



Essential Reference Paper B

East Herts Council

Social Media Guidelines

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SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

1. Background

- 1.1 Social media opens up the opportunity to engage with customers in a faster and more convenient way. It allows the council to share news with a large number of people immediately and provides the opportunity for instant two way communication.
- 1.2 There are a range of channels available to help shape and direct communication and this policy provides guidance about the use of social media, for both business and personal use. This policy links with the council's ICT User Policies and the Officer Code of Conduct.
- 1.3 The council encourages employees to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media as part of their work. It is an important part of how the organisation communicates and promotes its services to the community.

2. Business Use (On Behalf of the Council)

2.1 Social media access for business use

The communications team has overall responsibility for the council's accounts and will work with all service areas to ensure relevant news and alerts are shared in a timely manner. If employees would like to use the current social media channels to share news and relevant information, access and training can be arranged through the communications team.

- 2.1.1 Employees wishing to set-up new social media profiles or networking sites on work related projects should seek authorisation from the communications team and attend appropriate training. The council must have an oversight of all social media channels being used for council purposes. The council must also ensure there are adequate levels of governance on all social channels being used. If an employee with a social media profile leaves the council, they must alert Communications team to transfer the log in details or close the account.

2.2 Posting on social media for business

It is essential to use social media in a way that helps to protect and strengthen the council's reputation. Damage to reputation,

especially so publicly, can take a long time to repair and result in a lack of trust from stakeholders.

2.2.1 When posting or replying, remember to check the Social Media Guidelines (see appendix) and please bear in mind the following:

- Consider the content – it should not suggest an opinion, political preference or confidential information
- Consider the benefits- Is it something that will inform, benefit or support stakeholders?
- Consider wider news- does this conflict with other messages out there? If there are elections, does it conflict with the rules of purdah?
- Consider the implications- if it raises questions, can these be answered?
- Consider the wider organisation- Is anyone else in the organisation sharing or working on anything that may be a conflict?
- Consider the audience- what channels will they be using? Is the information clear and written in plain English without jargon?
- If responding to a question- is the information available to answer the question fully? If not, respond explaining that the enquiry is being looked into and try to give a realistic deadline for the answer.
- Consider the tone- if comments are abusive, respond with factual information to answer their question and contact the Communications team

2.3 Social media connections

The council may choose to 'follow', 'like' or otherwise other organisations and individuals using social media. This enables the council to view what other social media users are saying and, where appropriate, share their content or make comments. There is no fixed approach to who the council will have in its network but, as a guide, the audiences identified in the Communication Strategy will be considered as potential connections.

2.3.1 Some general watch outs when establishing connections are:

- Be aware of connecting to political or politically motivated groups
- Should a connected organisation or body make public statements (through either social media or any other channel) that are directly contradictory to the council ethos or priorities,

employees should carefully consider if they wish to remain connected

- Should a connected profile/page/site become a platform for conflict or abuse, employees should remove the organisation from their network

2.4 Social media and recruitment

Unless 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, managers should only conduct searches, either themselves or through a third party, on social media when these are directly relevant to the applicants skills or claims that they have made in the recruitment process. For example:

- A prospective employee may claim that they have used social media in their previous job (for example as a publicity tool)
- A prospective employee's social media use may be directly relevant to a claim made in their application (for example, if they run a blog based around a skill in which they claim to be proficient)
- A candidate applies via a social media channel

2.5 Using channels to drive engagement and provide a service

Each social media channel is used differently. Employees should familiarise themselves with a channel before uploading content to it. For example, Instagram requires picture content led but relies on hashtags to drive engagement and awareness (see social media guidelines). The communications team can provide guidance on the best way to use these channels before sharing content.

2.5.1 Think about the tone of voice, for example Twitter's core audience is 16- 34 but is growing in popularity with the over 65s, bear this diversity in mind when posting to ensure content is appropriate for all stakeholders.

2.5.2 Make sure information is frequent, interesting and correct. Stakeholders follow a page to receive regular updates that are of interest to them. They also expect a swift response so channels must be monitored frequently and questions should be answered. If an answer is not immediately available, provide regular updates and a realistic timeline.

2.5.3 Try to personalise messages by signing a name at the end to avoid being seen as a faceless and unhelpful organisation, and always read questions carefully to ensure the issue is fully dealt with. If a customer becomes rude or aggressive, remain calm, be understanding and try to offer factual answers. If the aggression remains, stop replying and seek advice from Communications team. Remember, anything that would not be appropriate to say in a phone or face-to-face conversation with customers of the council, would also not be appropriate on social media.

2.5.4 If commenting on another page or joining another conversation, be aware of the topics being discussed, anything with a political agenda or not fitting with the culture of the council should be avoided.

2.6 Hours of use

Employees are not expected to monitor and respond to social media enquiries outside of their working hours, unless in an emergency situation. In an emergency, nominated employees will be required to use social media to share news and updates.

2.7 Crisis management

From time to time a crisis may occur. If a crisis is developing, contact the Communications team for advice. They will contact the relevant service for more information or the executive team if there is something they should be addressing.

2.7.1 To identify if the council's social media account is involved in a crisis, consider the following points:

- Are a number of stakeholders repeatedly talking about one subject negatively?
- Is the subject being discussed highly emotive or a high reputational risk?
- Is the subject legal in nature or has negative legal connotations?
- Have the press picked up on it and are reporting it negatively?

2.7.2 The Communications team will monitor the situation, posting factual information if necessary/available and will contact other users to advise them of the situation and where to act. If the crisis takes place across multiple social channels, this can be monitored using Hootsuite.

2.7.3 Avoiding the situation or deleting posts can be viewed as negative, so if there is no information and situation is escalating, simply post something that lets users know the situation is being investigated. If responses become aggressive to do not respond.

2.8 Code of conduct

The Officer Code of Conduct sets out the standards of conduct required of council employees. These standards apply equally to conversations undertaken through the use of online media as they do to face-to-face conversations. Employees should treat anyone they speak to online with respect, comments should not be personal attacks, rude or disrespectful and should comply with equality laws, nothing sexist, racist, ageist or homophobic. Employees should familiarise themselves with the requirements of the Officer Code of Conduct.

2.8.2 All employees are required to adhere to this 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 organisation, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.

3. Personal Use

3.1 Using council ICT

The council allows limited personal use of ICT resources, including the internet. Please see the ICT User Policies for further information. Employees accessing social media sites on their personal devices should only do so in their own time e.g. lunch time or before or after their agreed working hours.

3.1.1 Employees should not use council ICT equipment to use social networking sites inappropriately or to create new channels that contain council information without agreement from the Communications team.

3.1.2 The council reserves the right to monitor employees' internet usage and, where possible, will endeavor to inform an employee when this will happen and the reasons for it. The council considers that valid reasons for checking an employee's internet usage include suspicions that the employee has:

- Been spending an excessive amount of time viewing websites that are not work-related
- Using the internet for cyber bullying

- Acted in a way that could damage the reputation of the council or breaches confidentiality
- Accessing websites deemed inappropriate as detailed in the ICT Internet Use Policy.

If appropriate, disciplinary action may be taken in line with the council's Disciplinary Policy.

3.2 Using social media for personal use

The council recognises that many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity. While they are not acting on behalf of the organisation, employees must be aware that they can damage the organisation if they are recognised as being one of our employees.

3.2.1 Employees should be aware that social networking websites are a public forum and should always assume that entries on any channel are public and can be seen by everyone, this could include a colleague, a manager, a Councillor and customers. No inappropriate or confidential information should be shared on any social media channel. The council must ensure confidentiality and reputation are protected, along with ensuring that customers are safeguarded.

3.2.2 The council requires employees using social networking sites to consider the Officers' Code of Conduct and not:

- Comment on the work of the council such that it could bring the authority into disrepute
- Conduct yourself in a way that could bring the authority into disrepute
- Allow your interactions to damage working relationships between employees, Councillors and any of the Councils' residents, clients or customers
- Allow your personal opinions to be considered to be the opinions of the council

3.2.3 If employees are commenting on a post, or posting something themselves that is related to the council, or a council project, they should make it clear that they are an employee of the council. The council encourages employees to engage with and share news from the council but should make it clear that they are not speaking on behalf of the council. It is generally advised to add something along the lines of 'all comments and opinions are my own' to your bio to ensure there is no confusion.

3.2.4 The council will not actively monitor the personal social media profiles of employees however, if the council becomes aware of any activity breaching the above, an investigation may include a review of activities on social media.

4.0 Legal Considerations and Compliance

4.1 Legal Framework

Any form of communication has the possibility of being misunderstood and social media is no more or no less vulnerable. The following laws apply with online participation of any kind:

- Data Protection Act 1998
- Defamation Act 1996
- Human rights Act 1998
- Equality Act 2010
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
- Regulatory and investigatory Powers Act 2000
- Telecommunications (Lawful Business Practice) (Interception of Communications) Regulations 2000

4.2 Data Protection

People post information on social media about all sorts of things, including, for instance, political opinions. In many cases, their username, their biographical details or their link to their website makes their identity traceable.

4.2.1 The DPA allows employees to process personal data as an individual if it is for purely domestic purposes. This is to allow employees to keep an address book or similar. If employees are engaging in social networking for work purposes, or for research, careful consideration of the DPA is required. The council's Information Manager must be notified of Social Media in use and its purpose, in case the use must be included within the council's notification to the Information Commissioner. For example:

- Referring to someone as, for instance, @JoeBloggs identifies him or her as an individual. Mentioning someone in a Tweet means employees are transferring personally identifiable information out of the European Union if the social media site is hosted outside it,
- Using a Twitter client, which will keep a subset of people employees follow on their computer, may contravene the DPA, especially if their tweets (or others' tweets about them) mention sensitive information and if they have set their Tweets to be protected.

As a result:

- Do not publish the personal data of individuals.
- Do not re-publish the personal data of individuals even when they have chosen to publish it.
- Seek advice before analysing or using any posts on social media as this may be regarded and need consideration under the processing of personal data.

See the Council's Data Protection Policy and Information Security Policy for further guidance.

4.2.2 Employees must also be aware of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which will apply in the UK from 25 May 2018 and applies to anyone who has day-to-day responsibility for data protection. The GDPR covers a wide range of personal identifiers, such as IP addresses, that will constitute personal data, reflecting changes in technology and the way organisations collect information about people. It applies to both automated personal data and to manual filing systems where personal data are accessible according to specific criteria. You can assume that if you hold information that falls within the scope of the DPA, it will also fall within the scope of the GDPR. Further information on how this will apply to social media users will be available in due course.

4.3 Libel

Employees should not publish an untrue statement about a person that is damaging to their reputation or allow someone else to publish something libellous on the council's website or social media platforms – if employees see such a statement they must take prompt action to remove it by contacting the Communications team.

4.4 Copyright

Placing images or text on any East Herts website from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos) breaches copyright. Employees should avoid publishing anything they are unsure about, or seek permission in advance.

4.5 Bias and Pre-determination

Employees should avoid publishing anything that might suggest they do not have an open mind about a matter/decision they may be involved in determining. For example if employees are involved in determining planning or licensing applications or other decisions, the decision runs the risk of being invalidated.

4.6 Obscene material

Publishing anything that people would consider obscene is a criminal offence.

5.0 Policy Review and Amendment

5.1 This Policy will be reviewed within three years or sooner in line with legislation and best practice to reflect the best possible level of support and management.

6.0 Appendix

6.1 Social Media guidelines

Social media opens up the opportunity to engage with stakeholders in a faster and more convenient way. It allows the council to share news with a large number of people immediately and provides the opportunity for instant two way communication. It also allows you to create character and give an insight into who you are.

There are four key channels that the Council will use to engage stakeholders and share news, each with their own format for doing this, these are- Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

6.2 Using Social media

- Each channel will have its own content specifications, for example Instagram is focused on images and Twitter requires short updates, only allowing 140 characters per post, but the general principles remain the same. Social media channels should be used to share updates, information and drive engagement.
- First thing to do is to think about the type of content you want to share to ensure you are using the right channel. Is it a larger piece of text- would this fit better on Facebook or can you just tweet a link? Is it an image- would it be best on Instagram or is the image of a fly tip, in which case it might be better on Twitter.
- Think about who you want to reach. If you want to share details of grants for new businesses, this might be best placed on LinkedIn.
- What do you want people to do with the content- if you want them to share it then ask them to share, if you want them to sign up to something then add the link to do so.
- Think about the people you want to engage with- follow them, like their posts, share their posts and contact them directly using @ followed by their user name to tag them in posts. If you reach out to them, they are more likely to engage with you.

- To get your posts noticed think about hashtags, these will make your post searchable and allow you to be part of other conversations. For example, if you are posting about bin collections use #bin #bincollection #rubbish.
- Think about who you are speaking to when you post. Don't use jargon they won't understand, don't use acronyms they are not familiar with and use the right tone of voice. Social media is conversational so keep your tone informal.
- Use social media to monitor what is being said about the council. Have a look at local press pages to see what they are interested in and they are saying about you. Keep an eye on trends- what are other councils doing, what are residents interested in, what else is happening in your area? Can you add to these conversations or is there something you should be aware of?
- Remember that everyone can see what you post, even if you delete it there may still be a record of it. Don't get drawn into an argument or send anything abusive. If someone contacts you directly, respond with factual information or ask them to DM you, if it becomes aggressive- stop posting. If in doubt, don't post.
- Don't post items for the sake of it but do try and post frequently enough to get your posts noticed and keep followers interested. Think about what your stakeholders want to hear- what will help them relate to you, what council work will stakeholders want to hear about?
- Think about when you are posting- people are most likely to check their social media accounts before or on their way to work, before they go to bed and on a Sunday evening, so these are the best times to try and catch the attention of your audience.
- Don't divulge personal information- your own or anyone else's. If you are being asked to comment on individual cases, ask them to direct message you to discuss out of the public sphere.
- Be aware of wider news stories- there may be trends you can tap into with your posts. There may also be times to avoid making announcements if your news clashes with a wider news story.
- Where possible, always try to respond to questions as quickly as you can, even if it is just to provide a realistic timescale for a full answer. Just ignoring people can make the situation worse.

6.3 Dealing with different channels

6.3.1 Twitter

- Twitter is used to share short news snippets and updates to a wide range of users
- The core audience is 16-34 but is growing significantly with users over 65

- Twitter can be used to start or join in with wider conversations, either by using a hashtag or by tagging someone in the post
- If you need to share something privately, use DM (direct message). The message will then only be seen by you and the person you are speaking to
- Twitter only allows 140 characters per post so keep it snappy
- You can share images, GIFs, videos and links to illustrate your point
- You can create a Twitter Poll that will run for 24 hours to garner opinions
- You can pin a key tweet to the top of your page so that this will be the first tweet anyone visiting your page sees- useful for sharing links so that people can easily find them
- Platforms such as Hootsuite can be used to schedule posts to allow for a regular flow of information and to monitor what is being said
- Twitter also allows you to see what is trending and what the most popular hashtags are, allowing you to join these conversations if relevant and to see what people are interested in when drafting posts.

6.3.2 Facebook

- Initially designed as a way to keep in contact, Facebook is now an ecommerce tool for small business and an advertising tool for larger businesses
- The average user is now over 35, with younger users switching to Instagram
- The additional space and no character limit allows for bigger features, but be careful not to make posts too wordy or you'll lose the audience's attention
- You can share images, GIFs, videos and links
- For a small amount of money, you can boost posts to ensure they are reaching your key demographic, even if they don't follow you
- The cover photo on the page can be used to promote your campaigns, update regularly to keep it interesting
- There are a number of groups that can be followed on Facebook, for example 'spotted in', but read the content on their page before joining to ensure you know what you are following. Some groups will be private, to join you will need to send a request and wait for it to be approved.
- There is a private messenger function and, unlike twitter, this can be used to contact those who don't follow you as well.
- There is also a feature for live streaming- Facebook Live- this is a great feature for sharing interviews or events etc, just be careful what you are sharing as it is live

- Facebook have recently added Facebook stories, allowing you to create short videos that will only stay live for 24 hours.
- Remember Facebook business pages can only be managed by a personal account, if you try to set up an additional account to run this e.g. a Press Officer account, it will be deleted.

6.3.3 Instagram

- Instagram is an image sharing tool to bring together groups of like-minded people or those looking for inspiration.
- The core audience is 18-29
- The key to this is to share stand out images that interest people and stop the scroll!
- When you're out and about, think about what you are doing and what is around you – would this make an interesting image for Instagram, would your followers want to see this.
- Just like Twitter and Facebook you can like posts, comment and tag other users in posts. You can also re-gram posts and send posts to your followers privately.
- Use of hashtag is the key to getting your images noticed by those beyond your followers. There is no limit on the number of hashtags you can use on Instagram so have a look what hashtags other people posting similar images are using and add them to your posts to help get them noticed.
- Instagram will also recommend posts you may like, based on who you follow and posts you like. This can help you find new contacts and provide inspiration.
- Your images should give an insight into your organisation. Instagram can be used to curate your look and define your personality. It can add character and give an insight into who you really are.
- Instagram has recently introduced Instagram stories, allowing you to share short videos with followers that will only be live for 24 hours. This provides the opportunity to share behind the scenes content that you might not want to live permanently on your page.

6.3.4 LinkedIn

- LinkedIn is a business networking tool that allows users to connect to people and companies of professional interest, search for jobs and share best practice and advice
- The core audience is 30-64
- As with the other channels, you can like and share posts and send private messages.
- You can also join and follow groups of interest
- LinkedIn has a business focus so should not be used to just share generic updates on the council. Posts shared need to be business

related, such as job posts, networking opportunities and information useful for businesses.

- Connections should also be business focused, for the council this could be businesses based in East Herts and the surrounding area or those looking to move into the area.
- LinkedIn also recommends connections to you. To ensure you are seeing the right people, make sure your profile is up to date and has relevant information about who you are, where you are based etc.
- LinkedIn is also a great place to share successful case studies, to demonstrate how the council can help businesses.
- The Pulse section of LinkedIn is also a useful tool, it allows you to see what the most popular posts are and what people are interested in. This is helpful when considering your own posts.
- LinkedIn can be used to gather opinions, for example if you are thinking about adding a new service, ask your connections what they think and if they would use it.