

Policy on the acceptable use of social media – March 2013

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Social Media includes the various online technology tools that enable people to communicate easily via the internet to share information and resources. Social media includes, but is not limited to, blogs; wikis; RSS feeds; social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn or MySpace; micro blogs such as Twitter; photo sharing sites such as Flickr; and video sharing sites such as YouTube.
- 1.2 The use of social media can help support dialogue between the Council and its citizens, partner agencies and members of the communities we serve. This dialogue can help us to engage with others and supports the Council's values of openness, fairness flexibility and transparency.
- 1.3 The purpose of this policy is to:
- Provide clear guidelines to elected members and employees on the use of social media;
 - Set standards of good practice in the use of social media;
 - Ensure employees are aware of their responsibility to comply with the law on issues including discrimination, data protection, libel and copyright; and
 - Assist employees to distinguish between the use of social media in their work and personal lives.

The policy and guidelines provide clarity to all employees in understanding that the behaviours expected for functioning in an electronic world are not any different from those expected of employees on a daily basis in other methods of communication, such face-to-face, via the telephone and by email.

2. Background

- 2.1 Social media has become an important communications channel. This technology, and the capabilities of the World Wide Web (www), often blurs the line between personal and professional communications. While social media opens new opportunities for communications and collaboration, it also creates new responsibilities for individuals. Posted material can, when matched with an identity or photograph, reflect not only on the individual, but also on that individual's employer, clients, colleagues and profession.
- 2.2 The Council has a number of policies which clearly detail the standards of behaviour expected from employees which also relate to the use of social media. These policies are detailed below:-

Acceptable Use Policy (ICT);
Councillors Code of Conduct;
Staff Code of Conduct;

Data Protection;
Freedom of Information;
ICT Security Policy for Mobile and Flexible Working;
Guidance to Councillors and Officials who serve on outside bodies;
Equal Opportunities Policy;
Information Security Incident Management Policy;
Information Management Guidelines;
Email Acceptable Use Policy;
Whistle blowing Policy;
Disciplinary Policy;
Highland E-safety Strategy Group Guidance for Professionals

3. Current use of social media

3.1 Use of Twitter:

Twitter is a micro-blogging site which lets users post short messages of up to 140 characters in length. Users 'follow' one another, which means they subscribe to a feed of each other's updates. All updates are visible on Twitter but there is also a direct message facility for private messages. The Council currently has two Twitter accounts and shares access to a third:

- [The Highland Council](#) @HighlandCouncil administered by the Chief Executive's Public Relations Team.
- [Highland Local Development Plans](#) @highlanddevplan administered by the Planning and Development Service.
- [Highland & Islands Strategic Co-ordinating Group](#) @handiprepared a shared Twitter site of the Highlands and Islands Strategic Coordinating Group (HISCG) a multi-agency co-operation in both the planning for and the response to a major emergency.

Users can choose to follow the Council's Twitter feed and can be automatically informed when new information (Tweets) are published. Users can reply to updates and forward messages (re-Tweet). This means that the number of people receiving messages is greatly increased.

Twitter provides a news feed (RSS) which is automatically downloaded to the user. Service users and media organisations can follow us on Twitter or subscribe to our RSS feed to get the latest Council news instantly. This is a very powerful tool during emergencies, extreme weather or elections.

3.2 Use of Facebook:

Facebook is a social networking site that allows users to create a profile and become 'friends' with one another, while businesses can create fan pages. The site allows people to post photos and videos, create and join events and groups, write publicly on friends' walls, and send private emails on the inbox system. The Council has a corporate Facebook presence, which points visitors in the direction of our web site, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr.

[The Highland Council's Facebook](#) page is administered by the Chief Executive's Public Relations Team. Although the PR Team does reply to comments posted on the Council's Facebook page, there is no intention, at this stage, of using Facebook to engage with the public i.e. inviting "friends".

The Council is also a partner in the :

- [Highland & Islands Strategic Co-ordinating Group](#) Facebook site.

The Planning and Development Service manage a Facebook presence via:

- [Highland Historic Environment Record](#)
- [Highland Council Countryside Rangers \(Lochaber\)](#);
- [Highland Local Development Plans](#);
- [The Wild Coastal Trail](#).

[The Highland Council Election Office Facebook](#) page is administered by the Council's Elections Manager.

To date, Twitter is proving a more suitable delivery mechanism for issuing daily news updates. The Council automatically provide tweets on Facebook for any users who may be interested and do not have access to Twitter. To make best use of Facebook would require a significant increase in resource i.e. by posting specific topics, asking users for feedback, constant moderation of comments etc.

3.3 **Use of YouTube:**

YouTube is a video-sharing website on which users can upload, share, and view videos. Anyone can view the videos, but users have to be registered in order to upload clips. Users can also review and comment on videos.

3.4 **Use of Flickr:**

Flickr is an image and video hosting website. We are posting photographs (including members' approved photos) on Flickr, which are of a quality that the media can use in their publications. The PR Office uses Flickr to complement, the distribution of news both to the media and on our website.

The [Highland Historic Environment Record](#) also has a Flickr group.

3.5 Use of blogging:

Blogging is short for 'web log' and is simply a web page which is regularly updated with information relevant to the original message. Blogging was used corporately for the first time to promote the [2010 Budget Consultation](#) and more recently the [2012 Budget Consultation](#).

In 2010 the Budget blog proved popular with the public and was deemed to be a successful experiment. Apart from staff time, there was no cost involved. This engagement with the public attracted some media attention and favourable comments in local government circles as being a model of consultation.

Other blogs provided by The Highland Council include:

- [Development Planning in Highland](#) – administered by the Council's Planning and Development Service;
- [Inverness Festivals](#) – administered by the Inverness Events Officer on behalf of the Inverness Common Good.

4. Professional and Personal Use of Social Media

- 4.1 When participating in social networking or while using social media, common sense and good judgment must be used when posting or sharing material. If not, consequences can include, among other issues, negative publicity, regulatory attention and confidentiality or copyright concerns.
- 4.2 Whereas this policy and supporting guidelines mainly apply to work-related sites and issues, it is important that all employees understand that any posted material will be available on the Internet indefinitely, and it is virtually impossible to recall or permanently or completely delete material once posted.
- 4.3 It is also important to understand that where material posted by an employee, either during work or in their own personal time, breaches Council policy that they may be subject to disciplinary action.
- 4.4 The policy and guidance therefore provide the necessary information to help employees to make choices about the interactions and behaviours that they demonstrate online.

5. Rules and Guidance (for the Public)

- 5.1 The following statement will be published on all Council social media to set out our policy on acceptable use of these platforms by the public. The statement reads:

"The Highland Council uses [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#), [YouTube](#) and [online blogs](#) to keep people informed about the services that we provide, including the outcomes of committee meetings and other key events like election results.

We may also use online blogs to ask for views and feedback on certain topics such as budget consultations.

Our social media sites are administered by Council staff and are generally monitored during normal office hours. They are not routinely monitored 24/7.

Please don't use Facebook or Twitter to report a service fault or to make a complaint. For help with services, to report a fault or [make a complaint](#), please call Tel 01349 886606 or visit:

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourcouncil/contact/>

If you have concerns about a child, please see [our website](#) for advice.

To make a [Freedom of Information](#) request please use our [email form](#) or write to: Freedom of Information Officer, Chief Executive's Office, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX.

We reserve the right to remove any contributions or block accounts to our social media sites that break the following rules or guidelines:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant.
- Do not post messages that are unlawful, prejudicial to court proceedings, abusive, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, libellous, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive.
- Do not swear.
- Do not make offensive remarks about someone else.
- Do not post content copied from elsewhere, for which you do not own the copyright.
- Do not post the same message, or very similar messages, more than once (also called "spamming").
- Do not publicise your, or anyone else's, personal information, such as contact details.
- Do not advertise products or services.
- Do not impersonate someone else.

Guidelines on the acceptable use of social media for employees

1. Why do we need Social Media Guidelines?

The purpose of these guidelines is to make clear what our responsibilities are when using social media in a work capacity, but also to highlight when these responsibilities cross into our personal use of social media.

2. Use of Social Media Responsibilities

The Council will:

- Make appropriate social media access available to employees as appropriate to their work needs/capacity;
- Set clear standards of behaviour expected by employees;
- Support expected standards of behaviour via the appropriate policies and
- Ensure all employees receive the appropriate information/training in relation to social media.

3. Using Social Media in the Workplace

- 3.1 Employees wanting to use social media to support their work duties should first discuss their requirements with their line manager and the appropriate IT/Communications colleague.

4. Using Social Media for Business Use

Those authorised to use social media in the workplace have a responsibility to use the tools in an appropriate manner.

- Staff should not use any social media tool for Council business unless they have received appropriate training. Services must apply for a representative/s to be registered on the approved business social media user list held by the Public Relations team;
- All online participation must be attributable and transparent ie no anonymous posts or posts using a pseudonym.
- Authorised users must follow copyright and data protection laws. For the Council's protection as well as that of the individual member of staff, it is critical that they stay within the legal framework and be aware that libel, defamation, copyright and data protection laws apply. Permission should be sought to publish or report on conversations that you take part in at work. Be aware that content on social media websites may be subject to Freedom of Information requests.

- Staff should be aware that if they break the law using social media (for example by posting something defamatory), they will be personally responsible. They may also be subject to the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.
- The Council's reputation is closely linked to the behaviour of its employees, and everything published reflects on how the Council is perceived. Social media should be used in a way that adds value to the Council's business; ie solving problems; enhancing the Council's services, processes and policies; creates a sense of community; or helps to promote the Council's aims and values.
- Staff should be aware that by revealing certain details they might be more vulnerable to identity theft.

5. Using Social Media for Personal Use

As the use and popularity of social media grows, the lines between what is public and private, personal and professional have blurred. The Council respects their employees' right to personal use of social media out-with the workplace.

However, staff should be aware that actions in and outside work that affect their work performance, the work of others, or adversely affect the Council's reputation, may become a matter for the Council.

Considering the following points may help avoid any conflict between personal use of social media and an employee's employment with the Council:

- If staff already use social networks or blogs for personal use they should be aware that any comments or images should not reflect on the Council or you as an employee in a negative manner;
- When using social media for personal purposes, staff must not imply they are speaking for the Council. The use of the Council e-mail address, Council logos or other Council identification should be avoided and it should be made clear that what is said is not representative of the views and opinions of the Council.
- Staff should comply with other Council policies when using social media. For example, staff should be careful not to breach council confidentiality and information security or information management policies, or the Employee Code of Conduct. If in doubt, don't post it.
- Staff should also be careful when posting sensitive personal details i.e. revealing your employer or address.
- Staff should be mindful of their privacy settings.
- Racism, sectarianism or other types of discrimination are unlawful and are not acceptable in any context. Putting these comments on line effectively puts them in print.
- Staff should be aware that copyright and data protection laws, as well as libel, defamation and data protection; laws apply to them.

- Staff should also be familiar with guidance on social networking provided by professional or statutory bodies.

6. Non Compliance with Social Media Policy and Guidelines

Expectations of employee's behaviour when interacting with social media are no different from expectations of their behaviour when dealing with other methods of communication, such as face-to face or on the telephone or email.

However, as with all other forms of communication, there may be circumstances where an employee's participation with social media is brought to the attention of the Council. In these circumstances, and dependent on the nature of the complaint this may require further investigation, and may be subject to the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

Employees should also be aware that where there is a serious breach of the Council's Social Media Policy, that the Council may be obliged to report these to the Police, for example making racial or sectarian comments.

Employees should also be aware that where they have a complaints or a grievance against either a colleague or the Council, that there are formal procedures in place for progressing these.

Guidance to elected members on the acceptable use of social networking during council meetings

1. Background

The many social media platforms now available have changed the ways in which elected members can communicate their Council duties. The use of social media can increase the accessibility of elected members and offer new ways in which to engage with constituents, stakeholders and the wider public.

2. Access to social media

Elected Members are free to use social networking from mobile devices such as a laptop, tablet, mobile phone or IPAD at any time outwith meetings as a means of communication with the public, colleagues and officers. The unrestricted access recognises the need for elected members to engage with their communities via this increasingly popular means of communication.

Any member wishing access to social networking platforms via the Council network is invited to log a call with the ICT Helpdesk.

At all times, members are reminded of their responsibility for ensuring they comply with all relevant legislation when using social media, including the Councillors' Code of Conduct, and the need to be considerate and courteous to fellow councillors and members of staff when using social media.

3. Use of social media/electronic devices during Council proceedings

The Council will allow the use of hand-held electronic devices in formal council and committee meetings (including accessing social media and the internet), provided that they are silent, and used in a way that does not impair decorum; and that Members making speeches in the council or in committee may refer to electronic devices in place of paper speaking notes.

Elected members will follow the following guidance:-

- **Use of Mobile devices:** Elected Members may use mobile devices (such as a laptop, ipad, tablet) to follow agenda items in committee papers or deliver pre-prepared speeches during public debate.
- **Regulatory meetings (planning and licensing) and private discussions/briefings at Council/Committee meetings:** In keeping with the spirit of the Councillors' Code of Conduct governing regulatory committee meetings, mobile devices, including mobile phones, should not be used for any form of communication (text or tweet) during business. This measure is to avoid any communication from a member of the public with an elected member which could influence the outcome of an application under discussion. 7.4 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct governing fairness and impartiality, states: "To

reduce the risk of your, or your Council's, decisions being legally challenged, you must not only avoid impropriety, but must at all times avoid any occasion for suspicion and any appearance of improper conduct”.

- This restriction also applies to discussions at full Council or Committee meetings held in private or confidential briefings.
- **Photographs:** Without the explicit consent of the Chair, photographs should not be taken or transmitted during a Council meeting.
- **Mobile phones:** At all times during meetings, mobile phones should remain on silent or be switched off.
- **Public/media:** The public and media are entitled to use social media (on silent) from the public benches during public meetings – but not take photographs of proceedings or record proceedings.

Tuesday 2nd April 2013