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Social Media Guidance

A guide produced for employees of East Dunbartonshire Council

Introduction

For most people in the UK, being online is a major part of daily life. Nearly 90% of us use smartphones to get online, access our social media accounts and browse the news.

Scots spend more time online each day (four hours eighteen minutes) than the rest of the UK. That's almost an hour more than those in Northern Ireland. A large proportion of this time is spent on social media.

We all work for East Dunbartonshire Council and we are all ambassadors for East Dunbartonshire Council, no matter where we work, whether it is at home, an office, library, depot or schools.

As an employer and service provider we recognise both the opportunities provided by social media but also that there risks and social media has the potential to harm or damage the reputation of the Council.

We wish to avoid such concerns by having in place clear and straightforward guidelines for employees on the use of social media.

This guide aims to ensure that all Council employees are aware of social media and what it means for both the Council, and you as an individual employee.

It has been developed to protect the reputation of the Council and provide guidance to employees on the effective and safe use of social media for their own protection.

This guide applies to all Council service areas, all employees engaged on Council business (including those working with partners), and personal use of social media where it could be deemed to have an impact on the Council's reputation.

What is Social Media?

Social Media is the term commonly given to websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration.

People use social media to stay in touch and interact with friends, family and various communities and to share information, opinions, knowledge and interests on-line.

There are many different types of social media platforms and the list of websites and applications are growing by the day, with each site or application being unique.

For the purpose of this guidance we use the term to include:

- Social networking sites (such as Facebook and Twitter)
- Blogs and microblogs (such as WordPress and Twitter)
- Content communities (such as YouTube, Pinterest and Instagram)
- Internet forums and online discussion boards.

The role of the Communications & Engagement Team

The Communications & Engagement Team successfully manages and develops several social media sites for the Council. The Communications and Engagement team use these platforms as a means of informing residents and the wider audience of Council activities, upcoming events, available vacancies, news in East Dunbartonshire, and any other general news items that would positively promote the area.

All items that are published on the website are 'posted' onto the Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts, allowing for direct news to residents and a wider reach. The council also has an Instagram account, LinkedIn account and a Youtube channel.

Council services or teams considering the use of, or wishing to use, social media as a channel for a Council project or campaign should refer to the Social Media Strategy and contact the Communications and Engagement Team.

The creation of any new social media channels or pages is not permitted without approval from the Communications & Engagement Team as in most instances, it will be appropriate for a Council campaign or project to be delivered through the Council's existing corporate accounts, benefitting from their extensive reach.

Employees are welcome to follow East Dunbartonshire Council on any of its social media channels, and share news and information that will help to promote the Council.

Guidance for those who use social media for work

Council employees with administration responsibilities for the Council's corporate social media accounts, and who reply directly to customer enquiries, comments and requests, will be based in the Communications & Engagement and Customer Service Teams.

For those employees the following guidance should be observed at all times:

- Do not use your own personal social media identities to set-up or log-in to Council accounts. Log-in to the accounts should be: Directly to the account (Communications & Engagement Team only) or through the appropriate social media management tool used to manage the accounts (all other designated employees)
- Respect your audience. Never behave in a manner which would not be acceptable in the workplace or a face-to-face meeting. Do not publish anything you would not wish to have published on the front page of the local newspaper. Never swear or use language that could offend or upset customers
- Never request or disclose personal information or details through social media channels
- Do not write or comment on anything political or about policy proposals. Never promote directly or indirectly a political party, political individual or political view point
- Do not advertise commercial products or services
- Try to not be a spammer. Do not post the same message or very similar message more than once in a short space of time. It is annoying, turns off customers and can lead to the suspension of the social media account by the social media platform

Key issues to remember:

- Social Media can provide ideal platforms for debate. However Council sites do not exist to provoke or provide opinions. They exist to promote services, inform and educate our customers about events and news from East Dunbartonshire and East Dunbartonshire Council, and promote East Dunbartonshire as a great place to live, work and do business
- Be aware that an organisation may be held responsible for something an employee has written or said if it is on behalf of the organisation or on organisation-sanctioned space. What you publish on social media can be permanent. Once it is published, it is out there and can be read by anyone and everyone. What you post can appear in search engine results/ user screen grabs even after you delete it
- Check the validity and appropriateness of statements from other websites or social media channels that are being re-tweeted, re-posted or linked to the Council's corporate accounts
- Be aware of when to escalate an issue that has been notified through social media, through usual escalation channels
- Be aware of when to advise customers to communicate through more secure channels such as private messaging, email and telephone
- Try to take difficult conversations out of the public domain and on to a private channel
- Respect copyright – especially with graphics, photos and music. If you are found to breach copyright, your service may end up breaking the law and could be fined or end up in court
- Comments made by the public to these sites should always be reviewed and, while comments will not be edited by Council employees, a comment may be deleted if it is offensive, off topic, political in nature, abusive or threatening. In addition, offensive or unacceptable actions, language or trolling may also result in the perpetrator being blocked and/or reported to the social media site administrator
- Contact the Communications & Engagement Team if you are unsure about how to deal with an issue

Private use of social media

It is important that employees are aware that posting information about the Council cannot be isolated from their working life. Any information published through social media can be accessed around the world within seconds and on open platforms, will be publicly available for all to see.

Remember, you are an ambassador for East Dunbartonshire Council both in and out of work. How employees communicate with people on social media sites reflects on the individual, and on the Council as an organisation and as an employer.

These guidelines apply whether you access and comment through your social media accounts from a Council computer or your own device.

If you already make reference to your employment in the Council on a personal social media site, or you intend to create such a site, you should follow the advice below:

- Be aware of the Council's Social Media Strategy, Policy Statement and guidelines for using social media
- Having identified yourself as a Council employee, do not engage in activities through social media channels that might bring the Council into disrepute
- Never reveal information which is confidential to the Council and never include contact details or photographs of service users or employees without their permission. Consult your manager if you are unsure
- Where possible, do not accept service users or ex-service users as 'friends' on your site or engage with them
- There are specific safeguarding issues that employees who work closely with children or vulnerable adults need to be aware of. It is recommended that any employee with concerns regarding these service users should seek further advice from their line manager, both for the protection of their service user(s) and themselves
- Under no circumstance should offensive comments be made about the Council, Members, service users or colleagues
- Be mindful of the time of day you make comments or posts through your social media accounts and the perceptions others may make from this
- Consider setting up separate role specific social media accounts to represent your views for any particular role you carry out/represent, rather than use a generic personal account
- Declare somewhere on your page or biography that the views expressed are yours alone.

In using a social media site for personal use, you should also be aware of the following:

- Even if you do not identify that you work for the Council on your social media accounts, people who know you or know of you may be aware of this and associate any comments you make with the Council.
- Be aware of the potential risk of accepting friends to your account. The comments of friends or friends of friends may be visible through your social media account and you may therefore be associated with these comments.
- Be mindful of the security of your social media account. Ensure you use a secure password, never share your password with anyone and if you believe your password has been compromised, ensure that you change it.
- Although you may not directly copy the Council in, the Council's social media monitoring software will flag up any reference you may make to East Dunbartonshire (the area or the Council)

Various social media sites will have their own rules and guidance, but if there is anything that could potentially be seen as breaking these policies or damaging the reputation of East Dunbartonshire Council, there are potential consequences.

Use of social media, and the roll out of internet access through Council computers has been incorporated into the Council's ICT acceptable use policy and employees have signed up to that. This is current practice on joining the Council.

Any breaches of the social media guidance will be dealt with through the Council's usual Discipline at Work Policy and Procedures and Grievance Policy and Procedures.