



Nottinghamshire County Council

Social Media Protocol for Councillors

Introduction

Social media is the term used for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This Protocol covers social media issues over the internet and by email, smart phones, social networking sites, blogging, and tweeting.

Social media increases our access to audiences and improves the accessibility of our communication. It enables us to be more active in our relationships with citizens, partners and stakeholders, and encourages people to be involved in local decision making, enabling better engagement and feedback, ultimately helping to improve the services we provide.

For the purposes of this Protocol, the term 'social media' covers sites and applications including but not restricted to Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, blogs, discussion forums, wikis and any sites which may emerge after the creation of this Protocol where Nottinghamshire County Council could be represented via online participation.

The Council acknowledges social media as a useful tool however, clear guidelines are needed for the use of social media sites to ensure they are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that their use does not expose the Council to security risks, reputational damage or breach the Data Protection Act.

Policy Statement

This Protocol provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems/networks.

Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, in line with corporate policy. They must ensure that their use will not adversely affect the Council

or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

Purpose

This Protocol applies to Councillors and Co-opted Members. It gives guidelines on how to use social media, sets out how we can effectively manage social media usage and indicates how any risks or pitfalls can be minimised or mitigated. The following risks have been identified with social media use (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection from infected sites.
- Disclosure of confidential information.
- Damage to the Council's reputation.
- Social engineering attacks (also known as 'phishing').
- Bullying or "trolling". An internet "troll" is a person who starts arguments or upsets people, by posting inflammatory or off-topic messages online with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response, or of otherwise disrupting normal discussion, often for their own amusement.
- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation.
- Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.
- Breach of the code of conduct for members through inappropriate use.

This Protocol aims to ensure appropriate use of social media, that Council information remains secure and is not compromised through use of social media, and that the Council's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected.

Responsibilities of Councillors and Co-opted Members

1. Social media must not be used in a way that might lead to a complaint that you have breached the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors and Co-opted Members.
2. It is recommended that you have separate social media profiles for your role as a County Councillor or Co-opted Member and for your private life.
3. You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media. Publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may incur a libel action for which you will be personally liable; no indemnity from the Council will be available.

4. Do not use the Council's logo, or any other Council related material on a personal account or website.
5. Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important to ensure that you are confident of the nature of the information you publish. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without your consent, used in different contexts, or further distributed.
6. Make use of stringent privacy settings if you don't want your social media to be accessed by the press or public. Read the terms of service of any social media site accessed and make sure you understand their confidentiality/privacy settings.
7. Do not disclose personal details such as home addresses and telephone numbers. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's Data Protection policies.
8. Safeguarding issues are paramount because social media sites are often misused by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business – if you have any concerns about other site users, you have a responsibility to report these.
9. Do not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal (where no members of the public are present or it is of a confidential nature) or exempt reports (which contain confidential information or matters which are exempt under the provision of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985).
10. Copyright laws still apply online. Placing images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about or seek permission from the copyright holder in advance.
11. Be aware of your own safety when placing information on the internet and do not publish information which could leave you vulnerable.

Principles for Using Social Media

You should follow these five guiding principles for any social media activities:

Be respectful – set the tone for online conversations by being polite, open and respectful. Use familiar language, be cordial, honest and professional at all times.

Make sure that you respect people's confidentiality – do not disclose non-public information or the personal information of others.

Be credible and consistent – be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent. Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Make sure that what you say online is consistent with your other communications.

Be honest about who you are – it's important that any accounts or profiles that you set up are clearly and easily identifiable. Be clear about your own personal role.

Be responsive – make an effort to share what you know. Offer insights where appropriate and put people in touch with someone who can help if you cannot. Respond to questions and comments in a timely manner.

Think twice – Think carefully about all your social media posts. Once published it will be too late to change your mind. Follow these rules and seek further guidance if you need it.

Inappropriate Use of Social Media by Others

Anyone receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their use of social media should report it to the police.

Other inappropriate content can be reported to the social media site directly to ask for it to be removed.

You may wish to save a screenshot in the circumstances.