

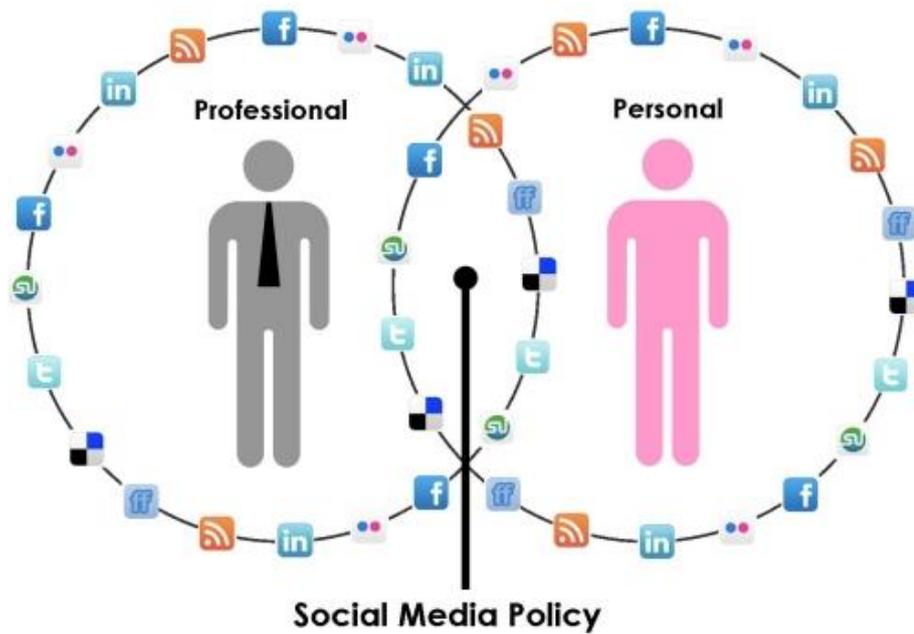


SHAFTESBURY TOWN COUNCIL

2017

Acceptable use of social media policy

Social Media Overlap



Acceptable Use of Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Shaftesbury Town Council recognises that the Internet provides a unique opportunity to participate in interactive discussions and share information using a wide variety of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. Employees are likely to use social media in a private capacity outside of work and they may also be required to use it in a business capacity as part of their role at the Council.

1.2 However, employees' use of social media in both a personal and business capacity can present risks to our confidential information and reputation, and can jeopardise our compliance with legal obligations. To minimise these risks, and to ensure that our IT resources and communications systems are used appropriately, we expect employees to adhere to this policy.

1.3 The purpose of this policy is to assist employees by providing clear guidance about acceptable behaviour on social media both at work and out of work. It is consistent with the regulations and conditions of service employees should already be aware of in their work for the Council.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all employees of the Council.

2.2 The policy also applies to contractors, agency workers, volunteers and those on apprenticeships and student/work experience placements, working on behalf of the Council.

2.3 This policy applies to the use of social media for both business and personal purposes, whether during office hours or otherwise. It also applies whether the social media is accessed using Council IT facilities, or equipment belonging to members of staff.

2.4 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Employee Code of Conduct, Harassment and Bullying Procedure, and Internet and Email and Phone Acceptable Use policy.

3. Exclusions

3.1 The social media policy will not apply where there are other separate, specific Council procedures to address an issue.

4. Definitions

4.1 Social media is a type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other, or to share data in a public forum. This includes online social forums such as Twitter, Facebook, Linked-In, internet newsgroups, and chat rooms. Social media also covers blogs and video- and image-sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr.

4.2 There are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. This policy refers to the examples listed, and any new social media which is developed in the future.

5. Personal Safety and Privacy

5.1 Employees need to be aware that the information they post on their personal social media profile can make them identifiable to service users, as well as people they know in a private capacity.

5.2 Employees should therefore consider this when setting up their online profile particularly in relation to; use of a photograph, providing details of their occupation, employer, and work location.

5.3 Employees should ensure that clients known to them through their work, *where there could be a conflict of interest*, are not linked to them through social media. The Council considers it inappropriate to have service users as 'friends' through social media, especially where these people are vulnerable and there may be safeguarding issues.

5.4 For example, it would be inappropriate for Sports Coaches to have service users and their families as 'friends' on Facebook.

5.5 Online sites such as Facebook are in the public domain, and personal profile details can be seen by anyone, even if users have their privacy settings on the highest level. Also if a user's profile is linked to other sites, any changes to their profile will be updated there too.

5.6 Employees who have set their privacy level to the maximum can have their privacy compromised by 'friends' who may not have set their security to the same standard.

6. Key Principles

6.1 Personal accountability and responsibility

i. All employees are expected to behave appropriately and responsibly, and should be aware that they may be accountable to the Council for actions outside of their work.

ii. Online conduct is the employee's responsibility, and it is important that employees are aware that posting information on social networking sites in a personal capacity cannot be entirely isolated from their working life.

iii. Any information published online can be accessed around the world within seconds and will be publicly available for all to see, and is not easy to delete/withdraw once published.

iv. The Council views any comment that is made on a social media site is made publicly, and that any inappropriate comment made, will be considered in the context of which it is made.

v. For example, disparaging comments against a colleague made to all friends on Facebook could be viewed as bullying/harassment, or could be considered to bring the Council into disrepute.

vi. Employees are advised to be mindful that all comments made through social media must meet the standards of the Data Protection Act, the Employee Code of Conduct and the Equality and Diversity policy.

vii. Employees may be accountable for actions outside of work, including making comments on social media sites, if that is contrary to any of Council's policies, impacts on or compromises the employee's ability to undertake their role, or undermines management decisions. Such behaviour could be investigated and may result in disciplinary action being taken, and ultimately could result in dismissal.

viii. Further employee guidance is available in the Appendix 1.

6.2 Access to social media for work purposes

i. Staff who use social media as part of their job must adhere to the Council's Communications and Media Policy. Employees must be aware that they are representing the Council when they are contributing to the Council's social media activities. Employees should use the same safeguards as they would with any other form of communication about the organisation in the public domain.

6.3 Access to social media at work, for personal use

i. Employees are not allowed to access social media websites for personal use from the council's computers or devices during working time and they must not be left running 'in the background', whilst at work. These provisions also apply to personal computers and mobile devices.

ii. Leaving Social Media sites 'running' constantly in work time is considered to be a breach of the acceptable use of the internet policy.

6.4 Any communications that employees make through social media must not:

- **Bring the organisation into disrepute, for example by:**
 - Criticising, disagreeing or arguing with customers, colleagues or managers;
 - Making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations/groups;
 - Posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content;
- **Breach confidentiality, for example by:**
 - Referring to confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or service user) or the Council
- **Do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual or group of individuals, and in contravention of the Council's procedures, for example by:**
 - Making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender -reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age;
 - Using social media to bully another individual (such as an employee of the Council); or
 - Posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content.
- **Any other action that impacts on the employees ability to do their job, for example by:**
 - Online activity that is incompatible with the position they hold in the Council
 - Any breach occurring inside or outside the workplace that is likely to affect the employee doing his/her work.
- **Contravene the Council's policies, for example;**
 - The Employee Code of Conduct, the Harassment and Bullying policy, or the Equality and Diversity policy.

The above examples are not a definitive list of the misuse of social media, but are examples to illustrate what misuse may look like. Employees are encouraged to talk to their manager and seek advice if they are unclear.

7. Addressing allegations of misuse

7.1 All employees are required to adhere to this policy. Comments made through social media may constitute an act of misconduct or gross misconduct, which could lead to dismissal, if the comments contravene any of the Council's policies or if they lead to a breakdown in the relationship of mutual trust and confidence.

7.2 Managers should ensure that all complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly.

8. Roles and responsibilities

8.1 Employees have a responsibility to:

- Avoid behaviour that may cause an individual to feel the subject of harassment or bullying.
- Familiarise themselves with the Social Media policy and employee guidelines to using social media in the Appendix 1.
- Act responsibly when using online media for work and personal use.
- Report instances to their manager, if they are subject to abuse

8.2 Managers have a responsibility to:

- Familiarise themselves with the Social Media policy and employee guidelines to using social media in the Appendix 1.
- Take prompt action to stop any harassment or bullying they become aware of, whether a complaint has been raised or not
- Ensure staff are aware of the Social Media policy and employee guidelines
- Support employees who are the subject of abuse through existing practices
- Ensure all complaints/allegations are dealt with fairly and consistently, and in accordance with other employment policies where appropriate.

8.3 The Town Clerk has a responsibility to:

- Provide support and advice to managers and employees on the operation of the policy and guidelines, where necessary.

9. Further Guidance

9.1 An Employees' Guide to the use of social media is attached in the Appendix 1.

9.2 This policy also works alongside other policies including the Internet, Email and Phone Acceptable Use Policy, Employee Code of Conduct, Disciplinary Procedure and the Harassment and Bullying Procedure, copies of which are available from your manager.

APPENDIX 1

EMPLOYEE GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Employees must be mindful that any online activities/comments made in a public domain, must be compatible with their position within the Council, and safeguard themselves in a professional capacity.
- Protect your own privacy. To ensure that your social network account does not compromise your professional position, ensure that your privacy settings are set correctly.
- Comments made outside work, within the arena of social media, do not remain private and so can have an effect on or have work-related implications. Therefore, comments made through social media, which you may intend to be “private” may still be in contravention of the Employee Code of Conduct, the Harassment and Bullying Policy and/or the Disciplinary Policy. Once something is online, it can be copied and redistributed making it easy to lose control of. Presume everything you post online will be permanent and can be shared.
- Do not discuss work-related issues online, including conversations about service users, complaints, management or disparaging remarks about colleagues or the Council. Even when anonymous, these are likely to be inappropriate. In addition doing this in the presence of others may be deemed as bullying and/or harassment.
- Do not under any circumstances accept friend requests from a person you believe could be a service user or may conflict with your employment.
- Be aware that other users may access your profile and if they find the information and/or images it contains offensive, make a complaint about you to the Council as your employer.
- Ensure that any comments and/or images cannot be deemed defamatory, libelous or in breach of copyright legislation.
- When setting up your profile online consider whether it is appropriate and prudent for you to include a photograph, or provide occupation, employer or work location details.

- You can take action if you find yourself the target of complaints or abuse on social networking sites. Most sites will include mechanisms to report abusive activity and provide support for users who are subject to abuse by others.
- If you do find inappropriate references and/or images of you posted by a 'friend' online you should contact them and the site to have the material removed.
- If you are very concerned about someone else's behaviour online, you should take steps to raise your concerns. If these are work related you should inform your manager.
- Employees should also act in accordance with the Council's Employee Code of Conduct; Internet, Email and Phone Acceptable Use Policy and Harassment and Bullying Procedure.
- Employees should not access social media sites or leave these running in the background during working time, *for personal use*, on any devices within their control.