Social Media Policy

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Revision	Originator of change	Date of change	Change description
1	SMW	12/02/20	Incorporate comments from committee
2	SMW	19/10/20	Strengthening of personal safety messaging
3	SMW	23/11/21	Changes based on E&E feedback
4	SMW	Ongoing	Addition of new social media accounts/channels

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Section one: Information for all - communications governance.

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1. Introduction

Social media continues to grow at a rapid pace and has changed the way individuals and organisations communicate.

It is a broad-brush term used for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of social media channels and digital platforms now available which offer great opportunities to communicate council messages and enable two way communications with residents, visitors and businesses.

Corporate websites are often no longer the automatic first port of call when people wish to ask a question. This means we have to think beyond traditional forms of communicating online to meet the needs of residents and stakeholders.

Done well, social media can help our customers get the information they need quickly which, in turn, can reduce the need for customers to call us or visit us, which can benefit us both. Social media is seen as quick, easy and accessible – and can be used on the move, 24 hours a day in a matter of seconds.

Social media can enable us to work more effectively by delivering important and timely messages, seek opinions, correct misconceptions and by sharing messages across partnerships.

Messaging can be done instantly and can be far-reaching, which can bring many benefits but also a number of risks. Accounts can take a significant time to create and manage in an effective manner and should not be undertaken lightly.

Social media is also not a silver bullet, nor a quick win to deliver service objectives or priorities.

And when social media goes wrong it can go wrong spectacularly and cause significant damage to the organisation, the brand and our reputation.

This policy lays out how City of Lincoln Council will use social media, responsibility for channels, procedures and risk management.

In addition, in sections two and three, it helps guide the use of social media by both councillors and staff.

2. Policy statements

City of Lincoln Council will, corporately, use social media channels only where it is relevant, as part of multimedia promotional and communications activities, where we can offer professional staffing and monitoring and where it meets council communications priorities. Social media is an integral part of the communications tool kit.

City of Lincoln Council-related social media channels and activities are only permitted with the specific agreement of the communications team and if they comply with the above criteria. To ensure there is no audience split there should, in the main, be only one corporate feed on each channel.

Personal accounts and postings by staff and councillors should comply with the relevant codes of conduct and the council's disciplinary policy. This consideration is even more important if they are identifiable as members of council staff or councillors, whether on the same digital channel, an alternative or offline.

3. Principles

Accounts should follow these six guiding principles:

- **Be respectful** – set the tone for online conversations by being polite, open and respectful. Use familiar language, be cordial, honest and professional at all times.
- **Be credible and consistent** – be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent. Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Make sure that what you say online is consistent with your other communications.
- **Be honest about who you are** – it's important that any accounts or profiles that you set up are clearly and easily identifiable. Be clear about your own personal role.
- **Be responsive** – make an effort to share what you know. Offer insights where appropriate and put people in touch with someone who can help if you cannot. Respond to questions and comments in a timely manner.
- **Be concise** – people shouldn't have to search for the main message you are sharing. Put it front and centre. Use plain English and keep sentences short, snappy and relevant.
- **Think twice** – think carefully about all your social media posts. Once published it will be too late to change your mind. Follow these rules and seek further guidance if you need it.

4. Scope

This policy applies to City of Lincoln Council as a corporate body with guidance for councillors and staff also included.

5. Communications

Social media is a communications and engagement tool. After many years of using social media, the communications team is best placed to advise on what can work and what doesn't, in the same way as any other communications medium.

Staff wouldn't speak to the media without the advice and consent of the communications team, however the reach and potential damage from a misstep with social media can be far more wide-ranging.

Social media is also now a valid source of news for traditional media outlets, which increases the potential reach of any posts we issue and, in turn, placing us into the media arena where many staff are not equipped or skilled.

The communications team is uniquely placed to not only bring the expertise required to decide whether social media is a suitable medium but also to manage channels to ensure good use, two way communication and to protect the council's reputation.

6. Accounts

The council currently has the following accounts managed and run corporately by the communications team.

These are all monitored during office hours and, where appropriate (for example, during Lincoln Christmas Market or when a particular story is 'breaking') during evenings and weekends.

Councillors and members of staff may wish to 'follow' or 'like' these accounts so that they can keep up-to-date with council business and comment or share on their own accounts where appropriate.

The council is responsible not only for the content of its own posts but also for the comments underneath. These will be monitored as per above (office hours) and, if required, handled as highlighted throughout this policy.

Twitter

- @lincolncouncil – our corporate account
- @lincolnelf – our Lincoln Christmas Market account
- @BeLincolnUK – Lincoln Towns Deal account

Facebook

- www.facebook.com/TheCOLC - our corporate account
- www.facebook.com/LincolnChristmas - our Lincoln Christmas Market account
- www.facebook.com/BeLincolnUK - Lincoln Towns Deal account

Instagram

- @lincolncouncil – our corporate account

- @theLincolnChristmasMarket – our Lincoln Christmas Market account

LinkedIn

- · City of Lincoln Council

- · BeLincolnUK

YouTube

- · City of Lincoln Council

The following accounts are run by individual officers or teams

Twitter

· @Lincoln_CC_BC – our Building Control account

Facebook

· www.facebook.com/City-Of-Lincoln-Building-Control - our Building Control account

· www.facebook.com/TheCOLCcareers - the HR team's account for recruitment

· www.facebook.com/HartsholmeCP - the account for Hartsholme Country Park

· www.facebook.com/City-Of-Lincoln-Council-Resident-Involvement - resident involvement

Facebook groups

- - www.facebook.com/groups/lincolnsocialresponsibility

In addition, the following accounts have been set up in 2022 for the Mayor of Lincoln role. The accounts are run in partnership with the council's Civic Team and the Mayor, with input from the Communications Team as appropriate:

The accounts held are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok and use the same user name of: **LincolnMayorUK**

7. One account

Latest expert advice from the Local Government Information Unit is that councils should have one corporate account on each major social media platform.

With this in mind, we run the aforementioned accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. However, the communications team also horizon scans and monitors trends in social media to ensure any upcoming apps and tools are considered as possible ways to engage with residents and stakeholders.

8. Code of local authority publicity

Social media communication by local authorities falls under the code of local authority publicity which, among other things, lays out regulations around how local authorities are allowed to communicate.

It also includes restrictions on local authority publicity in the run up to elections – commonly known as purdah or pre-election period – and all social media channels identifiable as related to the council must adhere to the code at all times.

Councillor and staff accounts are not bound by the same code but personal accounts and postings should comply with the relevant codes of conduct and the council's disciplinary policy.

9. Authority

As the city council, we are considered by residents and the media as an 'authority' and that when we post we have the facts correct and can legally post what we do. This means the council may be liable if information is posted from one of its accounts which does not comply with the legal framework. Therefore postings by those who are not aware of legal ramifications of public information are particularly risky.

10. To block or not to block

On most social media channels there are options to mute or block people, or to hide or delete comments where appropriate.

When dealing with inappropriate or aggressive comments on social media, the following approaches will be taken by the city council (approach will depend on what a resident has posted and decisions will be made on a case by case basis by the communications team).

Councillors and staff should consider taking the same approach with their own accounts, to avoid becoming embroiled in matters which could reflect on them. If the matter being discussed relates to City of Lincoln Council, it would be appropriate to make the council's communications team aware of the matter.

Aggression / rudeness / low level abuse

- · Answer the comment with a factual and professional response and request that the inappropriate behaviour ceases
- · If the aggression and rudeness continues, ignore but monitor (see 'repeated low level abuse' actions below)

Libel or reputationally damaging comments or images about named council officers (an issue which should always be referred on to the city council's legal services department)

·   Instant blocking with no warning and report to the socialmedia platform's owners

<u>High level abuse / repeated low level abuse / racism or equalities</u>

·   Delete comment with no warning

·   Block with no warning

·   Make the council's Democratic Services team aware (who may then also involve the council's Communications and Legal teams, if appropriate)

·   Report to social media platform's owners

11. Photography and video

As with other communication mediums, use of good photography and video are an essential part of social media communications.

Unfortunately, as with print media, poor or inappropriate imagery can have a negative impact on the council's reputation or the reputation of individual members or staff.

The council will only use professional, stock or well-taken appropriate images for social media feeds – the same as any other communications activity – and only use professional or well-taken appropriate video (speak to communications, who can assist with this).

On council or councillors accounts, any staff or residents in photographs or video will be made fully aware that it is, or could be, used on social media and must give permission before anything is posted.

No image or video should be posted without specific verbal consent from all parties if the image was taken in a private space. Any photo or video posted without the permission of all parties will be required to be removed.

Written consent is required by a parent or guardian for any person under the age of 16 before photography or video can be published.

Any imagery, be it video or photo, taken in a public place, i.e. a general image of the high street, where members of the public are walking, does not need permission. However, we would advise you respect others in this situation and seek consent *where possible*.

GDPR regulations and copyright laws apply.

12. How the council will ensure the best use of its social media

To ensure the best use of the social media, the council **will**:

- have one main corporate channel for each platform
- talk to residents and customers through its channels

- be transparent and honest in social interactions
- have a personality and be human – we will keep dry, 'corporate speak' to a minimum to enable engagement
- where appropriate, answer questions quickly and honestly
- be responsible
- share appropriate and helpful content from other organisations where appropriate
- monitor accounts during usual working hours as a minimum
- use hashtags appropriately and strategically
- ask questions and seek feedback
- consider social media accounts as customer service channels
- listen to responses
- adhere to HR policies
- adhere to the code of local government publicity
- work across service areas to provide an excellent customer experience
- always have more than one person responsible for an account
- only create accounts because we should, not because we can
- investigate any issues which arise outside of traditional office hours
- ensure information is accurate, and double check prior to posting, with any mistakes rectified in a timely manner
- evaluate the outcome of posts, seeking detail on interactions and reach

The council **will not**:

- just broadcast or talk at people – social media is social and two way communication is required
- continue running accounts that deliver poor performance – for example if a certain platform were to lose its popularity and post interactions became non-existent
- assume social media is 'free;' social media is time consuming and officer time costs the organisation
- assume social media is 'easy' or will look after itself; social media requires an investment of time, enthusiasm and energy
- leave accounts unattended for more than a week
- be inappropriate in any way
- post content which would intentionally embarrass the council, councillors or members of staff
- post content which is of a purely internal matter unless expressly requested to do so
- build accounts and hope people will come – they won't
- make derogatory comments about any person or the council as a whole

13. Emergency planning and business continuity

Social media will be the initial main form of communication with residents in case of a civil emergency or major incident in the city.

This will be through the main corporate accounts and not through any other council or personal account.

Social media will form a key part of the communications plan in case of emergencies.

14. Use of social media in the recruitment process

The HR departments will use it's Facebook page to advertise vacancies and these will be shared onto the council's corporate account by the communications team.

However, unless it is in relation to finding candidates (for example, if an individual has put their details on social media websites for the purpose of attracting prospective employers), the HR department and managers will not, either themselves or through a third party, conduct searches on applicants on social media.

This is because conducting these searches during the selection process might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics (for example, sexual orientation or religious beliefs) played a part in a recruitment decision. This is in line with the organisation's equal opportunities policy.

15. Working with the communications team

Anyone who wishes to undertake work and engagement online through social media should contact the communications team for assistance and advice.

The communications team will consider all requests and advise on the most appropriate action.

The communications team can be contacted through communications@lincoln.gov.uk or by calling 01522 873318.

Section two – councillor specific information

Social media can be a useful tool for councillors. It can help you gain feedback on proposals and communicate information about your activities.

Social media is always on, so it is advised that you consider setting personal limits and establishing your own routine, and remember that you are subject to the council's code of conduct when using social media.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and many more have all become everyday communications tools for councillors and the people they represent. The potential is huge and social media allows you to be innovative and responsive as well as providing links to useful sources of information or sign-posting to other organisations.

The following is some advice and guidance which can be used to guide your use of social media while acting in your official capacity.

1. Councillor use of social media

- In any personal online biography, it should be made clear that the views are those of the councillor in question and not necessarily the view of the council.
- Councillors should look to set out a response policy, such as "I welcome questions via email" and an engagement policy, such as "abusive content will be removed."
- For personal safety, as well as identity security, you should give serious consideration to whether or not you share personal information, images of friends and / or family.
- It is also advisable not to include details such as personal phone number, home address, details of family members and vehicle details.
- You are personally responsible for the content you publish. It is important that you are confident of the nature of the information you publish.
- If you comment about your role as councillor online you will be deemed as acting in your official capacity and any conduct will fall within the members' code of conduct.
- Social media must not be used in a way that might lead to a complaint that you have breached the city council's Code of Conduct for Councillors.
- It is advisable that councillors have separate social media profiles for their role as a city councillor and for their private life.
- Councillors are responsible for any content they publish on any form of social media. Publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may incur a libel action for which they would be personally liable; no indemnity from the council would be available.
- Councillors must not use the city council's logo, or any other council related material on a personal account or website, nor should they refer to themselves as a councillor.
- Social media sites are in the public domain, subject to privacy settings, so it is important councillors ensure they are confident of the nature of the information

they publish. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without consent, used in different contexts, or further distributed.

- Do not provide references for individuals on social or professional networking sites as this will create a legal liability.
- Councillors should look to make use of privacy settings if they don't want their social media to be accessed by the press or public. We encourage councillors to read the terms of service of any social media site accessed and make sure they understand the confidentiality/privacy settings.
- Councillors should not disclose any other persons' personal details such as home addresses and telephone numbers on social media. Any personal or sensitive information should be handled in line with the city council's Data Protection policies. Safeguarding issues are paramount because social media sites are often misused by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business – if councillors have any concerns about other site users, they have a responsibility to report these.
- Councillors should not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal (where no members of the public are present or it is of a confidential nature) or exempt reports (which contain confidential information or matters which are exempt under the provision of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985).
- Copyright laws apply online. Placing images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Councillors should avoid publishing anything they are unsure about or seek permission from the copyright holder in advance.
- Councillors should be aware of their own safety when placing information on the internet and should not publish information which could leave them vulnerable.
- Do not, in your role as councillor, use social media to promote personal financial interests.
- Be aware that the higher your profile as an elected member, the more likely it is that you will be seen as acting in your official capacity when commenting on social media.
- If you are a dual-hatter (i.e. a councillor at city council and county council), be aware that this policy is for the city council only and may differ from the policy in place at other councils. Please be mindful when commenting on either council's projects, as this could impact on your ability to participate in a debate and/or vote on such matters. It is suggested that you seek advice from officers before commenting.
- Do tolerate disagreement - some comments may not align with your own. Accept this and do not get bogged down with 'difficult' users.
- Remember social media isn't always a reflection of real life and that most people on social media are nothing like that in real life!

Section three: Information specific to all staff

1. **Employee wellbeing**
2. **Personal accounts**
3. **Personal use of social media at work**
4. **Excessive use of social media at work**
5. **Disciplinary action over social media use**
6. **Yammer**

1. Employee wellbeing

People on social media are not always nice.

The council has received abuse on social media with council staff (in general), individuals and councillors being insulted.

Insults are used, tone can be aggressive and accusations are frequent. People behave, and verbalise, online and on social media, in a way they would not necessarily do in person or on the phone.

Involvement in social media with responses like this can be demoralising, frustrating and upsetting.

The council understands the toll this can take on staff, and managers of staff regularly using social media for work purposes should ensure there are regular opportunities for staff to undertake other work offline.

Managers should also ensure that staff are appropriately trained to manage accounts professionally despite any abuse or negative feedback received, and support is in place during difficult periods as there would be if the abuse was verbal, on the phone or face-to-face. Consideration should also be given as to whether any such incident requires reporting under the Corporate Health & Safety Unacceptable Behaviour Policy.

To mitigate risks to staff, no one single staff member should be responsible for any account. There should always be another member of the team who has access to and editorial rights over the channels used. This also ensures business continuity.

2. Personal accounts

Staff are welcome and encouraged to have personal accounts on social media and there are lots of positive reasons to do so, including:

- Following the council – as an employee you can find out more about what the council is up to across all departments as well as events and activities you may have missed on internal channels.

- Hearing about things first – social media is often now where the news breaks first including, sometimes, council news.
- Joining in with the buzz – local activities can create a real buzz online, whether about the council or not and knowing our local communities and what they are talking about online is never a bad thing.
- You don't have to speak – you don't have to post your views on anything or everything, you can just listen to others by following them and reading what they have to say.
- We can help set you up – if the idea of a tweet or following someone is a giant step into the unknown, the communications team is happy to offer advice.
- You don't have to say you work for the council on your feed, and it is recommended that you don't to avoid any negative impacts – it is up to you.

Top tips for personal accounts:

- Use your common sense - don't write anything you wouldn't say to your friends or post pictures you wouldn't want your friends and family to see.
- Consider your privacy settings carefully so as to avoid any negative impacts on you from the wider general public.
- Don't be rude, abusive, bullying or anything else which could bring the council, or you personally into disrepute, even if heavily provoked as this could easily fall into a conduct issue.
- If commenting on a council issue, keep it factual, positive and non-personal.
- Block or unfollow people who are rude, abusive, bullying or otherwise insulting.
- Don't use the council's logo or an image including the council's logo as a profile image – you will look like an official council spokesperson and could get quoted by the press. Please be aware that certain platforms (LinkedIn, for example) add logos automatically and, if this platform is used, incorporating the logo cannot be avoided.
- Do follow the council and retweet or repost anything you find interesting or is good news – even if you only do that for tweets related to your team it helps spread the word of all our successes.
- Don't engage the trolls – trolls are exactly what they sound like and lurk on social media ready to leap on things people say. It is always best to ignore them.
- Choose your 'friends' carefully – if you are in a sensitive position as an employee or in a politically restricted post, best not to follow or post on political issues, especially local ones (this doesn't apply to councillors).
- Have regard to the member code of conduct and the member / officer code as detailed in the constitution.
- Remember social media isn't always a reflection of real life and that most people on social media are nothing like that in real life!
- Remember and be aware of the LGA's code of publicity, especially during pre-election period – this can be found on the Hub and on government websites.
- Please consider the implications of stating who your employer is on your social media profile as doing could potentially result in abuse and comments you make may be deemed to be coming direct from the council itself.
- Do not use your own social media account(s) for any council business at all. Your personal life must be kept separate from your work. This is for your own safety and

wellbeing. You must comply with the Council's Regulatory of Investigatory Powers Act Policy and the Guidance on Using Social Media which can be found on Netconsent.

▪ This sets out when it might be appropriate to use the council's social media accounts to investigate potential legal proceedings, and how to do it. If you have any questions about this, please contact the legal services or communications team.

▪ Any approach relating to the council or council work on personal social media accounts should be referred to the communications team who can advise on appropriateness of any response.

3. Personal use of social media at work

Employees are allowed to access social media from the organisation's computers or devices at certain times, if the sites are enabled. Employees who are not responsible for a council social media account must limit their use of social media to their official rest breaks such as their lunch break.

The organisation understands that employees may also wish to use their own computers or devices to access social media while they are at work. Again employees must limit their use of social media on their own equipment to their official rest breaks.

4. Excessive use of social media at work

Employees should not spend an excessive amount of time while at work using social media.

They should ensure that use of social media does not interfere with their other duties. This is likely to have a detrimental effect on employees' productivity.

5. Disciplinary action over social media use

All employees are required to adhere to the social media policy.

Employees should note that any breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action.

Serious breaches of this policy, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the council, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.

6. Yammer

As of September 2022, the city council's staff will be able to access Yammer, a social networking tool to openly connect and engage with colleagues across the organisation.

Yammer is being introduced to provide a collaborative environment to help staff connect with colleagues and bring together directorates virtually to share meaningful information, general and common interests using work-based social media.

Yammer will be used to deliver news, announcements and share general information directly to employees. The Hub (the city council's intranet) will be utilised for corporate/business information only.

It will enable staff to get answers to questions in Yammer groups without knowing exactly whom to ask. It will ensure managers and employees celebrate successes and recognise accomplishments in a Facebook-like environment.

Staff will be able to conduct polls and surveys to obtain feedback from colleagues quickly and respond where necessary.

Staff use of Yammer will also be governed by this social media policy, along with associated IT policies.