



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
Lincolnshire County Council
2017

USING SOCIAL MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

Social media refers to websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. It is a key part of the PR toolkit, specifically for:

- **Communication** – directly communicate important and timely messages, news and information, promote events and improve awareness of services
- **Engagement** – seek opinions, share conversations and engage with residents to improve residents' knowledge and correct misconceptions
- **Collaboration** – find more efficient ways of working together and sharing information which can change or enhance the perception of the council's services
- **Advertising** – target specific audiences outside existing networks with relevant information and calls-to-action in a more cost-effective way than traditional media

GETTING STARTED

If you wish to use an existing county council social media profile or page, you must contact the digital engagement team (DET) for advice and, if necessary, training.

New social media channels for county council services must be approved and set up by the DET. This includes partnerships where county council employees are responsible for posting.

The DET will ensure that ownership of all accounts is centralised and that only appropriate users have access. This helps to reduce the risks for the council, its partners and employees and ensures that the council has a record of all existing accounts and activity.

For a new profile or page to be approved, you must have:

- Evidence of a user need for it
- Resource to maintain it

If you are unable to provide either of these, the profile or page will not be created. However, the DET may be able to trial posts on existing profiles or pages to help gather evidence of user need.

Once a new profile or page has been approved, the DET will provide support and training. Access to analytics will be provided with additional information and audits available upon request.

Failure to maintain social media channels to expected standards may result in the profile or page being deleted. This may be due to:

- Infrequent posting
- Ignoring messages and comments
- Lack of engagement
- Inconsistent branding
- Lack of accuracy
- No evidence of added value to the service

PASSWORDS AND ACCOUNTS

All county council social media channels must only be used for business of the authority and never for private use.

The DET will manage the allocation of all social media usernames and passwords, as well as any changes to them. Account details and passwords must not be changed by services or shared with unauthorised users.

NOTE: The DET must be given the usernames and passwords, or admin access, to existing social media profiles or pages created on behalf of the council before the adoption of this policy.

All social media channels used for promoting news, information, brands, projects and services on behalf of the authority are the intellectual property of Lincolnshire County Council.

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

The purpose of using social media on behalf of the council is to:

- Increase community engagement and offer responsive communication
- Improve democratic engagement
- Support emergency and crisis communications
- Deliver savings in communication and collaboration
- Share messages which are aligned to the corporate communications strategy
- Support the Communications and Engagement Strategy, the IT, Internet and Email Policy, Community Engagement Strategy and Codes of Conduct and Guidance

PROFESSIONALISM AND TONE

Anything you write on a county council social media channel reflects on the organisation but, given the relaxed style of social media, it's important not to appear overly formal.

DO

- Engage with conversations, share news and ask questions
- Post regular/daily content and respond to questions
- Take difficult conversations out of the public domain and on to a private channel
- Consider how to deal with messages received out of hours

DO NOT

- Ignore genuine questions or interactions
- Talk about anything political, policy proposals or of wider council implications
- Reveal confidential or sensitive information about the authority or your work
- Delete posts/comments unless absolutely necessary (see Moderation)

If you are found to be viewing or publishing inappropriate content, such as illegal, pornographic, racist or sexist material, it will be investigated formally under the council's disciplinary procedure, which can be found in the [Employment Manual](#), and may be viewed as an act of gross misconduct.

MODERATION

We are under no obligation to moderate posts or comments by the public. However, there are measures which must be taken to ensure our duty of care when using profiles which are aimed at young and vulnerable people.

The council must not be seen to be endorsing comments which are:

- Defamatory, false or misleading
- Insulting, threatening or abusive
- Obscene or of a sexual nature
- Offensive, racist, sexist, homophobic or discriminatory against any religions or other groups
- Promoting illegal activity
- Intended to deceive

If any comment, by the service or a user, is suspected as falling into one of these categories then email the DET at digital@lincolnshire.gov.uk or telephone 01522 552770 immediately.

RISKS

Managing social media is fundamental to reputation management, creating advocates and strengthening the council's brand.

RISK	MITIGATION
Criticism from the general public (time, resources, usefulness etc)	Service areas will establish a business case for using social media and make use of evaluation to show its value. The DET will regularly assess profiles and pages and take action if they fall below agreed standards.
Technical security of accounts and potential for hacking	Only the DET can create new accounts. Passwords will be controlled and regularly changed by the DET and frequently monitored. Account details and passwords will not be shared with unauthorised users.
Vandalism of content and unsuitable content from other users, such as unsavoury comments	Unsuitable posts and comments will be removed as soon as we are made aware of any issues (see Moderation)
Damage to the council's reputation	The strategic communications team will liaise with services to formulate responses and actions to limit damage where required.
Inappropriate use by other council officers	Access to council accounts will be for authority usage only, supported by a business case and facilitated by the DET. All users of social media on behalf of the council must agree to this policy, have a copy of the strategy and will be provided with the necessary guidelines. Training and support will be provided by the Digital Engagement Team.

RESPONDING TO NEGATIVE POSTS

Negative posts can't be avoided but how they are dealt with has implications for the authority's reputation. They should not be ignored, although sometimes no answer is required if it is a rhetorical question, a repetition of an earlier posting or a post designed to provoke.

If such posts are public, it is better to answer them in public although, occasionally, it may be necessary to take them onto a private channel.

ENGAGING WITH YOUNG AND VULNERABLE PEOPLE

There are many benefits to engaging with young people, vulnerable adults, and their families on social media. However, the associated risks could be very serious and preparation is crucial:

- A young or vulnerable person may choose to utilise social media to make a disclosure or allegation. These must be taken seriously and immediate action taken to investigate.
- Be alert to any signs of [localised grooming](#). All concerns must be reported to the safeguarding team. If you believe someone is in immediate danger, contact the police.
- Most platforms have their own mechanisms for reporting [cyber bullying](#) which you must know how to use. All concerns must be reported to the safeguarding team.
- The council is not expected to ensure that users meet the age limits for using social media platforms. However, all concerns must be reported to the safeguarding team.
- Clearly indicate your 'opening hours' on any social media profile or page. Outside of these hours, the site must be closed for engagement and an alternative contact provided.
- Profiles or pages aimed at young people or vulnerable adults must be monitored frequently.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO

Copyright

You must have written permission from the original copyright-holder before using any photo or video. It is generally illegal to use imagery from the internet without permission.

Copyright cannot be transferred from a third party, such as a school.

Stock image libraries all have restrictions on usage. You must check the licensing agreements.

If in doubt, email digital@lincolnshire.gov.uk for advice.

Images of young or vulnerable people

You must not take or use any images of young or vulnerable people without written permission from their parent or guardian.

If a young or vulnerable person uploads a picture to a social media profile or page you control, you could be held responsible for not acting upon it if it's later deemed to play a part in an offence.

If you suspect there is an issue with an image, contact the safeguarding team and DET.

Drone photography

As drone photography becomes more common-place, you must be aware of the Civil Aviation Authority's legal guidelines for using them if doing so as an unlicensed operator:

- Don't fly within 50m of people or buildings
- Don't fly within 150m of, or over, crowds or built-up areas
- Always keep your drone in sight
- Fly below 120m (400ft) – if you endanger an aircraft, you could be jailed for up to five years

Images or video posted on behalf of the council must not breach these rules. For further guidance, visit droneaware.org/

PERSONAL USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Employees are personally accountable for what they publish on their own social media accounts. However, posts can still affect their professional standing and/or that of their employer.

The posting of inappropriate content could result in a formal investigation under Lincolnshire County Council's disciplinary procedure if:

- Your profile refers to your job title or employer
- You are pictured wearing the uniform of a council-run service
- You hold a prominent public-facing position within the authority

If you do make reference to your employment with the council on a personal social media profile, please ensure the following actions:

- Declare somewhere on your page or biography that the views expressed are yours alone
- Do not bring the authority into disrepute (also see [Social Media in Employment Policy](#))
- Do not reveal any potentially confidential or sensitive information about the authority that you may have come across in your work
- Do not use any council-owned images or logos
- Do not include contact details or photographs of service users or staff
- Where possible, refrain from accepting service users or ex-service users as 'friends'
- Do not make offensive comments about the authority, members, colleagues or members of the public as this is a disciplinary offence

In some circumstances, personal social media channels may be used for professional purposes while at work. The conditions for this must be agreed in advance with your line manager.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Directors and assistant directors

The senior management team is responsible for ensuring that employees are aware of their work-related and personal responsibilities.

Managers

All managers are responsible for ensuring that their staff understand this policy and abide by it, and for giving guidance where employees are unsure of appropriate content.

Digital engagement team

The DET will review and revise this policy as appropriate.

Further information

Digital Engagement Team

Tel: 01522 552770

Email: digital@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Lincolnshire Safeguarding Board

Tel: 01522 554112