

Social Media and Acceptable Use Policy



Comhairle Ceantair
**an Iúir, Mhúrn
agus an Dúin**
**Newry, Mourne
and Down**
District Council

Policy Control

Policy reference:	CS36
Title of Policy:	Social Media and Acceptable Use Policy
Version:	Version 2.0
Directorate / Departmental ownership:	Corporate Services / Digital and Communications
Officer responsible:	Assistant Director, Digital and Communications Veronica Keegan
Date of ratification:	5 July 2021
Review date:	31 March 2030
Equality screening and Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed by:	Head of Corporate Policy, Colin Moffett
Equality screening and Rural Needs Impact Assessment date:	3 November 2020
Location where document is held and referenced:	Responsible Department ☒ Corporate Policy repository ☒

Contents

	Page
1.0 <u>Title</u>	4
2.0 <u>Statement</u>	4
3.0 <u>Aim of this Policy</u>	4
4.0 <u>Scope of the Policy</u>	4
5.0 <u>Legislation, Related Policies and Procedures</u>	5
6.0 <u>Definitions</u>	6
7.0 <u>Department and Officer Responsible</u>	8
8.0 <u>Policy Approval Process</u>	8
9.0 <u>Review Date</u>	8
10.0 <u>Procedures and Arrangements for Monitoring the Implementation and Impact of the Policy</u>	8
11.0 <u>Equality Screening</u>	8
12.0 <u>Rural Needs Impact Assessment</u>	8

1.0 Title of Policy

1.1 Social Media and Acceptable Use Policy.

2.0 Statement

2.1 Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary in the public domain.

2.2 This policy gives guidance on how to use social media, sets out how we can effectively manage social media usage and indicates how any risks can be minimised or mitigated.

2.3 The following risks have been identified with social media use (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Damage to the Council's reputation.
- Disclosure of confidential information.
- Breach of safeguarding using images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.
- Bullying, harassment or harm.
- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation.

3.0 Aim of Policy

3.1 This policy aims to ensure:

- The Council's reputation and its employees and elected members are protected.
- Employees and elected members operate within existing policies, procedures, guidelines and relevant legislation.
- Clear guidance on acceptable behaviour in the use of social media both professionally and personally is provided to employees and elected members.
- Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media.

3.2 Nothing in this policy should be read as restricting the proper use of social media for business or personal use.

3.3 Any personal information published on social media is covered by the Data Protection Act 2018. All employees and elected members are required to handle personal information in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 including the UK General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

4.0 Scope of Policy

- 4.1 This Policy applies to all elected members and employees of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, including casual workers, agency workers, volunteers and contracted services (*from here they will be collectively referred to as 'employees' throughout the rest of the procedure*) who use both work and/or personal social media.
- 4.2 For the purposes of this policy, social media is any type of online media that allows discussion and interaction. There are several types of social media the Council uses now, or may use in the future, and this policy covers all types, for example:
- Social networking (Facebook, LinkedIn)
 - Microblogging (X)
 - Photo sharing (Instagram, Snapchat)
 - Video sharing (YouTube, Facebook Live, Vimeo)

5.0 Legislation, Related Policies and Procedures

- 5.1 This policy has been developed to support employees and elected members by providing information and guidance to maintain the good reputation of the Council when using social media.
- 5.2 The following, which is not an exhaustive list, are the related legislative provisions and measures requiring legal and regulatory compliance:

Legislation:

- Data Protection Act 2018
- Defamation Act 1996
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Environmental Information Regulations 2004
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Intellectual Property Act 2014
- Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Section 75)
- Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003
- Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- Public Records (NI) Act 1923
- Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
- Safeguarding Board (NI) Act 2011
- Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976
- The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP)
- UK General Data Protection Regulation 2018
- Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018
- Malicious Communications Act / Communications Act 2003 (sections relevant to offensive or menacing content).

The procedure is supported by the following Council policies and procedures*:

- Access to Information Policy and Procedure
- Bilingualism Policy and Procedure
- Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees
- Corporate Privacy Notice
- Disciplinary and Dismissal Procedure
- Equality Scheme
- Grievance Procedure
- Information Security Policy Statement
- IT Policies and Procedures
- Local Government Employee and Councillor Working Relationship Protocol
- Media Policy and Procedure
- NI Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors
- Records Management Policy and Procedure
- Retention and Disposal Schedule
- Safeguarding Policy Children and Adults at Risk
- The Personal Safety of Employees Exposed to Workplace Violence and Abuse from the Public Policy and Procedure
- Raising Concerns Policy (formerly referred to as Whistle Blowing Policy)

** File path: R:\Equality and Policy\Adopted Council Policies*

6.0 Definitions

6.1 Social media

Social media is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging and social networking are among the different types of social media.

6.2 Social media platform

Platforms are the foundation on which you can build your brand presence, such as the web, phone apps and social media.

6.3 Social media channel

Channels serve as a more direct means of communication and include Facebook, X, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram and more.

6.4 Social media account

Social Media Accounts means any websites, applications and similar electronic means by which authorised users are able to create and share information and other content (including, without limitation, text, photos and videos).

6.5 Social networking

The use of dedicated websites and applications to interact with other users, or to find people with similar interests to one's own.

6.6 Libel

Libel is when a false written statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published online or in print. Whether an employee is posting content on social media as part of their job or in a personal capacity, they should not bring the Council into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups.

6.7 Defamation

The action of damaging the good reputation of a person or organisation through libel or slander.

6.8 Copyright law

It is critical that all employees abide by the laws governing copyright, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Never use or adapt someone else's images or written content without permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, is also considered a breach of copyright.

6.9 Intellectual Property

Refers to the ownership of an idea or design by the person who came up with it. It is a term used in Property Law. It gives a person certain exclusive rights to a distinct type of creative design, meaning that nobody else can copy or reuse that creation without the owner's permission.

6.10 Discrimination and harassment

Employees and elected members should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official Council social media channel or a personal account. For example: making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief using social media to bully another individual posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content. For further information visit R:\Equality and Policy\Adopted Council Policies\Revised Equality Scheme April 2020.

6.11 Safeguarding

Safeguarding encompasses both activity which prevents harm from occurring in the first place and activity which protects children and adults at risk where harm has occurred or is likely to occur.

Child/young person refers to anyone under the age of 18.

Adult at risk - it is not possible to definitively state when an adult is at risk as this will change on a case by case basis. The following definition is intended to provide guidance, as to when an adult may be at risk of harm: *An 'adult at risk' is a person aged 18 or over where there is an exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect.*

For further information visit R:\Equality and Policy\Adopted Council Policies\Safeguarding Policy V2 Feb 2020.

6.12 Acceptable Use

This policy sets out guidelines on how social media should be used to support the delivery and promotion of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, and the use of social media by employees and elected members in both a professional and personal capacity.

It sets out what employees and elected members need to be aware of when interacting on social media channels and is designed to provide employee and elected member support, whilst protecting the Council and its reputation, and preventing any legal issues.

This policy should be read together with Council related policies (listed above) and the duty and obligations they impose.

Any activity using social media, which could be deemed a breach of policy will be subject to investigation in the same way that similar action would be in other circumstances, for example, verbally in the work-place, on the phone or in public.

6.13 AI-generated content

Material created using artificial intelligence tools, which must be verified for accuracy and compliance before publication.

6.14 Cybersecurity

The protection of systems and information from digital attacks or unauthorized access, which includes safe social media practices.

6.15 Trolling

Deliberate online activity intended to provoke or upset others, relevant to both public and staff behaviour online.

6.16 Misinformation

False or inaccurate information that is shared without the intent to deceive. Misinformation may be spread unintentionally but can still cause harm by misleading others or creating confusion.

6.17 Disinformation

False or misleading information that is deliberately created and shared with the intention to deceive, mislead or cause harm. This may include manipulated content, fabricated information or the deliberate spreading of false narratives.

6.18 Malinformation

refers to information that is based on truth but is shared deliberately to cause harm. This can include releasing private or confidential information, sharing genuine material out of context, or exposing personal details in order to damage an individual or organisation.

6.19 Misleading information

Describes content that may not be entirely false but is presented in a way that distorts or misrepresents the facts. This can occur through selective use of data, lack of context, edited media, or exaggerated framing that leads audiences to draw incorrect conclusions.

6.20 Fake information

Refers to content that is entirely fabricated or falsely presented as genuine. It is created to appear credible but has no basis in fact, and may include invented stories, altered images, or fabricated documents intended to mislead audiences or create a false narrative.

6.21 Deep-fake content

Refers to highly realistic but artificially generated or manipulated audio, video, or images created using advanced artificial intelligence technologies. These materials are designed to convincingly depict events, actions, or statements that never actually occurred, often making it appear as though a person has said or done something they did not.

7.0 Department and Officer Responsible

Directorate / Department	Corporate Services / Digital and Communications
Officer (s) responsible for developing the Policy	Assistant Director, Digital and Communications Veronica Keegan Corporate Communications and PR Manager, Patricia Murtagh

8.0 Policy Approval Process

Meeting	Date
SMT	1 April 2021
CMT	13 April 2021
Party Leaders	6 May 2021
Local Joint Consultative Committee	6 May 2021
Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee	17 June 2021
Monthly Council Meeting	5 July 2021

9.0 Review Date

The policy will be reviewed in line with the Council's agreed policy review cycle ie every 4 years (as per Council's Equality Scheme commitment 4.31), or sooner to ensure it remains reflective of legislative developments. However, the procedure will be reviewed in the event of any one or more of the following:

- Failure or weakness in the procedure is highlighted
- Changes in legislative requirements
- Changes in Government/Council or other directives and requirements.

10.0 Procedures and Arrangements for Monitoring the Implementation and Impact of the Policy

The Social Media and Acceptable Use Procedure accompanies this Policy.

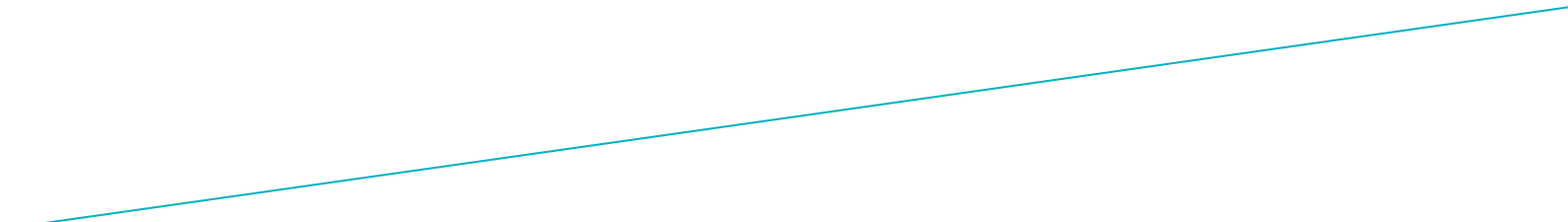
11.0 Equality Screening

The Social Media and Acceptable Use Policy has been equality screened and it is recommended it not be subject to an equality impact assessment (with no mitigating measures required).

12.0 Rural Needs Impact Assessment

The policy has been subject to a rural needs impact assessment.

Ag freastal ar an Dún agus Ard Mhacha Theas Serving Down and South Armagh



0330 137 4000 (Council)
info@nmandd.org
www.newrymournedown.org

**Oifig an Iúir
Newry Office**
Haughey House
Rampart Road, Greenbank
Newry BT34 2QU

**Oifig Dhún Pádraig
Downpatrick Office**
Downshire Civic Centre
Downshire Estate, Ardglass Road
Downpatrick BT30 6GQ