

Employee Social Media Policy

Links to Other Policies:

- ICT Security Policy
- ICT Acceptable Use Policy
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Disciplinary Policy
- Equality Diversity & Inclusion Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy

Effective date:

XXXXXX

Review Date:

XXXXXXXX

Status:

This policy does not provide contractual rights to individual employees. Gateshead Council reserves the right to alter any of its policies at any time. Should any changes be made to the policy, then these changes will be consulted on with our recognised trade unions and communicated to our employees using the relevant and appropriate communication channels.

Equality Statement

Gateshead Council are committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion as we believe it is fundamental to ensuring that our people, the community we serve and our future workforce know that we respect and embrace a culture which is supportive, where everyone is treated equally and fairly and where our people are empowered to be the best version of themselves and truly respected.

We continue to build an inclusive environment where opportunities are open to all, diversity is valued, and where everybody can reach their full potential without fear of harassment, prejudice, or discrimination. Every person in our organisation has a responsibility to make it a safe and inclusive environment where our people feel welcome and are able and supported to be who they want to be.

We want to help all our employees to not just thrive, but to flourish, prosper and succeed by putting people at the heart of everything we do. We'll recognise great behaviours and challenge poor ones to ensure that we continually build a culture which we're proud of and others want to be like.

HR and Workforce Development Policy and Guidance in Gateshead Council

Gateshead Council's HR and Workforce Development policies and schemes take into account current legislation, rules, regulations and best practice guidance from a range of professional and public bodies, including the following:



UK Legislation



ACAS



CIPD Best
Practice

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1.0 Policy Statement

This policy is in place to minimise the risks to the council through use of social media.

This policy and guidance is to ensure all employees in the organisation are familiar with good practice when using social media for personal use.

Social media is an effective way to disseminate and receive information to others and employees are welcome to use social media in their personal capacity outside of work. However, they should be aware posting information, photos, etc. on a social media platform, as an employee of Gateshead Council should be considered carefully so as not to bring the reputation of the Council into disrepute. They should not breach the confidence of a colleague, member of the community etc, offend or cause harm to an individual intentionally or otherwise. This list is non exhaustive.

2.0 Aim of the policy

We aim to provide everyone with the tools and procedural guidance to protect employees and the reputation of the Council. This ensures that a framework is in place to enable all users of social media to use it safely and effectively. The Council recognises the rights of the individual to a private life and this policy is intended to support employees to ensure that their actions online in a personal capacity do not adversely impact the council or their employment.

3.0 Definitions

'Social media' is the term commonly given to online platforms and tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.

This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media, including Facebook, LinkedIn, X (Formerly known as Twitter), WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat and all other social networking sites, internet postings and blogs. It applies to use of social media for business purposes as well as personal use that may affect our business in any way.

The internet is fast moving, and it is impossible to cover all circumstances as new and emerging technologies, applications and platforms become more popular. The same principles will apply, and this policy is not necessarily restricted to current technologies.

‘Cyber bullying’ is the term used to describe bullying, harassment and victimisation conducted via social networking channels. This can often occur in blogs or social networking sites

4.0 Who the policy applies to

The policy applies to all council employees with the exception of employees appointed or employed by the governing body to work in a school where the responsibility for managing social media matters lies with the governing body of the school.

It applies to employees’ personal use of social media. Any information relating to the Council obtained through their employment with Gateshead Council that is shared through social media applications, even if you are on private spaces, is still subject to:

- Copyright
- the Data Protection Act
- the Council’s Information Security Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- the Council’s Employee Code of Conduct.

5.0 Personal use of social media

Employees must not access social media for personal use during working time using either council or any personal electronic equipment capable of accessing social media.

Social media access using their own device is only permitted in an employee’s own time, for example during their lunch break or when clocked out of the Council’s flexi time system, or not at work.

In emergency situations such as flooding, the Council may post updates on its social media sites and employees will be informed when and where they can access these updates. In these circumstances, employees are permitted to access these sites using personal equipment during work time for these updates. Further, employees may repost these updates on their own social media accounts via their own devices where this would not have a detrimental impact on the Council.

Employees who join in electronic discussions must conduct themselves in an honest and professional manner and ensure that their conduct does not bring the Council into disrepute. All views expressed by employees must be in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct which states that employees must maintain conduct of the highest standard such that public confidence in their integrity is sustained.

Any employee who is found to be in breach of the guidance above may be subject to disciplinary action, which could result in dismissal.

6. **Employee Responsibilities when using social media for personal use**

You are expected to behave appropriately on the Internet/social media forums, and in ways that are consistent with the Employee Code of Conduct. Employees should not:

- Put their private interests before their duty to the Council;
- Breach Data Protection by talking about or identifying customers or colleagues;
- Put themselves in a position where their work responsibilities and private interests conflict or appear to conflict; or,
- Do anything that could harm the Council's reputation.

The public must be able to trust the integrity of the Council. They need to be confident that the outside activities of our employees do not undermine the council's reputation and that decisions are not perceived to be influenced with commercial, political or personal interests, which may conflict with an individual's role as set out in the Council's Code of Conduct.

It is an individual's responsibility to read the Terms of Service of any social networking site accessed and to ensure that any confidentiality, privacy and security settings outlining to whom information posted is available are understood. It is important that you check your online privacy settings and understand who can see the information you publish and your personal information.

As an employee of Gateshead Council, when using social media for **personal use, you must not:**

- engage in activities on social media that might bring the council into disrepute
- make defamatory comments about individuals, other organisations or groups or post anything that could be considered discriminatory.

- post comments or photos which breach any of the Council's other conduct policies, including but not limited to the Equality and Diversity Policy and the Bullying & Harassment Policy.
- respond to, like or share inappropriate posts or images which could be considered offensive or derogatory by any individual.
- respond to, like or share posts which breach any of the Council's other conduct policies, including but not limited to the Equality and Diversity Policy and the Bullying & Harassment Policy.
- post disparaging or offensive comments about clients or colleagues on messaging platforms and other forms of group communication
- use official Council logos or branding on personal web pages.
- use a Council e-mail address to register on social media sites for personal use.
- place personal postings on social media sites using your own personal mobile or device during working time, whilst clocked in.
- accept or request new contacts via social media if they are only known to you as external clients, customers or users of your service.
- post personal photographs of clients or service users on social networking sites without the permission of the person/s photographed or their parent or guardian (for children under the age of 16 or a vulnerable adult).
- post photos of colleagues in their professional capacity to personal social media accounts without their agreement.
- disclose personally identifiable information about clients, customers or service users.
- post personal comments which could be construed as representing the Council.

You must:

- always maintain confidentiality about colleagues, customers, Council Members and Council business
- be mindful that when you publish something online it is permanently available and can be republished in other media. Conversations on these platforms are not private.

Employees must not under any circumstances upload, forward or post a link to any abusive, obscene, sexually explicit, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content. If they are found to have done so, they may be committing a criminal offence. and the Council will have a duty to bring it to the attention of the police.

Use of social media in breach of this policy , could lead to disciplinary action, which could result in dismissal.

7.0 **Monitoring**

Gateshead Council reserves the right to monitor, intercept and review, without further notice, staff activities using our IT resources and communications systems, including but not limited to social media postings and activities, for legitimate business purposes which include ascertaining and demonstrating that expected standards are being met by those using the systems and for the detection and investigation of unauthorised use of the systems (including where this is necessary to prevent or detect crime).

For further information, please refer to our IT and Communications Systems Policy.

Where evidence of misuse is found, the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Disciplinary Policy. This may involve the examination and disclosure of records to those nominated to undertake the investigation including any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation.

Employees should note that information that they post about themselves or others using their personal equipment may, where it is identifiable that they are a Gateshead Council employee, be used as evidence at a disciplinary meeting.

For further information, please refer to the Disciplinary Policy available on the intranet or via your manager.

8. **Risks of vetting prospective employees via social media**

Care must be taken to ensure fairness, and that bias is eliminated in recruitment processes. Human Resources, line managers or any other employee must not conduct searches on social media sites / internet to vet prospective employees.

9. **Using social media for Council business**

Using social media for business use is covered by a separate policy (Corporate Social Media Policy).

10. Reporting inappropriate use

If an employee who can be identified as an employee of the Council or could be linked to the Council in any way, acts inappropriately in any manner whilst accessing social media, they must attempt to rectify it immediately.

This could include, but is not limited to, removing the comments, contacting the service provider to have them removed and apologising for the comments. In all instances, employees are responsible for advising their manager as soon as possible after realising the error has occurred, even if the mistake has since been resolved.

The manager must then consider the impact of the action and take appropriate measures, for example if private customer details have been disclosed or confidential Council information has been reported. Advice should be sought from the Council's Data Protection Officer and Human Resources.

If an employee believes that another employee has breached this guidance, for example by posting inappropriate or offensive remarks, this should be reported to their own manager in the first instance. Employees are advised not to respond online to anything they believe to be inappropriate.

Any employee who believes they have been subject to cyber bullying by fellow employees or customers/service users should report the behaviour in line with the Council's Bullying and Harassment Policy, which is available via the Intranet.