

## Report to Resources Committee

24 February 2015




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**Title:** Social Media Policy

**Report of:** Support Services Manager

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### Purpose of Report

1. To recommend to the Board approval of a Social Media Policy.

### Background

2. The company has successfully used social media for some time to engage tenants and stakeholders through the Communications Team in a controlled environment. However, we are aware that many of our employees regularly use social network sites Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Mysapce outside the direct control of the organisation.
3. This policy has been developed to provide guidance on personal use of social media in work and outside of work.

### Aims of the policy

4. The aim of the policy is to:
  - Establish clear rules on personal usage of social media at work
  - Outline our policy on using social media for promoting our business
  - Inform employees that social media sites are not private and we will not tolerate comments which bring the company, its employees, customers and stakeholders into disrepute or that infringe our equality policies, bullying and harassment policy or code of conduct
  - Remind employees that monitoring takes place
  - Explain the possible consequences of policy breaches
5. The Policy is attached at the Appendix to this report.
6. The policy applies to all employees and Board Members of The Gateshead Housing Company and Keelman Homes.
7. The use of social media is on the increase and the policy will be reviewed annually or earlier as required in response to changes in legislation or regulation

### Links to Values

8. This report links to the following company values: -

- Being honest, accountable and transparent
- Being motivated, trained and committed across the company
- Being caring and respecting
- A commitment to all our employees
- Embracing equality.

### **Impact on Customers**

9. The guidance will help us to manage social media outside the control of the communications team. This will have a positive impact on customers as employees will have clear rules on how to use social media sites in and outside of work.

### **Risk Management Implications**

10. Not managing social media can cause reputational damage and lack of confidence in the services we provide to our customers and stakeholders.

### **Financial Implications**

11. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

12. The social media policy will help us to manage activity to ensure there is no adverse impact on any customers.

### **Value for Money Implications**

13. Value for money principles are followed in all aspects of this report.

### **Health Implications**

14. The company's approach to employee engagement and wellbeing through clear policies and procedures is embedded within everything we do. Compliance with the actions specifically mentioned within this report, ultimately will have a positive impact on people's health and overall wellbeing. By working to ensure that any services we provide meet the needs of the customers, partners and of employees and do not cause undue stress to either party.

### **Environmental Implications**

15. There are no environmental implications arising from this report

### **Recommendation**

16. The committee are asked to recommend to the Board the introduction of a Social Media Policy and to receive updates on progress.



## Social Media Policy

### Aims and objectives

This policy is intended to help staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social Media

We aim:

- to establish clear rules on personal usage of social media at work
- to outline our policy on using social media for promoting our business
- to remind you that monitoring is taking place
- to inform you that what you say on social media sites, in and outside of your working time, is not private and that we will not tolerate comments which bring the company, the council, its employees, its customers and stakeholders into disrepute or which infringe our bullying and harassment policy or code of conduct
- to outline the company's policy on using social media for recruitment practices
- to explain the possible consequences of policy breaches

### What we mean by social media

Social media means:

- social networking sites such as Facebook, Google+, Twitter and Myspace, Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram etc.
- professional networking sites such as LinkedIn, Yammer etc.
- online chat rooms and forums, blogs, and other social media such as YouTube and Flickr.

The above list is not exhaustive.

### Who this policy applies to

This policy applies to all employees and Board members of The Gateshead Housing Company and Keelman Homes. This includes casual and agency workers and volunteers who are collectively referred to as employees in this policy

All employees are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of our company and our services, employees, partners, customers and competitors.

### **Using social media to promote our business**

The Communication Team are responsible for the use of social media, advising on campaigns, projects and initiatives and taking overall responsibility for social media content that is generated by The Gateshead Housing Company. If your job involves using social media for business purposes, e.g. communications and marketing, you must stay within the following parameters:

- You should always seek approval from your manager for each communication
- You should always identify yourself by name and role. There may be occasions when this is not possible and the named department is deemed appropriate.
- You should not contravene our equal opportunities or bullying and harassment policies, make comments which may harm the reputation of the company, its employees, customers and stakeholders or divulge confidential information
- You should not use the company logo and marketing material unless specifically authorised to do so
- You should always correct any mistakes immediately you become aware of them
- You should not say anything about a third party which might be defamatory
- You should not promote your own personal views or opinions when using social media for work purposes

### **Use of company equipment for personal social media activities**

If you use our company equipment, including computers, laptops, ipads and smartphones to access social media during your working hours or outside your working hours you must not access any inappropriate or offensive websites (detailed rules can be found in our ICT Security Policy) and you must comply with the rules on responsible content set out below.

### **Monitoring**

We log and audit the use of company computers, laptops, ipads and smartphones, including email, internet and other computer use. Auditing software has been installed to monitor which internet sites you visit. We will look at the content of what you have posted or uploaded where we have good reason to do so. We do this in order to investigate and detect unauthorised use of our equipment in breach of our policies, including social media use. For further details of how we monitor and the purpose of monitoring, see our ICT Security Policy.

Employees should be aware that where the use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for work purposes) that result in breaches of this policy found, action may be taken under our Disciplinary Procedure

We reserve the right to restrict or prevent access to certain social media websites. Monitoring is only carried out to the extent permitted or as required by law and as necessary and justifiable for business purposes.

### **Use of your own equipment to access social media sites whilst you are at work**

You must not use your own equipment (e.g. your mobile phone, iPad etc.) to access social media for personal use during working time. Please restrict usage to breaks and time outside working hours.

### **Posting responsible content on social media sites**

When using social media sites you are operating in a public space and your conduct may have serious repercussions for the company, its employees, its customers, stakeholders and other affiliates.

You should comply with the following basic rules whenever you are using social media sites whether using our equipment or your own equipment both in and out of work:

#### **Do:**

- Say 'I' rather than 'we' in any context where you might be construed as talking about our organisation, even if you have not named us.
- Remember that conversations between 'friends' on Facebook are not truly private and can still have the potential to cause damage.
- State that the views you are expressing are your personal ones, not those of the company, in any situation where you disclose that you are an employee of the company or where this could be inferred.
- Report to HR if you see anything on a social media site that indicates that a colleague may have breached this policy
- Use our whistleblowing procedure to raise any issues of malpractice – this is the appropriate channel for raising issues in the first instance, not social media sites.

#### **Do not:**

- Make comments which could damage the reputation of the company, the council or its employees.
- Make comments which could damage the company's relationships with the council its customers, stakeholders and other affiliates.

- Use social media to insult, embarrass or offend a colleague, customer, supplier or any other relevant stakeholder.
- Use social media to bully or harass or discriminate against any colleague in a way which contravenes our bullying and harassment policy.
- Comment on any sensitive business-related topics for example potential site closures or acquisitions or the company's financial performance.
- Post comments or pictures which are inconsistent with the requirements of your role or the image it requires you to project.
- Post pictures of yourself wearing company uniform unless this projects a positive image of the company
- Use a company e-mail address to register on social media sites unless authorised to do so
- Divulge confidential information about our business or our customers or suppliers
- Do not upload, post, forward or post a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content

Remember that comments posted on social networking sites may be difficult or impossible to remove and can remain in the public domain. Comments and posts may also be taken out of context.

## **Recruitment**

Human Resources, line managers or any other employees should not conduct searches on social media sites to vet prospective employees.

## **Breaches of this policy**

All employees are responsible for their own compliance with this policy and should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any breach of this policy should be reported to HR. Any breach of this policy will be taken seriously and may lead to disciplinary action. In serious cases, such as posting material which could damage the company's reputation, or which amounts to bullying and harassment or the disclosure of confidential information, this could include dismissal under our disciplinary procedure.

You must remove any material posted in breach of this policy upon our request.

You must co-operate to the fullest extent possible in any investigation into suspected breaches of this policy. This may include handing over any relevant passwords in situations where they are required in order to investigate a suspected breach.

If the effect or meaning of any part of this policy is unclear you should seek clarification from Human Resources.

Breach of this policy may be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.

Any member of staff who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform their line manager or the human resources department.

### **Status of this policy and new instructions**

This policy does not give contractual rights to individual employees. The company reserves the right to alter any of its terms at any time although we will notify you in writing of any changes.

This policy is supplemented by additional instructions from the ICT department about how you use our ICT systems. It is very important that you comply with any such instructions.

### **Links to other policies**

Before using work-related social media you must have regard to this policy and other relevant policies:

ICT Security Policy

Equal Opportunities Policy

Disciplinary policy

Bullying and Harassment Policy

Whistleblowing Policy

Communications Strategy (Draft)

### **Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed annually or earlier as required in response to changes in legislation or regulation