

Monaghan County Council

Social Media Policy



Comhairle Contae Mhuineacháin
Monaghan County Council

Adopted by the Senior Management Team at its meeting on

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1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this document is to outline Monaghan County Council's policy for the use of Social Media. This details personal and professional responsibilities for the participation in or use of social media as part of an employee's job or in a professional capacity as a Council employee.

This policy aims to:

- Represent an official and consistent position that governs the use of social media by employees, representatives and third parties acting on behalf of the local authority.
- Assist the local authority to adopt a responsible approach to managing the usage of social media platforms and channels for the purpose of conducting local authority business.
- Highlight the potential risks associated with social media usage and address these for the purpose of employer and employee protection.
- Ensure that Monaghan County Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media.
- Provide employees with standards of acceptable use as they engage in conversations or interactions using digital media for official, professional, and personal use.
- Ensure that employees operate within existing policies, guidelines, and relevant legislation.

2. Authority and Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all employees (permanent and temporary), independent contractors, consultants, and other persons or entities that use Monaghan County Council's digital resources, during and outside of working hours.

The policy also applies to the personal use of social media by employees of Monaghan County Council, where in the course of such personal use employees identify themselves or are identified as employees of Monaghan County Council and/or engage in discussion on matters relevant to the business of the Council.

By having a written policy on acceptable use of social media in the workplace, Monaghan County Council shall endeavour to;

- Provide clear guidelines for employees on General Acceptable Usage;
- Protect itself against liability for the actions of its employees and in turn enhance the reputation of the Council;
- Support compliance with any relating legislation;
- Support the employer's duty of care to the employees in the workplace.

3. Definition of Social Media

3.1 Social Media is defined as any online forum, internal or external to the organisation, which is used to publish information that can be accessed by people or organisations internal or external to the Council. This information can be in a variety of formats such as documents, photographs, videos, personal observations, live commentaries, blogs, or any other type of digital content.

4. Context

4.1 The use of Social Media does not replace traditional forms of corporate communications but complements existing communication methods very effectively. Social Media can contribute to the promotion and awareness of the Council and can be used to broadcast information about services. Social Media allows the Council to expand its communications network and to engage more effectively with the public.

Social Media enables Monaghan County Council to:

- Disseminate information in an efficient manner to improve customer service;
- Listen to our clients and understand our audiences better;
- Ask questions and gain feedback;
- Gauge influence;
- Build on a public profile;
- Disseminate information about Council services and policy.

Monaghan County Council considers the use of social media platforms to be a valuable tool that can add significant value to achieving the aims and objectives of the local authority. The approval for additional social media channels will be based on the availability of sufficient human and technical resources to support their usage and management.

The specifics of this policy and associated guidelines aim to ensure compliance and effective use of social media tools.

5. Acceptable use of Social Media

5.1 Access to Social Media accounts

Access to all social media accounts or activity will be restricted to the Communications Department. Nominated senior staff members within individual sections who have been granted permission from the Director of Service to use social media accounts shall abide by the terms and conditions of each individual social media platform and

must always provide the Communications department with access to these social media accounts.

5.2 Guidance for authorised users of social media

When posting on behalf of Monaghan County Council, senior staff members who have been granted permission to use social media accounts should: -

- Accept responsibility for his/her words and actions.
- As an online spokesperson, ensure that posts are completely accurate, are not misleading, and do not reveal confidential information.
- Know that once material is published, it is essentially part of a permanent record and may remain publicly viewable despite later attempts to delete it.
- Keep records (including screenshots) of any interactions of a sensitive nature.
- When uploading content to Social Media sites, be aware that it may be available to the media and general public regardless of whether a profile is public or private.
- Do not post material that is inaccurate, unlawful, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, abusive, slanderous, hateful, biased embarrassing to any other person or entity.
- Remember that online statements can be held to the same legal standards as traditional media communications.
- It is important for employees to remember that local posts can have global reach.

All official Social Media accounts and associated content remain the sole responsibility of Monaghan County Council.

5.3 Personal Use of Social Media

Employees posting from their own personal accounts can still affect the reputation of the organisation. Employees shall ensure that any mention of Monaghan County Council, employees, customers or matters relevant to the business of the Council in personal contributions to online sites does not bring the organisation into disrepute or give the impression that the views expressed are those of the Council. Activity relating to social media occurring outside of working hours is subject to the same consideration regardless of when the activity takes place.

Employees shall not assume that posts or comments made online will remain private given the nature of the internet. The freedom of expression enjoyed by an employee shall be balanced against the right of Monaghan County Council to protect its reputation and to observe its duty of care to its employees.

Employees are expected to conduct themselves in a manner which does not bring the individual or the council into disrepute, for example bullying, harassment or discrimination of another person.

If publishing content online relevant to Monaghan County Council in a personal capacity the individual should consider the use of a disclaimer such as: “The postings on this site are my own personal view and do not represent Monaghan County Council’s positions, strategies or opinions”.

6. Content Guidelines

6.1 Content Submission

Individual Sections are encouraged to provide material which illustrates the many essential services the council provides. The content should be approved by the Head of Section or in some cases the Director of Services. The content must be accurate, not misleading or reveal confidential information. All Social Media content should be emailed to the Communications Team at webupdates@monaghancoco.ie. Guidelines are available in **Appendix 1** at the end of this document.

All Monaghan County Council Social Media content shall meet the acceptable standard for council communication and conduct. The following are examples of ‘Unacceptable Content’.

- Inappropriate language or content;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, disability, age, race, religious belief, or membership of the Traveller Community;
- Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- Illegal activity or encouragement of same;
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems;
- Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party;
- Content that violates the Council’s Policy and Procedure for the Protection and Safeguarding of Children;
- Content that expresses political bias;
- Content in breach of the principles of the Council’s Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure.

6.2 Proprietary and Confidential Information

Proprietary information shall not be exchanged, discussed, or referred to on social media sites even in private messages between site members who have authorised access to the information.

Examples of such information include:

- Personal data as defined under GDPR and the Data Protection Acts;
- Financial information (e.g. salaries, fees paid, contract details);
- Discussion on any aspect of council business or activity particularly issues subject to administrative, legal, financial, or regulatory processes;
- Sensitive commercial information submitted as part of tender processes;
- Intellectual property such as drawings, designs, maps of infrastructure;
- Information about citizens or identifiable groups;
- Information about employees (e.g. sick leave, performance etc).

7. Ownership and Management of Social Media Accounts

The Communications Department under the direction of the Director of Corporate Services, is responsible for the ownership and management of the council's social media accounts. Only nominated senior staff members who have been granted permission from the Director of Service employees shall publish content on Social Media accounts. Social media activity is integrated with the Council's Communications strategy.

The council is aware that it may be held liable for acts of bullying, harassment or discrimination carried out by employees on social media sites, even if the acts are carried out without the council's consent or knowledge. Acts can include defamation of customers, third parties or employees.

All Council social media accounts associated content and contacts remain the sole property of Monaghan County Council and remain so even after termination of employment.

8. Monitoring and Reporting procedure for Social Media

It is the policy of Monaghan County Council to monitor social media content on behalf of the Council to ensure that content is appropriate.

Personal use of Social Media by employees will not usually be monitored by the council. However, monitoring may be conducted where a matter is brought to the attention of the council with respect to employee conduct or anything which may harm the reputation of the council.

8.1 Reporting Suspected Misuse of Social Media on behalf of the Council

All employees, third parties and other persons that use the Council's digital resources, during and outside of working hours have a responsibility to report suspected misuse of Social Media on behalf of the Council. Any suspected misuse shall be reported to the Director of Corporate Services.

8.2 Reporting perceived misuse of Social Media by an Employee

Any perceived misuse of social media by an employee, shall be reported to the appropriate Line Manager, in accordance with the Council's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

8.3 Reporting Personal concerns relating to Social Media

Any personal concerns, relating to Social Media, shall be reported to the Human Resources Department.

8.4 Reporting Feedback on Council services communicated via Social Media

Monaghan County Council welcomes relevant feedback in relation to the services of the Council communicated via social media. Feedback shall be reported to the Director of Corporate Services.

9. Freedom of Information and Data Protection

Records created, maintained, and stored by Monaghan County Council are subject to a range of legislation including Freedom of Information (FOI) and Data Protection. Records management of social media content shall comply with the National Records Retention Policy and any other relevant records retention policies.

10. Security

All social media platforms are subject to security threats and risk of data breaches. As such, employees must not use a Council email address or password when setting up personal Social Media accounts and must not associate a Council email address or password with any personal social media account or other platform.

11. Copyright and other Legal Issues

Employees must comply with the law in relation to copyright (in particular, the Copyright and Related Rights Act 2000). When using content from third parties, for example, government departments and other public bodies, the content should be attributed to its original source.

12. Social Media in an emergency

In certain situations, it may be critical for Monaghan County Council to provide timely and accurate information directly to the public in an emerging or active emergency. In the event of an emergency, early warning and public notices will be relayed via National and Local Broadcasting, emergency helpline services, internet services and Social Media.

13. Social Media comments

The council's Social Media sites are not monitored 24/7 and the council will not be able to reply to individual messages and comments received. However, the council will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed on to the relevant people.

The council retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Racist, hateful, sexist, homophobic, slanderous, insulting, or life-threatening messages
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Aggressive, coarse, violent, obscene, or pornographic comments
- Serious, unproven, or inaccurate accusations against individuals or organisations
- Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright

- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Unintelligible or irrelevant messages
- Any other message that the council feel will not add to the normal flow of debate/discussion

Monaghan County Council is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by any subscriber in any forum. Opinions expressed in comments on Monaghan County Council social media forums do not necessarily represent those of the Council.

All comments, once posted, become the property of Monaghan County Council and the council reserves the right to reproduce, distribute, publish, display, or edit same.

14. Policy Links

This Social Media policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies: -

- Code of Conduct for Employees
- Staff Data Protection Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Grievance Policy and Procedure
- Photography and Video Policy
- Acceptable use Policy
- Any other policies relating to online/electronic communications and the use of IT within the workplace.

15. Monitoring and Review

Monaghan County Council shall monitor the implementation of and compliance with this policy and will review it on a regular basis. This policy may be amended from time to time as is deemed necessary. Employees will be notified of any changes.

16. Infringements of Policy

Any breach of this policy can result in disciplinary action, up to and including to and including termination of employment in the case of more serious breaches in line with the Council's Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.

17. Guidelines on submitting Social Media content to the Communications Team

17.1 Content

All Social Media content should be emailed to the Communications Team at webupdates@monaghancoco.ie. The content must be accurate, not misleading or reveal confidential information. While even the most diligent individuals can make spelling and grammar mistakes, communicating with the public on behalf of the council places an onus on staff to keep any such errors to a minimum.

The content should be approved by the Head of Section or in certain cases the Director of Services before submitting the proofed content to the Communications Team. The content can be supported by images/graphics or when required created by the Communications Team.

The council uses the following Social Media Platforms: - Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn. While in most cases there is no limit to the text content, in the case of X (Twitter) the maximum number of characters including spaces is 280 characters (between 40 – 70 words). It is advisable to limit the text to five or six lines for all other platforms.

- Monaghan County Council Facebook Page - <https://www.facebook.com/Monaghancoco/>
- Monaghan County Council Instagram page - https://www.instagram.com/monaghan_coco/
- Monaghan County Council Twitter (X)- <https://twitter.com/MonaghanCoCo>
- Monaghan County Council LinkedIn - <https://bit.ly/3NrvjmD>

17.2 Content Requirements

Content

All content should be composed using plain English or Irish, using an appropriate tone, and should be respectful at all times.

Photographs and Video

Quality images are a vital part of Social Media posts. If the individual business unit is supplying their own imagery, photographs should be high resolution jpegs. Images should be separate files, not embedded into pdf or MS word documents. Please note that images with a lot of text in them do not perform well on Social Media. Images where possible should include alternative text for accessibility purposes.

When taking photographs, the use of a high-quality camera or camera phone is recommended, ensuring there is good light, and that the natural light is behind the camera to avoid any glare. All images/videos should be emailed to the Communications Team at webupdates@monaghancoco.ie

To comply with GDPR and Data Protection, Monaghan County Council must obtain the consent of individuals prior to the taking or publishing of images. 'Consent' in respect of all photographs and videos taken which contain personal data should be received before submitting images/videos for publishing on Social Media. Further information is available in the council's 'Photography & Video Policy' on the Staff Portal under Data Protection.

17.3 Social Media Co-ordinator

It is advisable that individual sections nominate a Social Media Co-ordinator. The necessary Social Media training can be organised for staff if required.