



Prudhoe

TOWN COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMAIL POLICY

1. Policy statement

- 1.1. This policy is intended to help all employees, volunteers and Councillors make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn and emails.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards we require employees, volunteers and Councillors to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which we will monitor your use of social media and emails, and the action we will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

2. The scope of the policy

- 2.1. All employees, volunteers and Councillors are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of our council.
- 2.2. Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.
- 2.3. Breach of this policy by Councillors may be dealt with under the adopted Code of Conduct and as such will be referred to the Monitoring Officer at Northumberland County Council.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

- 3.1. The council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 3.2. The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.
- 3.3. All employees, volunteers and Councillors should ensure that they take the time to read and understand the policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk/Chair.
- 3.4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

4. Using social media sites in our name

- 4.1. Only the Clerk, under the direction of the council, is permitted to post material on the council website and social media, in the council's name or on behalf of the council.
- 4.2. Employees, volunteers and Councillors are encouraged to share official press releases and postings made by the Clerk, on behalf of the council.

5. Using social media

- 5.1. We recognise the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about our council and community. We also recognise the importance of our employees, volunteers and Councillors joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.
- 5.2. Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the council ensure that you have read and understood this policy.



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6. Rules for use of social media

Whenever you use social media, you must adhere to the following general rules:

- 6.1. Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- 6.2. Any employee, volunteer or member who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform the Chair/Clerk.
- 6.3. Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with Chair/Clerk.
- 6.4. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- 6.5. Before you include a link to a third-party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- 6.6. When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- 6.7. Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.
- 6.8. You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.
- 6.9. Do not escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- 6.11 Do not discuss employees.
- 6.10. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory.
- 6.11. Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.

7. Monitoring use of social media websites

- 7.1. Employees, volunteers and Councillors should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under the Disciplinary Procedure and in respect of Councillors, via the adopted Code of Conduct.
- 7.2. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against the Council and its employees.
- 7.3. In particular, a serious case of uploading, posting, forwarding or sharing a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):
 - a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
 - b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
 - c) material which is offensive or obscene;



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- d) material which is criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, Councillors, or our employees;
- e) confidential information about the council or anyone else;
- f) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the council); or
- g) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Any such action by Councillors will be addressed under the adopted Code of Conduct, and be referred to the Monitoring Officer. Any such action by employees will be addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure and may result in summary dismissal.

7.4. Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with our Disciplinary Procedure, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

7.5. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk and Chair of the Council.

8. Rules for the use of emails

- 8.1. Emails are the primary method to promote effective communication on matters relating to Council business and therefore should be used for that purpose only.
- 8.2. Employees and Councillors should use official Council email addresses for all Council business.
- 8.3. Messages sent by email should be written in accordance with the standards of any form of written communication, and the content and language used in the message must be consistent with Council best practice. Messages should be clear and concise and directed to those individuals with 'a need to know'.
- 8.4. If a sensitive or contentious matter needs to be addressed, consider speaking to the recipient first, by telephone or in person, then follow-up with an email.
- 8.5. Emails should not be used for spreading gossip, or for personal gain, or in breach of any of the Council's policies on Equality, Bullying and Harassment and in keeping with Member's Code of Conduct and an Employee's Contract of Employment.
- 8.6. When responding to a large group of recipients, the 'reply all' facility should be used, but caution should be taken that others have not copied in recipients who should not be disclosed to or who have not agreed to share their contact details.
- 8.7. Confidential information should not be sent externally without the approval of the Chair/Clerk.
- 8.8. Erroneous email messages can give rise to legal action against the Council or individual Councillors. Claims for defamation, harassment, breach of confidentiality or contract could result. It is vital that email messages be treated like any other form of correspondence and, where necessary, copies should be saved and retained. Messages are disclosable in any legal action commenced against the Council or individual Councillors.



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8.9. External emails received by individual Councillors should be forwarded to the Clerk, and the Chair if appropriate, who will in turn forward to all Councillors.

8.10. Mis-use of emails in the following categories can lead to action being taken in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedure or the Code of Conduct:

- a) Defamation of character
- b) Inappropriate, obscene or offensive content
- c) Untrue or malicious content
- d) Any discrimination in line with the Council's Equality Policy.
- e) Breach of confidentiality

9. Monitoring and review of this policy

9.1. The Clerk shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.