



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Social Media Policy

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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.

Social media is a well-established communication route for communities in finding information about council services, decisions, and support.

There can be both positive and negative consequences in the use made of social media.

This Policy sets out 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.

2. Scope of the policy

‘Social media’ refers to on-line sites which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests online.

This policy therefore covers but is not limited to social media sites such as Facebook, X LinkedIn and YouTube, blogs, discussions forums, special interest forums, user communities.

It also covers podcasts or any similar production – while podcasts do not allow interaction in the same way as social media channels, they can provide information and opinion on council matters, and add to the information promoted through social media. As podcasts remain a relatively new venture for the council, their development comes under this policy.

3. Aims of the policy

- To ensure that the use of social media is aligned to the council's corporate communications strategy, and through that to council objectives
- 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
- To support the council's use of social media as a contribution to the council as a trusted voice for information.

4. Expectations for personal and professional use of social media

There are 3 typical levels of use:

- Personal use of social media (e.g. a personal profile on a social media channel in a personal capacity by Council Officers and includes personal use at home)
- Use of social media by employees in their council role
- 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 sites 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
- Information Security Policy: this provides support in managing information appropriately
- Guidance for public use of council social media sites: this is intended to support employees, and 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 (see Appendix 1).

5. 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 life. [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 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 whether it would be appropriate to befriend someone on 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 and shared.

6. 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*. If you have any doubts, take advice from the Communications Team.

Guidance

As an employee, you must 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.
- **Privacy and feelings of others must be respected at all times**. Do 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.

7. 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. 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. 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 can advise you on using social media as a communications channel.

8. Using social media securely

It is important to use social media as securely as possible. The points below help to reduce risk. There are risks however which may not be covered so good judgment by anyone using social media on behalf of the council will be key.

Key guidance points:

- Use role-based email accounts to set up social media accounts (i.e. not individual named accounts) so that the account can be closed/updated if an individual leaves or is unavailable.
- Do not use the same passwords for social media that you use to access council computers or devices.
- Do not store passwords in files that are not password protected, or in shared, unencrypted documents on servers.
- Do not follow links or download software on social media pages posted by people or organisations you do not know.
- Council accounts should be accessed via council owned devices.
- Turn on 2 Factor Authentication (2FA) for all social media accounts.
- Set up alerts about unrecognised logins within your social media platforms, if not turned on by default.
- Remove access for staff when they leave and change any social media account passwords they had access to immediately.
- Close any accounts that are no longer used or have been inactive for a while, to avoid them being hacked or used to compromise active accounts.
- Put emergency recovery plans and processes in place:
- Internal account breach: if someone unauthorised publishes to your account, ensure you can quickly remove their access remotely. You can do this by logging out of all sessions and changing all passwords related to the account.
- External account breach: if your account is hijacked by someone external and you are locked out of it, it is essential that you have a point of contact with the social media platform owner to escalate any issues with the recovery activities; and that you know what information you will need to provide them with to identify yourself as the legitimate owner.

9. Creating an official council site on social media

Social media can be used as a positive tool to promote services and to improve engagement, consultation and communication. In emergency situations social media can be the quickest route to warning and informing communities about the impact of a situation and advising on support available in dealing with it.

Applications for new council social media accounts will be considered against criteria aligned to council objectives and challenges.

Assessment for a new site will be based on, but not limited to, these criteria:

- Could a new site support income generation for the council?
- Could a new site deliver community support; if so, would it be easier for people to get the support via an existing site?
- Are sufficient resources and skills available to maintain and develop public use of the proposed new 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 ([see Appendix 3](#))

Guidance for delivering a council social media site will be provided as part of the approval process. This is set out in Appendix 2 and will be updated as required annually following the annual evaluation exercise.

A key element of this guidance is ensuring that the council voice on social media can be a trusted voice – that the information issued is accurate, up-to-date and reflects decisions and policies of the council.

10. Choosing a social media channel for a council site

There is a growing number of social media sites available for use; and there can be differing views on which are acceptable for use on the basis of for example the kind of content a site attracts and allows.

The potential positive, and negative, consequences of social media apply to all social media sites.

Some sites favour different formats of content above others.

The choice of social media channel should be based primarily on:

- Where our communities are, and
- The ability to produce enough suitable content to make having a site effective

A caveat to this would be any guidance relating to the council that advised against using a particular site.

In order to be sure that the sites chosen remain an effective choice, this Policy includes the requirement for services who run a council site to participate in an annual assessment of effectiveness.

This annual assessment will support the sharing of good practice across services and deliver effective choices in how the council uses social media.

Schools will be exempt from this as they have a 'built-in audience' (parents and pupils) likely to have on-going interest and make on-going use of information on their sites.

11. Evaluating social media impact

It is important to ensure that council social media sites deliver benefit for communities and council, proportionate to the resources required to deliver them.

Those who run official council social media sites will be required to participate in an annual evaluation exercise by providing information on the performance of their site.

A guide to the information required and the process for participating in the exercise is included in the social media site application form.

This exercise will also support the Connect for Success principle of a learning council through the sharing of effective practice across services.

12. Council support for employees in using social media

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 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.'

13. 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.

This can include responsibility for what others say on their councillor social media accounts. In summary, where a councillor is aware of abusive content on their social media page, and allows it to remain visible over time, this can be seen as tacit endorsement or facilitation, depending on the context.

The Standards Commission guidance on social media is [available on its website](#).



If commenting on 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.

Appendices:

- 1 Guidance for use of council social media sites
- 2 Checklist for employees
- 3 Social media presence application form including annual evaluation requirement

Appendix 1: Guidance for community use of council social media sites

The statement below sets out the standards for public use expected on council social media sites, in order to make our sites welcoming for all who wish to use them.

As part of developing our sites as positive places for our users, the guidance below will serve as grounds for hiding comments and/or blocking users who do not adhere to them.

Guidance for use

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
- Do not post messages that are irrelevant to the post you are commenting on.
- 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 – guidance for employees in running council social media sites

Key things to consider before getting involved in social media:

- Social media can have both positive and negative consequences for people publishing information on 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, please ensure that:

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

Guidance in managing a council social media site

You are publishing information on behalf of the council when you publish on a council social media site.

It is important that official council sources of information can be a trusted voice amidst the volume of information available to people.

You must therefore:

- Ensure that information published is accurate, up-to-date and relevant to the role of your social media account.
- Ensure permission is in place for you to publish visual and digital content on your site such as photos.
- Be responsive to what followers are interested in when planning content for your site.
- Ensure that the council's 'guidance for public use' (see Appendix 1) is included in your site and respond to participants' contributions in line with this.
- Be clear about what you want to achieve by using social media, and carry out regular evaluation to ensure you are achieving this.
- Raise any issues or concerns with your channel with the Communications Team.



Appendix 3

To apply to run a social media account on behalf of the council, please follow this link:
https://central.app.argyll-bute.gov.uk/w/webpage/request?service=social_media_site_request