

## PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS GUIDANCE NOTE 4

### Using Social Media

#### Version 01.01

The [RTPI Code of Professional Conduct](#) (the Code) sets out the required standards of professional conduct and practice expected of RTPI Members. Its purpose is to protect and guide practitioners, and to serve as a tool to maintain public trust in the profession. All members, irrespective of their class of membership, are required to adhere to its five Core Principles:

- Honesty and integrity
- Professional competence
- Independent professional judgment
- Professional practice and duties
- Professional behaviour and respect

This guidance has been prepared to support RTPI Members with their professional responsibilities with particular regard to (1) Distinguishing between personal and professional social media accounts, as well as providing (2) General guidelines.

The relevant parts of the Code are within clauses 1, 22, 25, 26 and 28 which state:

*1. Members are required to uphold the highest standards of professional ethics and must act with honesty and integrity throughout their career.*

*22. Members must not make derogatory comparisons with the services available from others engaged in planning work and must not misrepresent the services available from their own practices. All advertising must be legal, decent, honest and truthful and must avoid exaggeration.*

*25. Members must at all times act in a way which promotes and encourages equity and inclusion and the principles of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and must not discriminate on the basis of any other status.*

*26. Members must not engage in or display any bullying, harassing and victimising behaviours or actions and should challenge either directly or by reporting any inappropriate behaviours that they witness.*

*28. Members must at all times conduct themselves in a manner that does not prejudice their professional status or the reputation of the Chartered Institute.*

Social media allow us to directly engage with fellow professionals, stakeholders and the public; however, an increasing number of complaints are arising as a result of profiles on, and posts to, social media accounts. As a result it is important for

**Approved for use October 2024**

Registered charity number: 262865 Scottish registered charity number: SC 037841

members to ensure that their use of social media accords with the Code of Professional Conduct.

### **1. Distinguishing between personal and professional social media accounts**

Many members will have personal social media accounts and those that they use for professional activities. As an example, LinkedIn may be used to promote professional achievements and to engage with a wider professional group, and this account will normally provide details of your professional memberships and affiliations. As a result, posts and “likes” have the potential to impact on the profession and the Institute. Members may also have personal accounts in, for example, Facebook, which are used for friends and family and in which members may sometimes make more familiar or discourteous statements. However if this account identifies a connection with the RTPI then this also has the potential to impact on the profession and the Institute.

**CASE STUDY EXAMPLE:** An RTPI Member was a member of a public Facebook group within their personal Facebook page and alluded to the use of drugs in a post made on this page. A complaint was made that this was unprofessional behaviour. This matter was not investigated as it occurred more than two years before the complaint was made, and there was no connection to the Institute on the member’s profile, however the member was advised to be careful about posts made on public Facebook pages.

The issue of “likes” has also arisen and members should review posts and consider the perceived perceptions about liking someone else’s comment which may cause concern to others or suggest that impropriety has taken place. Members may consider that a “like” shows a general affinity to the situation that another professional is commenting on, but others may see it as a statement of agreement to everything that is said in the post. Care should therefore be taken even with showing some agreement or a “like” to posts. Members should consider how a “like” might be perceived by others and whether it might offend.

**CASE STUDY EXAMPLE:** A member “liked” a post put out by another planner which stated “Curious that Parish Councillors object to a development in a private capacity but don’t declare prejudicial interest at PC meeting”. This matter was not investigated but the member was advised to be more cautious when using social media.

Risks arise from the blurring of the lines between personal activity and corporate or professional activity on social media. Even when not at work or representing the RTPI, all members have a duty not to bring the Institute into disrepute.

**CASE STUDY EXAMPLE (from another professional institute):** A professional posted a photo on a personal Facebook page with a caption “Enjoying a drink after a successful day at work in which we gained new clients”. Unfortunately, a friend of a friend who was a journalist was able to view this, and they identified the “clients” in the photo. As a result the journalist published an article identifying that the clients

***Approved for use October 2024***

*Registered charity number: 262865 Scottish registered charity number: SC 037841*

had changed their advisors which had been confidential up until that point. The employee lost their job as a result of this post.

## **2. General guidelines**

Your employer may also have guidelines or restrictions on how you might use their social media accounts and personal ones. Members should therefore also ensure they are aware of any requirements their employer may have and how this might impact on their use of social media.

It is also important to remember that once something is published on the web it is almost impossible to have it totally removed, and a member's social media activity and profile are likely to be checked by a future employer; therefore caution should always be taken to ensure that posts are accurate and true, and are not offensive to anyone.

RTPI members should bear in mind the following guidelines and consider which might apply to their circumstances:

- Promote the values of the planning profession: social media are a way of promoting the values and views of the Institute. Anything published on social media should be consistent with RTPI values and views and so remember the Code's five core principles.
- Think before you post: If in doubt, don't publish. Even if quickly deleted, publishing something live can be seen by many users or indexed by search engines instantly.
- Do not plagiarise: outright copying, quoting or the use of an image without attribution are easily uncovered and potentially criminal offences. Check copyright of images and credit if necessary.
- Do not discuss personal or confidential information: while social media blurs the concept of internal and external communications, always make sure any material published on social media is suitable for the wider public.
- Be honest and use common sense: take responsibility for use of social media in a corporate capacity, so if in doubt about posting anything, first consult with your communications team for advice.
- Racist, sexist, or otherwise offensive or objectionable language will not be tolerated.
- The terms of use of each social media platform must be respected: their guidelines clearly spell out the legal limits of their service and should be followed.