

Social Media Policy

London Borough of Barnet

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Social Media Policy

POLICY NAME	Social Media Policy		
Document Description	Policy which outlines the council's policy towards the use of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Yammer etc for work purposes by staff etc, but which does not cover communications with the public by social media		
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1) Introduction

Social media is the term commonly given to websites, online tools and other information communication technologies which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing opinions, information, knowledge and interests. As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks, encouraging participation and engagement.

Barnet Council is already active on social media with the Corporate Communications Team responsible for updating and maintaining the council's corporate Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Youtube accounts. (See appendix 1).

Greater use of social media will enable the council to take its message to its customers. Social media has proven highly successful and popular when used in connection with a major council event or related media issues. During the May 2010 General Election, Twitter was extensively used by the council to update residents on the counting process, including real-time images; giving a further insight to residents of how, where and when their votes were collected and then counted.

A further successful application of social media through Facebook and Twitter was during the severe winter weather in recent years, when the council provided followers with up to the minute weather forecasts, latest road information and details of when the council would be gritting.

2) Purpose

This policy provides a framework for the effective, compliant and secure use of social media to promote and develop the council's objectives, services and achievements; providing information about council services to service users. It provides guidance to employees on best practice when using the medium in a professional capacity whilst protecting the reputation of the council and allowing the safe and controlled roll-out of social media across the organisation.

This Policy aims to: -

- Embrace the possibilities for customer engagement and reach of social media channels while protecting the reputation of the council.
- Ensure that all social media used to communicate with the public, partners or other stakeholders by all council staff within their professional duties are aligned to the Corporate Communications Strategy.
- Ensure that all council social media sites are easily identifiable as originating from Barnet Council and correctly apply the council's logo and brand guidelines.
- Ensure that any council communication through social media meets legal requirements.
- Prevent the unauthorised use of Barnet Council online channels and branding, whether by third party or by council staff.
- Provide appropriate guidelines to ensure the council is not exposed to legal or governance risks.

3) Scope and Responsibilities

- a) This policy applies to everyone. The policy applies to anyone engaging in social media communications and interactions on behalf of the council; this includes permanent, contract and temporary employees of the council Re, CSG, NSL. We refer to all these as “Everyone” in this policy. This policy does not cover communications with individual members of the public through text, IM and other social media methods social media communications as these are contained in the council’s Communications with the Public by Text and Social Media Policy
- b) All users should bear in mind that information they share through forms of social media, even if they are on private spaces, e.g. through personal messaging is still subject to:
 - Data Protection Act 1998
 - Freedom of Information Act 2000
 - Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- c) Users of social media on behalf of the council MUST adhere to the rules in section 5a and 6 of this policy. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action being taken.

4) Development

All social media activity should run through the council’s main accounts unless a service provides an extensive and comprehensive business case that details the usefulness of a service specific social media account.

Council services that wish to regularly use social media can contact the Communications team to gain access to the social media management tool, Hootsuite. This will allow them to post message on any account that the council owns. All messages posted by service will be verified by the Communications team.

5) Social Media - Guidelines and Rules for Use

The following guidelines and rules for using social media are issued in this policy to ensure that sites are used effectively as part of a wider communications structure and that their use does not expose the council to security risks or reputational damage.

a) **Council users of social media must adhere to the following rules:**

- Be civil, polite and relevant.
- Do not swear.
- Do not post content copied from elsewhere, for which you do not own the copyright.
- Do not publicise your, or anyone else’s, personal information. Do not reveal or post any personal data, such as contact details unless you have the explicit consent of the individual concerned. This includes information which could identify an individual without actually naming them.
- Do not impersonate someone else.

- Do not engage in activities on the internet that might bring the council into disrepute and may lead to disciplinary action.
- Do not reveal information which is confidential to the council – consult your manager if you are unsure.
- Do not post comments or materials which are party political.
- Do not link to, or indeed post, messages that are unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive.
- Do not use council branding or logos on your personal accounts.
- If you are running an on-going campaign, tell people how you will use the medium, what information you will be publishing and over what time period.
- Each service will be required to appoint a moderator.
- Accounts hold a full audit trail of usage and may be monitored for activity.

b) **Use by Members of the Council**

The council will support the use of social media by Members in cabinet roles. It will provide advice on the establishment of an account by any Member of the Council. Council officers cannot support the use of any medium for party political matters. Cabinet Members should use 'Cllr' accounts for party political issues. Members should always keep clear distinctions between council business, political business and personal business. It is recommended that Members have separate accounts for different roles.

The council website's homepage will have the capability to stream RSS feeds of elected Members' social media updates if they so wish. This facility will be removed in the pre-election 'purdah' period.

6) Yammer

Yammer is a tool to allow staff to share information and good practice with other, as well as giving feedback on pieces of work in progress within the Delivery Unit. It is currently used by Adults and Communities only. Whilst we want staff to make the most of this resource, there are some simple rules you must follow to make it a positive experience for everyone.

Yammer is monitored daily to ensure that these house rules are being followed.

- Do not mention individual cases or disclose any personal or sensitive personal data.
- Yammer must not to be used as a document store – general information and resources can be shared via Yammer, but you must use the council's shared drive system to store all policies etc. Information shared in Yammer must not concern cases or individuals
- This is a professional forum, so appropriate language for the workplace must be used at all times.
- Be respectful of each other's views and contributions.

- As with email and other systems within the council, you must not share the content of any conversations within Yammer with anyone external to the organisation.
- Never disclose your password or share it, and treat it the same as any other council password
- Remember that information shared, stored and communicated on Yammer will be subject to Freedom of Information and may be disclosed as part of a request

7) Rules of Moderation

It is the responsibility of the Communications team to monitor and moderate content that comes from all council own social media channels.

Posts which infringe legislation or the council's policies or may impact detrimentally on the council's reputation -

such as posts which are racist, use offensive/abusive language, contain personal information or could be seen as party political - must be removed.

8) Personal use of social media

The council recognises that employees will wish to use social media in a personal capacity in their private time. This strategy does not intend to discourage or limit personal expression or use.

Employees should however recognise the potential for reputational damage to the organisation via personal accounts if they are identified as working for the council.

Every employee is personally responsible for the content they publish in a personal capacity on any form of social media site. If in doubt you should seek guidance from your line manager or the Corporate Communications Team.

Before posting, employees should always remember that information posted on social media sites becomes public knowledge and may be viewed or used by colleagues, service users, members of the public and the press. You should always be aware of how your privacy settings are set on social media to avoid postings having an unwarranted wide audience.

Where the council believes that it has been brought into disrepute or that the employee has disclosed confidential or sensitive information which should not yet be in the public domain, this may constitute misconduct and disciplinary action may be taken.

When accessing social media via the council's internet systems you must do so in accordance with the council's Acceptable Use Policy, which requires you to use these resources 'reasonably', in a manner that does not interfere with your work and is not inappropriate or excessively accessed.

9) Risks

The increasing use of social media exposes organisations to greater reputational risk, either through ignorance or malicious intent. Longevity of material and content once posted is a crucial aspect to consider alongside the ability of the internet to send information to worldwide audiences within seconds.

a) *Libel and defamation*

The two way nature of social media opens up the risk of being caught up in conversations that could carry a risk of defamation. Defamation is the act of making a statement about a person or company that is considered to harm reputation, for example, by lowering others' estimations of the person or company, or by causing them to lose their rank or professional standing.

If the defamatory statement is written (in print or online) it is known as libel. If it is spoken, it is known as slander. There are exceptions to this – posting a defamatory statement online or recording it on a podcast would be examples of libel.

An organisation may be held responsible for something an employee has written or said if it is on behalf of the company or on a company-sanctioned space. Legal action can also be taken against anyone repeating libellous information from another source, so careful checks are needed before quoting statements from blogs or websites. This can also apply to linking to or re-posting defamatory information.

Consideration should be taken as to whether a statement can be proven before writing or using it – in law, the onus is on the person making the statement to establish its truth.

b) *Data Protection Act 1998*

Everyone is under a duty to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 (“DPA”) if they process personal information. Key to this is that data is held in accordance with the eight data protection principles set out in the DPA. This obligation extends itself to use of social media.

Entering into conversation via social media opens up the risk of being caught up in personal conversations and the risk of disclosing personal data is greater.

Anyone posting in social media should not rush to respond to postings and instead be considered in their reply to ensure that no personal data is accidentally disclosed.

The council's DPA policies and wider suite of Information Management policies are available on the intranet [here](#) and the internet [here](#).

c) *Contempt of court*

Everyone should exercise caution if referring to pending court proceedings to avoid publishing material that may have a tendency to prejudice the outcome. Enquiries should be made as to any applicable court suppression orders prior to commenting on any proceedings. If in any doubt contact your line manager or the Corporate Communications Team.

d) *Copyright*

Everyone must comply with copyright laws and ensure fair use of copyrighted material and attribute work to the original author/source where possible. See the council's Copyright

Policy on the intranet and internet for more information.

e) **Photography**

Everyone should be aware of laws concerning the use of photography - in particular images which contain individuals under 16 years of age. All images used on council social media sites must have received consent from all parties captured within them. See the council's Photographic and Filming Policy available on the internet and intranet for guidance.

f) **Pre-election period**

The council itself, as opposed to its political administration, must remain politically neutral in its communications at all times. The council's social media pages must not be used to promote party political messages, views or other content.

Although this must be maintained year round, this issue is particularly sensitive in the run-up to an election – whether local or national. The council will moderate any comments that, in its view, may compromise its obligation to remain politically neutral.

It must be noted that this extends to the posting of third party links and comments on a council owed platform.

10) **Review of Policy**

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis or when a significant change in business practices or legislation is implemented. by the Information Management Team in conjunctions with the Corporate Communications Team,

11) **Contact Information/ Further Guidance**

Further advice and guidance is available from the Corporate Communications Team

Address: London Borough of Barnet
Building 2
North London Business Park
Oakleigh Road South
London NW 11 1NP

Tel No: (020) 8359 2495

Appendix 1

Defining social media

“A social network service focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Most social network services are web-based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as email and instant messaging services. Social networking has encourages new ways to communicate and share information. Social networking websites are being used regularly by millions of people.’ (Source; Wikipedia)

Any site that allows interaction between people and/or organisations can be considered social networking.

What do they do?

These sites provide a platform, normally outside of an organisation’s network, and typically based on the World Wide Web where anybody can access and interact in some way with each other.

This interaction can be mainly written (in the case of Facebook and Twitter) or it can be multi-media content (Youtube and Flickr). One of the main reasons for first interacting with social media is often to keep in touch with larger groups of people already known to you, such as customers, friends or colleagues.

Blogs:

A blog is a form of diary or mini website, usually web hosted and available to the world – although corporate and closed blogs do also exist. Open blogs are universally available and searchable and are mainly constructed by individuals to talk about issues and topics which interest them. Anybody can set up a blog site at little or no expense. Blogs cover the whole spectrum of human interests and are therefore the ultimate niche communication/marketing tool.

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com>

Facebook has more than 900 million users worldwide (2012) and is widely considered the most influential social media platform.

Each user has a personal profile, edited to a desired degree. These profiles often contain personal information with levels of ‘access’ able to be determined.

Facebook is based on the concept that you can tell the world where you are and what you are doing at any given moment through ‘status updates’.

Groups or communities are easily established to exchange information through ‘conversations’ over time. Since these groups can be set up by anyone and are largely unmediated, anybody can say almost anything about whatever they wish to discuss, with derogatory or inaccurate comments near impossible to remove.

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com>

Twitter is a form of micro-blogging which started as a tool for employees within a company to keep each other informed of what they were doing, seeing or thinking. The activity grew such that there are now more than 500 million registered users sending more than 50 million ‘tweets’ (posts) per day with users following updates of many celebrities, companies and public bodies across the world. The Twitter account of 10 Downing Street has more than 700,000 followers alone.

The big difference between Twitter and blogs is that you can only use 140 characters for

each 'tweet'. Any fellow user who is following your account can then decide to read your tweet, re-tweet (copy) your post or respond directly to you either via a direct public tweet or personal (private) message.

Local authorities across the country are using this platform to disseminate information.
www.twitter.com/uklocalauthorities

Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com>

Flickr is an internet available site, which allows users to upload pictures and make them widely accessible. Members can choose privacy levels to restrict viewing access if required. Flickr allows 'galleries' or picture folders to be created meaning easy storage and search functionality for large amounts of images. The service is largely free for the average user.

Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com>

Youtube is a free internet accessible platform which allows videos to be uploaded for public or private viewing. Youtube is considered the prime video sharing social media site. 48 hours of footage are uploaded every minute resulting in nearly 8 years of content uploaded every day.

Yammer: <https://www.yammer.com>

Yammer is a free online social network site used for private communication within organizations. Access to a Yammer network is determined by a user's Internet domain so that only individuals with appropriate email addresses may join their respective networks. It can be used to share information and discuss policies etc, allowing users to submit views and comments and work collaboratively.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com>

Instagram is a free mobile orientated social network which allows users to upload, share and comment on images. Members can choose privacy levels to restrict the viewing of images if required. Images can be manipulated using filters and can also be posted to a designated Twitter or Facebook account once uploaded.

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/nhome/>

LinkedIn is a free online social network site which in many ways operates like Facebook but is designed for a more work/professional sphere. It allows people to connect with fellow professionals and share ideas and work updates, to build and engage with professional networks. It is aimed at increasing access to access knowledge, insights and opportunities.

There are other social media sites which may be used eg, [LGA](#), [Community Care](#)