

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Social Networking Policy



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This document will help you understand how, as an employee, you can use social media:

- As a communication tool at work.
- For personal use at home.
- For personal use at work.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document has been created to encourage a growing use of social media across Barnsley Council, whilst setting out a framework within which social media should be used.
- 1.2. The Council holds a strong respect for private, family life, home and work correspondence. However, there are many channels of social media which are not private.
- 1.3. This policy will define and guide your uses of social media in the following circumstances:
 - As a communication tool at work - section 3
 - For personal use at home - section 4
 - For personal use at work - section 5
- 1.4. You have no additional legal, ethical or social obligations while using social media, however the standards of behaviour expected and detailed within the corporate [code of conduct for employees](#) and the Members Code of Conduct for Barnsley MBC are also applicable when using social media.
- 1.5. Social media is a constantly changing and growing technology. With this in mind, this policy shall be evaluated every 12 months by the Head of Communications, and approved by the council's Senior Management Team and Cabinet.
- 1.6. This policy applies to all Elected Members and council employees. It also applies to relief employees, agency staff, contractors, consultants, apprentices, volunteers, trainees and those on work placements, who work for the council. This policy also applies to staff employed in locally managed schools where the governing body has adopted the policy.

- 1.7. Throughout this policy, the term ‘employee’ and ‘you’ is used to cover all these types of workers. The term “we” is used to describe the Council.

2. Definition

- 2.1. Social media can be loosely defined as websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Social networking internet sites include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, blogs and Instagram. There are completely new platforms developing and becoming popular every day. We welcome unique, effective uses of social media across the organisation.

3. Using social media as communication tool at work

- 3.1. Social media is one of the most effective tools for communicating to a wide audience. We want to encourage employees to use it where it is relevant. This could be to advertise an event or service, to promote community engagement, or for many other purposes. The potential uses for social media continue to increase as technology develops.
- 3.2. Social media is already being used by many council services and partners. There is a list of current user accounts on the council website.
- 3.3. Before setting up a social media account or blog for work purposes, you will need to contact the communications team to make sure there is a business need. The communications team will offer guidance and support regarding your use of social media, as well as training if required.

- 3.4. You will need to share administration rights with the communications team so that the account can be monitored and closed if not used regularly or appropriately.
- 3.5. While assessing your needs for social media for business use, you should consider the corporate objectives and how your uses of social media can support these.

4. Using social media for personal use at home

- 4.1. It is important that you take responsibility for your own posts on your social media accounts. A comment or tweet posted to the internet is there permanently, regardless of whether or not you try to remove it. There will always be a permanent record of everything you post.
- 4.2. We will ask you to remove a post or piece of content if it is considered defamatory to the organisation. Offensive, defamatory or inappropriate comments about the Council, its customers, suppliers or any of its employees posted by employees or Members on social networking sites will not be tolerated. Any such postings made by an employee may result in disciplinary action.
- 4.3. If you have a work related issue that you wish to air, please do it through the appropriate channel. The [dignity at work](#) or [grievance procedure](#) should be your first reference point in these situations.
- 4.4. You should not divulge confidential information about, or belonging to, the Council, its service users or work colleagues.
- 4.5. You should not impersonate another colleague on social networking sites and forums.

- 4.6. You must not take and share images of service users. You can share images of colleagues with their express permission.
- 4.7. There is no expectation for you to accept 'friend' requests from colleagues or managers.
- 4.8. We recommend that if you do want to make online comments regarding aspects your work that you do so openly and as yourself. Be clear that information or comments posted are personal expressions and may not represent the organisation's official view.
- 4.9. You must not strike up or accept an online relationship with your current or past service users using a personal social networking account. Similar to your offline work, where you have a close relationship with a service user, you must let your manager know.
- 4.10. We want you to be proud that you work for Barnsley Council, if you want to have your employer information displayed as part of your profile, this is fine. You are welcome to advocate positively on the council's behalf. However, unless it is part of your role within the council then you should never make official announcements on a social media platform. As referred to at paragraph 4.9 above you should make it clear that all comments are your own opinions, for example "views expressed are my own". This makes it clear to anyone you interact with that you may have a greater understanding of our organisation but you are not making any official declarations.
- 4.11. Check your privacy settings and make sure you understand what people can see. Social media are public places and it is best to assume that all your posts can be seen by anyone.
- 4.12. You are bound by all confidentiality and digital security arrangements while using council equipment and your council login. Outside of work, using your own equipment, you are bound by the

council's confidentiality and digital security arrangements regarding data obtained during the course of your employment.

5. Personal use of social media at work

- 5.1. You are allowed appropriate and reasonable personal use of social media at work, using council or your own equipment. This is to take place in your own time, such as during your lunch break , not adversely affecting performance or provision of service.

6. Enforcement

- 6.1. Breaches of this policy will be investigated in line with the [disciplinary procedure](#) and this could result in disciplinary action.
- 6.2. It is important that you understand how Courts may consider communications recorded on social media sites. Nothing you post online is private and all postings and comments can be used as evidence, regardless of the privacy settings of your page or the people who have access. Comments made on a public forum are considered to be in the public domain. Updating your account settings to private will not protect you should you be found in breach of this policy.
- 6.3. All employees have a Common Law duty of loyalty to their employers and any failure to fulfil this duty will be treated as a breach of the [Code of Conduct for employees](#).
- 6.4. We reserve the right to monitor use of social media, through line management and monitoring of excessive or inappropriate usage.
- 6.5. We have a duty of care to take all reasonable steps to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees. We will provide managerial support to any individual adversely affected by comments made about them on social media sites where these have arisen for

reasons connected to the employee's job. This may include the provision of counselling and guidance, as appropriate. However the Council will not act on behalf of an individual employee, by asking social networking sites or online media outlets to remove comments about an individual on their behalf. This action is usually more effective where taken by the person concerned. Neither is the Council able to act for an individual employee in the conduct of any legal proceedings. If the comments have been made by another employee we will seek to facilitate mediation in accordance with the Dignity at Work procedure if that is appropriate in the circumstances. Otherwise we will consider whether there are grounds to take formal action under the disciplinary procedure.

7. Further information

- Link to social media guidance
- Link to list of council social media accounts on council website
- Links to related council policies
- Link to guidance from the teaching union ATL on actions to take with regard to cyber bullying