Social Media Policy

Argyll and Bute Council

Social Media Policy

Appendices

1. Introduction

Argyll and Bute Council is committed to making the best use of all available technology and innovation to improve the way in which we do business. This includes using all reasonable and cost-effective means to improve the way we communicate, reach out to and interact with the different communities we serve.

The growing use of social media is highlighting both positive and negative consequences that information published can have for those individuals publishing it and their employer.

This Policy sets out clear guidelines for Argyll and Bute Council employees to follow when using social media, in order to support the customer service we deliver, the council's reputation and our employees.

'Social media' is the term commonly given to on-line sites which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests online. As the name implies, social media involves the building of online communities or networks to encourage participation and engagement. This includes blogs, message boards, social networking websites, content sharing websites and many other similar online channels.

2. Aims of the policy

- To ensure the use of social media is aligned to the council's corporate communications strategy

- To ensure that communication through social media is consistent with the Employee Code of Conduct and other relevant Council policies and procedures.

- To support employees in the effective use of social media

- To support where required employees who feature in social media information relating to their role as council employees.

3. Expectations for personal and professional use of social media

There are 3 typical levels of use:

1. Personal use of social media (e.g. a personal profile on Facebook or use of Twitter in a personal capacity by Council Officers and includes personal use at home)

2. Use of social media by employees in their council role

3. Representing the Council on an external social media site e.g. a Scottish Government debate or consultation site, communities of practice.

Any employee who publishes information on social media or on-line site must be aware of and comply with the following:

- Employee Code of Conduct: this in brief advises on personal conduct, disclosing information and remaining politically neutral.

- ICT Acceptable Use Policy: this helps ensure that business use of social media supports business objectives of the council

- Guidance for public use of council social media sites: this is intended to protect employees, the political neutrality of council social media sites, to provide sites that are welcoming for all to use and to deliver benefit for customer service.

- Information Security Policy: this provides support in managing information appropriately.

4. Personal use of social media

It is the choice of the individual to use social media or any other on-line publishing forum. The Council respects your right to a private and family life, home and correspondence [Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)].

As a Council employee it is important to be aware that **posting information or views about the Council in a personal capacity may not be separated from your working life**. The Employee Code of Conduct sets out how employees' rights as citizens are ensured along with their obligations as an employee.

Guidance

You are **personally responsible** for any information you publish. You must not state or imply that you are speaking on behalf of the Council. If an employee wishes to set up his/her own personal blog, website or on-line site, you must use a disclaimer that protects yourself and the Council e.g. 'these are my personal views only' '

- Employees **must not** disclose any confidential information relating to the business of the Council, for example, in relation to another individual or to commercial considerations. Such action would be in breach of the Employee Code of Conduct and may lead to disciplinary action.

- Employees **must** consider carefully whether it would be appropriate to befriend someone when using social media for personal purposes, for example where there is a professional/client/pupil relationship, and/or where this could create a potential conflict of interest.

- **Do not** use your Council email address to sign up to social media sites for personal use

- Ensure you know the policies of the social media sites you are using, instructions for use, security and profile settings before using a social media service.

- Check your online **privacy** settings and be clear on who can see the information you publish and your personal information. Regardless of your privacy settings always be aware that any information you put online may become publicly available, may attract media interest and is open to being republished in other media.

- All Argyll and Bute Council employees should be aware of and follow the council's **Employee Code of Conduct,** the **ICT Acceptable Use Policy** and **appropriate professional standards.**

5. Use of social media by employees in their council role

Your relationship with social media changes as soon as you identify yourself as a council employee, speak in any kind of professional capacity or use social media on council business. When you represent the council there are certain responsibilities, standards of behaviour and other organisational considerations which apply. Remember, *you are the public face of the council.* You should speak on-line in the same way as you would if you were dealing with customers face to face, on the phone, by letter or email. If you have any doubts, take advice from your line manager and/or the communications team.

Guidance

As an employee, you <u>must</u> take the following into consideration when using social media:

- If you wish to use social media as a council employee **you should clearly identify yourself and your role.** Make it clear whether you are acting in your professional capacity – and remember, even if you do not intend to, your professional role or status as a council employee will affect the way you and the organisation are perceived and therefore brings certain responsibilities.
- **Be aware of your link to Argyll and Bute Council** on social media. If you identify yourself as a council employee, ensure your profile and any information you publish is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues and customers.
- **Be professional.** Make sure you are always seen to act in an honest, accurate, fair and responsible way at all times.
- Sites must not be used to abuse other employees, service users or elected members. **Privacy and feelings of others must be respected at all times**. You should not post messages that are abusive, defamatory, or do not comply with equalities legislation. The use of such language could bring the council into disrepute and may impact on your conduct as an employee and become subject to investigation under disciplinary procedures.
- **Never share confidential or sensitive information.** You should know and follow the council's Information Security Policy and related guidance.

6.   Representing the council on an external social media site

Argyll and Bute Council may allow employees to access social media sites for business purposes subject to authorisation through the ICT Acceptable use policy. Access will be approved based on business benefit to the council. Such business benefit may include increased marketing of services; access to research, information and other resources; community and customer engagement and consultation; professional development.

Guidance

If you represent the council online, you should follow the guidance below:

- Ensure you have the appropriate **approval and support** of your line manager before any official use of social media. Take advice from the communications team before you start.

- **You are an ambassador** for the organisation. Always disclose your position as a representative of the council, your department or team. Anything you publish will reflect directly on the council as a whole.

- **Respect your target audience**. Think about their specific needs and be aware of any language, cultural or other sensitivities you may need to take account of.

- **Do not share sensitive or confidential information**. Always ensure compliance with the Council's Information Security guidance.

- **Respect copyright** regulations.

The Communications Team will advise you on all aspects of using social media as a communications channel. If in doubt, consult your line manager.

7. Creating a council site on social media

Social media can be used as a positive tool to promote services and to improve engagement, consultation and communication. It can be used to share learning or practice or to promote council services. In some cases the most appropriate use of social media will be to create a specific site, page or other platform to communicate your service or professional activities, for example a library or leisure centre page.

Guidance

If you are creating a council site:

- All council sites on social media must be aligned with the council's Corporate Communications Strategy and authorised using the Social Media Presence Application Form

- Be clear about what you want to achieve by using social media, and carry out regular evaluation to ensure you are achieving this.

- Ensure that the council's 'guidance for public use' (see Appendix 1) is included in your site, and that participants' contributions are responded to in line with this.

- Identify a moderator/facilitator with the appropriate skills to deliver benefit from the site.

The Communications Team will advise you on all aspects of using social media as a communications channel.

8. Council support for employees in using social media

This Policy is intended to support employees in using social media positively.

In addition the council:

- Will provide guidance for public use of its own social media sites to protect employees and the political neutrality of the sites, and to ensure that our sites are welcoming places for all (see Appendix 1). The social media presence application form states the need for this guidance to appear on any site (see Appendix 3).

- Will provide a check list for employees to follow, highlighting key elements of this Policy (see Appendix 2), and will work with Trade Unions to make employees aware of the Policy and consequences that negative use of social media can have.

Argyll and Bute Council is committed to supporting employees in the work they do on its behalf.

Accordingly, if employees feature negatively in social media on account of their role with the council, the council will take all appropriate action to support the employee.

The focus in deciding how to respond will be on minimising any negative impact on the employee and reputation of the council. The council's response will be assessed on a case by case basis:

- There may be circumstances in which the council would consider taking legal action on behalf of an employee.

- Depending on individual circumstances, support for an employee may not mean issuing a direct response. The council will advise the employee of how it intends to respond.

- If the employee is not satisfied with the council's response, the council will advise the employee of options open to them to pursue independently; options will depend on individual circumstances.

9. Elected members using social media

Many councillors choose to use social media as a way of interacting with their constituents. While the advice in this policy will be helpful to elected members they are bound by their own Code of Conduct.

It is the responsibility of Councillors to ensure that they are familiar with, and that their actions comply with, its provisions. Any breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors is referred to and dealt with by the Standards Commission.

If using council social media sites, councillors will be subject to the 'guidance for use' that applies to employees and members of the public, in order to ensure the political neutrality of the sites and to ensure that council social media sites are welcoming sites for all to use.

In using any social media site, for personal or business reasons, councillors, like employees, **must not** disclose any confidential information relating to the business of the Council, for example, if it would compromise a right of personal or commercial confidentiality.

In recognising the potential impact of social media on councillors, information, training and guidance will be provided to support them in their use of and response to social media.

Appendices:

1   Guidance for use of council social media sites

2   Checklist for employees

3   Social media presence application form

Appendix 1: Guidance for use of council social media sites

Argyll and Bute Council welcomes constructive comments about the services we deliver and we believe that our customers have the right to be heard.

To ensure that our social media sites are used to the benefit of everyone, we reserve the right to remove any contributions or block accounts that break the following rules or guidelines.

If you are using our social media sites please:

- Be civil and relevant.
- Do not post messages that are unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, obscene, sexually oriented or racially offensive.
- Do not swear
- Do not post content from elsewhere for which you do not own the copyright.
- Do not post the same message, or similar messages, more than once (also called 'spamming')
- Do not publicise your, or anyone else's, personal information, such as contact details.
- Do not advertise products or services.
- Do not impersonate someone else.
- Do not use our sites to promote party political messages or information. The council, as opposed to its political administration, must be politically neutral.

Thank you.

Appendix 2: Employee checklist

Key things to consider before getting involved in social media

The growing use of social media is highlighting both positive and negative consequences that information published can have for those individuals publishing it and their employer.

Regardless of privacy settings on social media sites, information you put online may become publicly available, may attract media interest and is open to being republished in other media.

Posting information or views about the council in a personal capacity cannot be separated from your working life.

When posting information in your council role, you are the public face of the Council.

To help ensure that using social media is a positive experience, below is a check list of questions;

- Are you aware of the Employee Code of Conduct, Corporate Communications Strategy, ICT Acceptable Use Policy, Information Security Guidance and relevant professional codes?
- Have you completed your ICT Acceptable Use Policy form for the use of social media?
- Have you completed your social media presence application form, if required?
- Have you considered risks and taken steps to manage those risks?
- Have you taken into account equality and accessibility issues?

Appendix 3

Social media presence application form

Please ensure the form is signed, dated and returned to the address given at the bottom.

I.	Primary content controller

Name:

Department:

Secondary content controller: *who will take control when primary controller is absent?*

Name:	Department:

Moderator: *who will monitor site for offensive or negative posts?*

Name:	Department:

II.	Project details

Platform:

Proposed URL or page name:

Purpose/Objective:

Target audience:

III.	Using social media

This section will determine how you plan to use your chosen social media platform.

Approximate Frequency of use: *How often will you update your chosen platform? (please tick)*						
3 times daily:		Once a day:		Once a week:		Once a month:	
Moderation: *How often will you moderate the site for offensive or negative posts? (please tick)*						
3 times daily:		Once a day:		Once a week:		Once a month:	

Moderation process

Any council site must include a link to 'guidance to public use'.

How will you respond to comments in line with this guidance?

IV.   Evaluation

Measures: *(How will you know if your social media presence is successful? Consider number of followers, level of activity, increased sales, channel shift etc)*

V.   Approval by Director/Head of Service

Signed: Date:

Full name: (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Return completed form to: Jane Fowler Head of Improvement and HR