

This Policy applies to all employees

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SOCIAL MEDIA ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY

Agreed at Cabinet on 11 October 2011

October 2011

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content. They include, but are not limited to Social Networking Sites and other sites which are centred on collaboration and communication among users. Social media can be loosely categorised into six types: blogs and microblogs; collaboration tools (wikis, forums); social networks; on-line games, virtual worlds and content communities.
- 1.2. Social media sites are strategically important because they do not simply provide a new way for existing groups to communicate; they enable formation of effective new niche interest groups, regardless of members' geographic location and time zone. Engaging with these highly networked groups can provide powerful support for team activities, such as marketing, and individual activities, especially learning.
- 1.3. Use of social media sites, as with other forms of communication and publishing, can involve risk. This Policy sets out the framework adopted by East Lothian Council to manage the risks associated with employee use in both their work and personal lives.
- 1.4. It specifies the responsibilities of East Lothian Council (ELC) employees both inside and outside of work.
- 1.5. The principles and rules which apply to the use of social media by employees apply equally to other forms of written documentation that becomes public.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this Policy is to manage social media risks by providing a clear statement of the rules which apply to employee use of social media for personal or work purposes.

The expected benefits of having this Policy include:

- East Lothian Council can safely exploit social media to support its activities
- That Council employees are not exposed to any legal and governance risks
- That the reputation of the Council is not adversely affected
- All Council employees have access to a clear statement of their responsibilities and obligations when using social media sites both outside of work and while at work
- That employees are aware that they must not disclose confidential information, or make any derogatory, untrue or discriminatory comments about East Lothian Council, its employees, clients or elected members
- East Lothian Council expects that employee users of social media applications will always act with due consideration for others
- That employees act in accordance with their own Professional Codes of Conduct where applicable when using social media sites.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This Policy covers the use of social media sites and applications by all Council workers and employees for disciplinary or conduct purposes, both while at work and outside of work. It does not define the Council's wider approach to the use of social media as an emerging way of delivering services and engaging with the public.
- 3.2 Social Media sites include, but are not limited to:
- Blogs (e.g. personal blogs, BBC blogs)
 - Online discussion forums (e.g. BBC Messageboards, Digital Spy)
 - Collaborative spaces (e.g. Wikipedia, shared Google Docs)
 - Media sharing services (e.g. YouTube, Flickr, AudioBoo)
 - Social networking systems (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+1)
 - Micro blogging applications (e.g., Twitter,)
 - Online games (e.g. World of Warcraft)
 - Virtual worlds (e.g. Second Life)
- 3.3 All Council employees should bear in mind that information they share through social networking applications, even if they are on private spaces, is subject to copyright, The Data Protection Act, The Safeguarding of Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, The Computer Misuse Act and any other relevant legislation. They must also operate in line with the Council's Equal Opportunities in Employment Policy and the Council's Single Equality Scheme. For the Council's protection as well as the employee's, it is critical that employees stay within the legal framework in their use of social media sites. Failure to do so will lead to their conduct becoming subject to investigation under the relevant Disciplinary Procedure.
- 3.4 Under common law, employees should be aware that there is an implied duty of trust and confidence between an employer and employee. It is possible therefore that any inappropriate use of social media outside the workplace, for example by making negative or defamatory comments about the Council, its clients, or employees, could result in disciplinary action if it brings the Council's reputation into disrepute, or exposes the Council to potential liabilities.

4. Using Social Media Outside of Work

- 4.1 Use of such sites as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn has become a significant part of life for many people. Generally they provide a very positive means of expressing thoughts and interests and engaging with families, friends, professional networks and other groups. Personal use of these tools develops skills which have potential value in many workplace roles, such as writing for the web and engaging in online dialogue.

The following rules manage the risks that may arise from this use:

- a. **Do not** use your Council email address to sign up to social media sites for personal use.
- b. When using social media for personal purposes, you **must not** state or imply that you are speaking on behalf of the Council. If an employee wishes to set up his/her own personal blog, website, or other web presence, they **must** use a disclaimer that protects the Council e.g. 'these are my personal views and not those of my employer'
- c. An individual is free to talk about the Council. However instances where the Council may be brought into disrepute as a result may constitute misconduct or gross misconduct and disciplinary action will be applied.
- d. Employees **must not** disclose any confidential information relating to the business of East Lothian Council, to their employment at East Lothian Council, to the employment of colleagues or relating to elected members.
- e. Employees **must** comply with all Council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach the Council's Information Security Policy or Council confidentiality
- f. Sites **must not** be used to abuse other employees, service users or elected members. Privacy and feelings of others should be respected at all times. Employees should obtain the permission of the individuals involved before posting contact details or pictures. Anything which is published to the internet is in effect a permanent public record and could be seen and used by an employer or prospective employer. Care should be taken to avoid using offensive language or language which could be deemed as offensive to others.
- g. Employees **must** consider carefully whether it would be appropriate to befriend someone when using social media for personal purposes where there is a professional/client/pupil relationship, and/or where this could create a potential conflict of interest.
- h. Employees who intend to make adverse or critical comments about the Council and/or its services using social media, **must ensure** that the views they are presenting are as a citizen of East Lothian and that there is no connection to their professional capacity as an employee. The Council will however still have the right to consider whether critical comments made by any employee and posted publicly using social media should be investigated under the relevant Disciplinary Procedure.
- i. Viewing and updating sites, blogs or other regular web presences used for purely personal purposes should not take place during working time (excluding recognised breaks).
- j. If approached by a media contact about content on a site relating to East Lothian Council, employees should immediately contact the Communications Manager for advice and support, following the existing policy.

- k. Any misuse of social networking sites which has a negative impact on East Lothian Council - including what might be read to be online bullying and harassment - may be regarded as a disciplinary offence. The use of racist, homophobic, sexist or other prejudicial language by employees which could bring the Council into disrepute may also be regarded as a disciplinary offence.
- l. Employees should identify themselves as employees of East Lothian Council only when appropriate.

5. Using Social Media at Work

- 5.1 East Lothian Council recognises the value that the use of Social Media may bring to our connections with our citizens, community groups and professional networks.

However, employees should not use any social media tool to support East Lothian Council business activities without the appropriate authorisation.

- Access will be only be granted to social media sites for business purposes on an individual or workgroup basis.
- Access will only be granted after submission of a suitable business case to the Head of IT & Customer Services and those seeking access have attended an awareness session. (*'Board of Directors decision Oct 2010'*)

This restriction does not apply to use by school employees for teaching and learning purposes, such as sharing learning activities on school and class blogs. This applies to the school network only.

- 5.2 The Council expects employees to exercise personal responsibility whenever they participate in social networking. This includes not breaching the trust of those with whom they are engaging. Employees should be sure that they are presenting accurate information and ensuring citizens are not misled.
- 5.3 Employees **must not** disclose confidential information relating to Council business, to elected members, to their employment or the employment of others by East Lothian Council. Employees **must not** disclose personal data about our citizens and must always act in accordance with the Data Protection Act.
- 5.4 The Council's reputation is made up in a large part by the behaviour of its employees and everything that our employees publish reflects on how East Lothian Council is perceived. Social media should be used in a way that adds value to the Council's business and causes no harm to the Council's reputation. If it helps employees, our co-workers, our citizens or our partners to perform well and solve problems; if it enhances the Council's services, processes and policies; if it creates a sense of community; or if it helps to promote the Council's aims and values, then it is adding value.
- 5.5 If you are in any doubt about something you are about to post, then do not do it. What you post/upload will be around for a long time.
- 5.6 Employees **must not** publish any content which may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, or other claims for damages. This includes, but is not limited to, material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature which may bring the Council into disrepute and may impact on your conduct as an employee and become subject to investigation under disciplinary procedures.

5.7 The Communications Manager has the responsibility to advise on the use of social media to achieve communications and marketing objectives for our services. No official use will be made of social marketing sites without strict controls in place in advance.

5.8 If someone from the media or press contacts you about posts you have made using social media you should talk to your manager and our Communications and Marketing Business Unit before responding.

6. Preparing a Business Case for Agreed Social Media Use for Council Purposes

6.1 Employees who want to start a social network or blog for Council purposes such as participation, engagement and consultation about the Council, should tell their manager and consult with the Communications and Marketing Team. This will ensure that they gain the necessary information to present a business case to the Head of IT & Customer Services

6.2 The business case should include details of:

- What you wish to communicate and your target audience
- Your aims for the social network or blog and why you think a social network or blog is the right platform for your purposes
- What other channels of communication you will use to support your use of social networks
- How many times a day you intend to update the social network or blog
- Which other employees will be authors or administrators of the social network or blog when you are unable to update it due to sickness/annual leave
- If appropriate, how you intend to keep records of the data that you post onto your social media site or blog
- Your commitment to updating the social network or blog to clearly state when you no longer work for the authority or handing over the site to the person who takes over your role
- Your commitment to reviewing the social network or blog and providing your manager and the communications team with data on a bi-annual basis to ensure the social network or blog is being used effectively. Content should be reviewed regularly.

7. Monitoring and Review

7.1 The Council reserves the right to review and alter this Policy in light of experience and any changing circumstances. The Council will, under such circumstances, consult with the relevant Trades Unions.

Head of Human Resources

Head of Information Technology & Customer Services

October 2011