posts can be shared outside your network.

- 1.5 There are certain responsibilities, standards of behaviour and other organisational considerations which apply. Participation online can result in your comments being permanently available and open to being republished in other media.
- 1.6 You should also be aware that you may attract media interest in yourself or the organisation, so proceed with care even when you are participating in a personal capacity.
- 1.7 Be aware of your association with North Tyneside Council in online spaces. If you identify yourself as a North Tyneside Council employee, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues and customers.
- 1.8 Never share confidential or sensitive information about the Council, customers or other stakeholders.
- 1.9 If you have a personal account on a social networking site, such as Facebook, think carefully about who you request to be 'friends' with or accept 'friend' requests from. Requesting or accepting an elected member, client, service user or customer as a 'friend' on a social network site must not compromise the professional and impartial relationship between Council staff and elected members, clients, service users or customers. Generally this should be avoided.

## **2. Use of social media for Council based activities**

The Council recognises that Directorates and service areas will increasingly use social media to interact with each other, customers and the community. Before setting up a social media account for work related activity you should seek permission from your Head of Service and complete a 'request to set up an account' form which can be found on the intranet or via the Communications team

When using social media for Council based activities it is important to adhere to the following:

- 2.1 Be professional and remember you are an ambassador for the Council. Always disclose your position as a representative of North Tyneside Council, your department or team.
- 2.2 Be aware that you may attract media interest in yourself or the organisation, so proceed with care. You should not say anything on social media that you would not say on any other public channel.
- 2.3 It is not permitted to follow, 'like' or 'friend' politicians or businesses when using Council social media accounts, as this can be construed as favouritism or partiality. This guidance is in accordance with Local Government Publicity Code which states the council should not be using its resources to engage with what could be perceived as political communications or endorse private businesses or products.
- 2.4 You are encouraged to share interesting third party content e.g. media articles and government information but only if you are sure it is appropriate and it is politically impartial.
- 2.5 Do not post or share anything which breaches Copyright or that could be construed as advertising or promoting a commercial company.

- 2.6 Respect your target audience. Think about their specific needs and be aware of any language or cultural sensitivities you may need to take account of.
- 2.7 Debate is encouraged but a protracted online argument is not. Any discussions that are best dealt with in private should not be discussed on social media.
- 2.8 Never share confidential or sensitive information about yourself, the Council or other stakeholders. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with your line manager. Respect copyright when linking to images or other online material and always stay within the legal framework and be aware that data protection and financial regulations apply.
- 2.9 Be clear that any views that you post are your own and not views of the Council.
- 2.10 All employees should be aware of and follow the ICT Security Policy.
- 2.11 If you have any doubts about posting any material or responding to another user, take advice from your line manager.

### **3. Breaches of Policy**

- 3.1 Staff should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for work purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken under the North Tyneside Council Discipline Procedure. Monitoring is only carried out to the extent permitted by law.
- 3.2 Serious breaches of this policy by Council employees will amount to gross misconduct and may result in dismissal. The below list constitutes examples of serious breaches but this list is not exhaustive:
  - Breach of confidentiality such as revealing confidential intellectual property or information owned by the Council, giving away confidential information about an individual/organisation or discussing the Council's internal workings (such as its future plans that have not been communicated to the public).
  - Behaving in a discriminatory, bullying or harassing way towards any individual including making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age. This can involve using social media to bully another individual (such as an employee of the Council) or by posting images or links to content that are discriminatory or offensive.
  - Bringing the Council into disrepute. This can include criticising/arguing with customers, colleagues, partners or competitors, making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups and posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content.
  - Breach of copyright such as using someone else's images or written content without permission or failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something.

- 3.3 Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and North Tyneside Council.
- 3.4 Any member of staff who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform their line manager.
- 3.5 Where unsuitable material is uncovered on a Council employee's social networking site that is of a safeguarding nature, the issue will be referred to the relevant agencies.