

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**CORPORATE & COMMUNITY SERVICES
and
FINANCE, PROCUREMENT & IT SERVICES
CABINET MEMBERS**

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY AND GUIDANCE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To approve, adopt and promote the Social Media Policy and Guidance.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The council is committed to making the best use of all available technology and innovation to improve how we do our business. Social media tools will enable the council to deliver modern effective public services through workforce transformation.
- 2.2 Over recent months the council's Corporate Scrutiny Panel has investigated the use of social media. A key recommendation of this work is to implement a flexible policy going forward.
- 2.3 As the council begins its social media journey, it aspires to meet both current and future customer needs and expectations. In order to gain the most from this powerful communication channel it is necessary to embed a Social Media Policy with guidance, outlining;
- The potential of using social media technologies
 - Conduct and personal use of social media
 - Guidance on how to get started with social media
- 2.4 The speed and fluidity with which social media is growing makes it difficult for the council to adopt a policy that remains relevant. To this end, we propose reviewing the social media policy every six months to meet both current and future customer needs and expectations. The expected result of this ongoing review is a single Digital Policy combining updated Internet, Email and Mobile Phone Policies.

3. **OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

3.1 The options presented for consideration by the Cabinet Member are as follows.

3.1.1 **Option one** - To approve the social media guidance and policy.

3.1.2 **Option two** - To reject the policy.

3.1.3 **Option three** - To recommend amendments to the policy and/or guidance.

4. **ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

4.1 **Option one** - Is proposed as the best option. It enables us to roll out the use and maximise the potential of social media technologies across the council.

4.2 It ensures that the necessary control, guidance and support are available. It also highlights the legalities of communication using such digital technology.

4.3 **Option two** - Rejecting the policy would stop the potential council and customer benefits of such technologies and go against the cross party scrutiny recommendation.

4.4 **Option three** - Requesting further amendments to the policy would require further consultation and delay its implementation.

5. **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

5.1 Financial

5.1.1 There is no financial impact.

5.2 Staffing

5.2.1 The policy and guidance will apply to all employees and elected members. It compliments existing Codes of Conducts.

5.3 Property

5.3.1 There are no property implications to consider.

5.4 IT

5.4.1 There are minimal IT implications to consider. These include possible browser upgrades and access control.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

- 6.1 There are circumstances by which the council as an employer is legally responsible for online content published by its employees. These points are referred to with the policy and guidance.
- 6.2 Officers have completed an Integrated Impact Assessment covering all of these issues. A copy is available upon request.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Legal Services and Human Resources were consulted and are supportive of the policy.
- 7.2 The trade unions were consulted and are supportive of the policy. They also support the idea of an ongoing review of the contents plus the combining of complimentary policies (internet, email and mobile phones).

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That the Social Media Policy and Guidance is approved and adopted.
- 8.2 The policy is subject to continuous review to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
- 8.3 The policy is combined with the three supporting policies to form a single Digital Policy during 2012.

**DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES
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Date: 26 January 2012

Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: None

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 North Lincolnshire Council is committed to making the best use of all available technology and innovation to improve how we do our business. These tools will enable the council to deliver modern effective public services through workforce transformation.
- 1.2 Within this scope social media has the ability to fundamentally change and improve service delivery. We aspire through social media to transform services through redesign, replacing or complementing existing ways of working and adopting new models of working.
- 1.3 We use the term ‘social media’ to describe any kind of web based tool that you can use for sharing what you know, including but not limited to: blogs, photo’s, video’s, social networks, mobile phone applications, text, e-mail, digital TV services, wikis, gaming and collaboration tools.
- 1.4 As the name implies, social media involves the building of online communities or networks to encourage participation and engagement. It is about sharing and interaction and gives people the opportunity to make their own content, provide feedback, improve services and communicate with others who care about the same place or issue.
- 1.5 The council aspires to be at the forefront of using technology and innovation to improve service delivery. As the council begins its social media journey it aspires to meet both current and future customer needs and expectations. The council will support pilots, learning and transformation service re-design to find better and more innovative delivery of communication, engagement and services. Therefore the councils use of social media will include:

Communication – listen to users and their conversation about local issues.

Engagement – participate in conversations, building dialogue with users through social media.

Staff – encourage our staff to access social media during the course of their work and where appropriate share what they know and support each other in making the best use of social media

- 1.6 The speed and fluidity with which social media has grown makes it difficult for the council to make a formal policy that remains relevant. To this end the social media policy will be reviewed every six months to meet both current and future customer needs and expectations.

2.0 Policy

Using social media in your work

- 2.1 North Lincolnshire Council would like its employees to feel confident when using social media and to achieve meaningful results through these activities. This policy has been developed to help employees understand good practice for online participation and to make clear the standards expected of anyone using social media.
- 2.2 This policy is in addition to any professional standards that govern specific areas of work for officers and in addition to all other council policies.
- 2.3 This policy should be followed in conjunction with the council's Code of Conduct, which describes the standards of conduct and practice that North Lincolnshire Council employees should follow. The code is a key element in the employment relationship and therefore an integral part of the contract of employment.
- 2.4 Social media should be seen as another communication channel in the same way as telephone and e-mail and therefore the same behaviour and activities should be observed. However it is important to note that unlike telephone and e-mail exchange information posted on a social media site is publicly available.

- 2.5 Furthermore each employee using social media must receive sufficient training and support.
- 2.6 Before using social media you must have received the necessary permission or appropriate delegation, in writing, from your Director. This will detail which social media you can access during work time. You should then follow these guiding principles for any social media activities that are part of your work:

Be responsible for your actions

Remember that you are a representative of the council. Where possible you should disclose your position as a representative of the council/service area but consideration should be given to personal safety when doing so. Using social media on behalf of the council means that you are responsible for your own actions and may be held accountable for these. Conduct that is likely to bring discredit to the council will be dealt with in accordance with the council's disciplinary procedure.

Be respectful

Set the tone for online messages and conversation by being polite, open and respectful. Use familiar language and be cordial and professional at all times. You must ensure that you respect people's confidentiality and do not disclose non-public information or the personal information of others. If you are unsure what information is in the public domain then always seek clarification before divulging anything.

Be responsive

Make an effort to share information and offer insights where appropriate. Put people in touch with someone who can help if you are unable to. Respond to questions and comments in a timely manner, ensuring you meet the users expectations for the type of social media you are using.

Be credible and consistent

Ensure accuracy of information, be fair, thorough and transparent. Encourage constructive criticism and feedback.

Be confident

Don't be scared of participating but if in doubt always seek further guidance before doing so. Never publish anything you are unsure about and be confident and clear in what you say.

Be integrated

Wherever possible, align online participation with the council's website and other offline communications e.g. Direct magazine.

Be legal

Remember that laws relating to defamation, copyright and data protection apply when using social media (other laws may also apply). You should not make statements about other people or companies that could harm their reputation, and you should be careful not to copy the work of another person or company as this could be a breach of copyright laws. Personal information about other people should not be placed on social media as this is their information and any such disclosure of personal information could be a breach of the Data Protection Act 1998. The council can be held liable for your actions so if you are unsure about whether you are acting within the law you should seek further clarification from Legal Services.

3.0 Personal use of social media

- 3.1 It is your own personal choice whether or not you participate in any kind of social media activity in your own time. Whilst the views and opinions you express are your own, as an employee you are still a representative of the council and should be aware that any information that you post about the council cannot be entirely separate from your working life. The council's social media business accounts are

not to be used for personal reasons. Unauthorised entry into the authority's computer systems, unauthorised use of software or breach of the data protection requirements is a breach of the council's disciplinary rules.

3.2 You are personally responsible for anything you say online. The following are some guiding principles for employees using social media in their own time:

- Add a disclaimer to your blog or social media profile to make it clear that your personal accounts and views are personal, e.g. *“these views are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of North Lincolnshire Council”*
- Make sure you avoid any misunderstanding about whether you are speaking as a representative of the council or in a personal capacity.
- You should not identify the council when using social media in a personal capacity if doing so would bring discredit to the council. This is a breach of the council's disciplinary rules and may invoke action being taken against you.
- Be aware that what you say openly can be accessed around the world within seconds, it may be shared or re-published elsewhere and will continue to be available for all to see in the future.
- Be mindful that even social media sites restricted to your 'friends' are in effect public, as you cannot control what friends do with the information you post.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality and make sure you don't publish any information that is private
- Stay safe and don't give out personal details such as your address or telephone number.
- Stay within the legal framework and be aware that defamation, copyright and privacy laws, amongst others, apply
- Be aware that participating online in a personal capacity may attract media interest in you as an individual, so proceed with care.

3.3 If in doubt always seek advice.

4.0 Get help with using social media

4.1 If you need advice about using social media in your work, then get in touch with others who can help you – the sooner the better. You can make good use of the expertise within the council and learn from other people's experiences.

5.0 Appropriate training and support

5.1 Before starting on your social media activity you must first complete the 'Getting started with social media' e-learning module available from the Human Resources Learning and Development Team.

5.2 Once the necessary authorisation has been granted, your manager should contact the IT department in order to gain access to the appropriate social media sites. IT will keep a detailed record of authorised users and what sites the users have access to.