

Social Media Policy

Last updated September 2019

Background and purpose

This policy sets out Bracknell Forest Council's agreed approach to social media in terms of both personal and corporate use.

The term social media covers a wide range of interactive online tools and sites including, but not limited to, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, YouTube, blogs, WhatsApp.

This policy must be considered with the full social media guidance, which can be found on DORIS.

Staff personal and non-corporate use

Policy for staff using social media in a personal capacity

Staff should:

- Consider all social media participation as being in the public domain, even if it is a private message/ closed group, permanently available and open to being republished in other media. This includes sharing and creating content.
- Preserve the professional relationship between you and your colleagues, customers and partners.
- Staff who work in an area where there is a recognised code of professional conduct will need to follow this in respect of contact with clients through social media. For example, it is not appropriate to 'friend' vulnerable clients on social media and professional boundaries must be maintained at all times.
- Be politically neutral if it is a requirement of your job role/ part of your contract.
- Never post personal, confidential or sensitive information you have been privy to as part of your role, this includes in 'private messages' or closed forums, for example Messenger and WhatsApp.
- Not share any information you get in a professional capacity on social media – direct or in passing. This is to ensure there is no conflict of interest.
- Remember their commitment to safeguarding and promoting welfare. Professional boundaries must be maintained at all times.

Inappropriate employee conduct, even if in a personal capacity, can be grounds for disciplinary action, if it could:

- bring the council into disrepute,
- damage working relationships,
- damage relationships with clients or other third parties.

Policy for staff using social media in a professional but non-corporate capacity

There are many cases where participation on social media sites in a professional capacity can be beneficial, for example LinkedIn.

This activity is not proactively monitored by the council but council policies including, but not limited to, the code of conduct and Equality Act apply.

The principles below should be followed whenever using social media in a professional capacity:

- Clearly identify yourself and your role and make it clear your view is not the council's official view and that you are not an official spokesperson.
- Always be politically neutral.
- Be credible, cordial, accurate, fair and transparent.
- Be consistent.
- Be responsive. Respond to communication and share the insight you gain.
- Be legal.
- Be aware of your association with the council in online spaces. Think about the implications for the council of 'liking', 'befriending' or 'favouriting' people, brands, campaigns or pages, or of expressing personal opinions.
- Be aware of child and adult safeguarding issues – social media sites are often misused by offenders. If you have any concerns, report them to the safeguarding lead in your department.
- All requests for recorded information received via social media should be passed to Information.Compliance-Officer@bracknell-forest.gov.uk.

Policy for corporate use

Local Government Communications states:

'Social media is...online technologies, channels and practices used to share opinions and information, promote discussion and build relationships.'

Corporately, social media is a useful means to:

- raise awareness of and provide access to services,
- strengthen and improve our reputation by developing a two-way conversation,
- increase the number of residents accessing services online.

The council's communications and marketing team leads the council's approach to social media and manages the council's corporate Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter accounts, working closely with customer services and digital services.

Operational teams with a need to get out borough-wide messages with significant impact, for example highways, can access the corporate channels via the council's agreed social media management platform – subject to satisfactory training and licensing arrangements.

Staff should not set up a social media page or account for business use without express permission. Non-compliance may result in disciplinary proceedings.

Council social media accounts and pages must not take on paid for advertising from third parties. This could be in breach of the publicity code, social media terms and conditions and the council's third party publicity protocol.

Governance

The social media group shares operational best practice; it does not have any formal decision-making or strategic responsibilities. New terms of reference and governance arrangements were adopted in 2019 with any decisions fed in to the Head of Communications and Assistant Director of Customer Experience.

Employee responsibilities

Employees are responsible for ensuring their posts on any form of social media, both business and personal, do not compromise the council, professional relationships with clients, customers or partner organisations, or working relationships with colleagues. No personal details or references should be made in terms of clients, customers or partner organisations. Employees are responsible for ensuring anything posted/ shared/ commented on does not bring the council in to disrepute.