



Social Media Policy

(Updated May 2016)

Revised policy on the use of social media

Using social media to improve communication with the public to enhance the Council's reputation and improve internal communication.



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1.0 Policy overview

The social media policy is managed by the Communications team. The policy has been adopted by Cabinet (2011) and is used and operated by all staff and members. HR issues relating to social media will be dealt with using the Council's existing HR policies relating to conduct and capability.

1.1 Aims of the policy:

- To guide and govern the Council's use of social media so that this channel is used effectively to engage with our stakeholders and enhance reputation;
- To make sure the Council's social networks are secure;
- To manage the Council's reputation and minimise risk;
- To provide a consistent and corporate approach to using social media across the Council;
- To make sure individual social media users agree to principles and standards and operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.

1.2 Links to Council's corporate aims:

This policy contributes to the following corporate aims:

Council Vision and Priorities:

The Council's profile and reputation are part of "Delivering for Dacorum" (Corporate Plan 2015-2020).

1.3 Policy statement

This policy applies to both official Council business use of social media, and personal out-of-hours use of social media by Council employees if in reference to the Council.

This policy provides a structured approach to the corporate and service-specific use of social media and will ensure that such use is effective, lawful and does not compromise the Council's information or its computer systems/networks.

Officers and Members are encouraged to use social media positively as another channel to engage with residents and other stakeholders.

Users must use social media sensibly and responsibly, in line with corporate policy, without adversely affecting the Council or its business, damaging its reputation and credibility or otherwise violating any of the Council's policies.



2.0

Using social media at Dacorum Borough Council

2.1 Introduction

‘Social media’ is the term used to describe the websites and applications that let users create and share content or to take part in social networking – communicating with friends, family, customers and colleagues by posting and sharing information, comments, messages, images and video.

The purpose – whether social, business or both – of social networking is to share information, build communities and encourage collaboration over the internet. It encourages dialogue, participation and involvement.

Examples of social networks include Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram.

Dacorum Borough Council currently uses social media to connect with residents, businesses, staff and councillors. Social media is a rapidly evolving channel and we must continue tapping into its potential to benefit from:

- **improved customer experience** due to the speed of the service, better information provision and convenience;
- **better communications** as messages can be shared faster, to both wider and more targeted audiences and engagement and understanding can be improved;
- **back office improvements** from service issues being highlighted earlier, customers providing more feedback on the processes and more meaningful consultation;
- in the longer term (and in partnership with Customer Services), **saving money** through sharing a message with lots of residents at once, reducing the number of contacts and enquiries the council has to deal with; and
- **reduced costs** from channel shift, contact reduction, opportunities for co-production and increased web transactions.

We use social media to:

- create a sense of community, belonging, pride and identification with the area;

- build and protect the Council’s reputation;
- create dialogue and two-way conversations with residents;
- enthuse residents about a particular theme or event;
- support communities to help each other;
- involve people in decisions;
- measure social media activity and gauge opinion;
- reach people who do not use traditional communications and engagement channels.

2.2 Social media: business use vs personal use

When using social media for business purposes employees should:

- a) Be aware of and comply with Dacorum Borough Council’s Employee Code of Conduct and relevant information security policies and procedures. This includes ensuring that employees’ use of social media does not put the Council’s information and security systems at risk or damage our reputation.

b) Be aware of and comply with the **Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity** (March 2011) which says that: “Local authorities should ensure that publicity relating to policies and proposals from central government is balanced and factually accurate. Such publicity may set out the local authority’s views and reasons for holding those views, but should avoid anything likely to be perceived by readers as constituting a political statement, or being a commentary on contentious areas of public policy.”

The code also specifies the need for care during periods of heightened sensitivity prior to an election (paragraph 33):

“Local authorities should pay particular regard to the legislation governing publicity during the period of heightened sensitivity before elections and referendums – see paragraphs 7 to 9 of this code. It may be necessary to suspend the hosting of material produced by third parties, or to close public forums during this period to avoid breaching any legal restrictions.

“Publicity by local authorities should:

- be lawful
- be cost effective
- be objective
- be even-handed

- be appropriate
- have regard to equality and diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.”

The Communications team will advise if comments on social media networks need to be suspended or taken down.

- c) Be aware that they are personally responsible for the content they publish on any form of social media. (It is important to be confident about the nature and accuracy of the information published.)
- d) Seek permission from customers, partners or suppliers before making reference to them in postings (unless reporting something that is already in the public domain). To comply with the Data Protection Act, written consent must be obtained if posting photographs of residents. (The Communications team can supply copies).
- e) Be wary of publically endorsing companies or products in the Council’s name by sharing posts. Do not re-post/re-tweet other agencies’ messages unless there is a clear link to the Council.
- f) Identify themselves as working for the Council, for example Communications Officer or Communications team. Staff must only use council email addresses and not personal ones. It is reasonable to use generic service email addresses, such as communications@dacorum.gov.uk

g) Never give out personal details such as home address and telephone numbers.

h) Be aware of safeguarding issues. Safeguarding is everyone’s business: if a user has any concerns about other site users, they have a responsibility to report these to the safeguarding lead in their directorate. (Contact Human Resources for the contact in your directorate).

i) Not use insulting, offensive or racist language, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace.

Failure to comply with these guidelines could result in disciplinary action.

The Council’s Corporate Information Technology Security Policy allows that social media may be used by employees for non-business use¹. We recognise that social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter are a popular means of communication and that employees regularly subscribe to such media for personal use.

¹ See [Dacorum Borough Council’s Corporate Information Technology Security Policy section 5.1 Internet Usage](#): “Access to the Internet will be permitted to authorised users by their line manager(s) unless otherwise advised. At the discretion of your line manager, and provided it does not interfere with your work or productivity, the Council permits the use of the Internet facilities for non-business research or browsing during lunchtimes or before/after flexi-time/normal working hours.”

However, it is important that employees recognise the boundary between work and home. When choosing contacts or groups on social media sites to ensure that they do not put themselves in a situation in their home life that could compromise their work and impartiality as a council officer. For example, the groups that council staff join on Facebook or who they follow on Twitter or other social networks may be as important as the status updates that they post.

We encourage staff to use LinkedIn as a means of building positive reputation on both sides, but would remind staff not to reveal confidential information about the Council (in the same way as they are prevented contractually from doing so offline).

While the data on LinkedIn belongs to the employee, the Councils' interests as the employer are obviously at stake. We advise that a 'good' LinkedIn profile follows common sense guidelines. For example, use a meaningful job title and be specific about what you are responsible for.

If in doubt members of staff should seek advice from the Communications team, their manager or from the Information Security and Standards Officer. In any situation employees should be aware that any disclosure of information obtained through their position at the council may be covered by the Data Protection Act. Any reports of inappropriate activity linking employees to the Council will be investigated.

Posting anything online that brings the Council into disrepute will be considered a disciplinary offence. Derogatory comments about the Council posted online may constitute misconduct or, depending on the circumstances, gross misconduct.

2.3 Social media advice for staff in sensitive positions

Dacorum Borough Council staff who work in sensitive positions should consider whether it is appropriate to post information relating to their job or employer or personal details about themselves when using their own personal Facebook profile.

Likewise, social media users at the Council need to be sensitive about posting items on our pages about named individual employees.

This is not only to protect staff, but also to safeguard the Council's reputation and possibly our partner organisations.

Facebook's search engines may create potential for criminals (in the case of the police) or others to use the internet and social media to identify personal information about officers in order to embarrass, discredit, harass, corrupt or blackmail them or their families. This could apply to some areas of work at the Council, for example enforcement or anti-social behaviour officers.

Staff should check that privacy settings are set so that information is not made available to all public.

We also recommend staff in sensitive positions do not post any of the following information on the internet or social media sites:

- Details of employer
- Details of employment post
- Images in any uniform
- Mobile telephone numbers
- Home address
- Personal email addresses
- Family members' details
- Hobbies or places often visited
- Details of vehicles
- Sensitive personal data
- Images of colleagues without their consent

Facebook updates how its privacy settings work from time to time, so staff need to keep up to date with these. When selecting an audience for posts, this should be set to at most only 'friends' and never 'public'. Remember that when posting on another person's timeline, they control what audience can view the post. Additionally, anyone who gets tagged in a post may see it, along with their friends.

2.4 IT security

Please refer to the Corporate Information Technology Security Policy.

Staff should not download or install any software related to or hosted on social media sites onto Council equipment.

It is also forbidden to store Dacorum Borough Council data on unmanaged (non-DBC) devices such as smartphones and tablets. There needs to be a clear distinction between work and home devices, the data contained on them and their associated uses.

This means that apps to manage systems like Yammer or CCHQ must only be operated from Council-owned phones. If these are then lost or stolen, they can be remotely wiped of all data.

2.5 Investigatory use

It is recognised that social media can be used for investigatory purposes, such as identifying fraud or illegal events. Employees who use social media for this purpose must comply with relevant guidance and legislation.

2.6 Internal use of social media

Dacorum Borough Council uses the intranet as a closed social network for employees and members, as one of our methods of internal communication.

Examples of what people can do on the intranet include:

1. Post a message: A question, an update on a current project, an interesting article that others will benefit from.
2. Read what colleagues post: Get a pulse of what's happening in the organisation.
3. Like something: Let colleagues know they agree or acknowledge receipt of the message.
4. Reply to messages: Take a step beyond a 'like' and share thoughts on a colleague's post. Individual thoughts become conversations, connect individuals and content and answer questions. It's a good way of crowd sourcing ideas.
5. View profiles: Get to know coworkers by viewing their profiles. If everyone fills out a profile, it helps people connect.

2.7 Members' use of social media

Members are encouraged to use social media to communicate with the public. Social media can enhance the relationship between the public and their elected members, giving people a way to express their concerns directly to their elected representatives.

Members must ensure that their use of social media does not breach the Code of Conduct set out in the Council Constitution. Members should be aware that their personal use of social media reflects on the Council as a whole, and act accordingly. They should also be aware that social networks are public, and views expressed on platforms such as Facebook or Twitter may be picked up by the media. Social media postings should therefore be considered as public statements.

Members must also be careful not to communicate information that is not in the public domain.

3.0 Social media management and quality control

3.1 Who manages social media?

Dacorum Borough Council's use of social media is managed by the Communications team in line with the overall communications strategy, alongside other media channels.

Services wanting to develop their use of social media should contact Communications initially to discuss the most appropriate method, either:

- 1) services supply news and information (photos, links, quotes) for communications officers to post on the service's behalf; or
- 2) services nominate a team member(s) to be trained to become a social media user themselves under the management of the Communications team and in line with our Practical guidance for social media users (see Appendix).

Where there is a strong business case for other teams to develop a stand-alone social media presence (rather than going through the main corporate accounts), approval must be sought

from the service Group Manager and the Communications Team Leader. Conditions for setting up a new Dacorum Borough Council social media account are set out in section 3.3 where do we post?

3.2 How do we manage social media?

The Council uses the system CrowdControlHQ to manage all our social media accounts. CCHQ is a web-based risk management platform that enables us to efficiently control access to our social pages, keeping them safe and secure.

Only trained CCHQ users have authority to use or access the Council's social media channels and act as spokesperson².

Only members of the Communications team may access the Council's social media accounts directly. Direct access passwords to all social media accounts will be held by Communications.

If there is a specific function that CCHQ does not cover (such as editing page information or setting up a new page) the Communications team is responsible for this.

New Facebook pages need to be set up from the Council's business account which is linked to the email address communications@dacorum.gov.uk (and not linked to personal profiles).

¹ This does not apply to Members, who can choose to comment and act as spokesperson on behalf of the Council using their own social media profile. Members should make their position clear to members of the public.

Communications will make sure that all Council social media sites are easily identifiable as originating from the Council and correctly apply the Council's branding and identity guidelines as appropriate.

Among others, CCHQ has the following advantages:

1) Protection and control:

CCHQ allows the Council to protect our social media activity, provide an audit trail, mitigate risk and make sure we comply with security standards.

- Password protection: Sharing passwords across teams, departments or with partners can lead to a number of potential problems, including rogue posting or even loss of control over social media accounts. CCHQ provides permission-based logins which eliminate the need to share passwords.

CCHQ does not store social network passwords but uses the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) standard for authenticating requests between different websites and domains, without having to store end-user passwords.

- Tiered access levels: CCHQ also provides a tiered access, so means that different access/authority levels can be assigned, requiring new users to have posts approved first, while allowing the Communications team to have full access and provide back-up across all accounts
- Audit trail: CCHQ provides a full audit trail. The author of every post can be tracked and any activity is logged as it occurs. This means that people are far less likely to take risks with our social media accounts.
- Abuse-free pages: The 24/7 moderation feature means that posts containing words and phrases we do not want to appear on our Facebook pages will be automatically deleted or moderators alerted.
- Crisis management tools: Using CCHQ we can:
 - Immediately restrict unauthorised access to all social media accounts
 - Monitor what people are saying
 - Engage with residents by posting a unified message to multiple accounts if required
 - Remove abusive posts automatically
 - Suspend individual access of chosen accounts during a crisis

2) Collaboration and engagement

CCHQ engagement features allow users to view and respond to all social media activity in one place and monitor pages anytime of the day or night.

- Dashboard: CCHQ combines multiple accounts in a single dashboard, letting multiple users manage multiple accounts from a single platform.
- Collaborate: It allows colleagues in different locations or departments to work together, ensuring consistency and providing a full audit trail.
- Schedule posts: Users can save time and schedule posts or tweets to be sent at a specific time and date. This makes sure that there is always activity on Council pages, even when users are not around, as well as to programme a campaign in advance.

3) Monitoring and insight

- Usage alerts: These warn system administrators when the activity of any Council social media accounts is too low.

- Buzz monitoring: CCHQ users can discover who is talking about the Council, what they are saying and where they are. As well as initiating conversations through social media, it is important for us to be aware of existing conversations that are going on, and, where appropriate, join in, particularly if doing so may help correct misleading information about the Council and our services.

Note: All staff (whether they are CCHQ users or not) who come across blogs or communities talking about the Council should bring them to attention of the Communications team. Staff should not engage with such groups as a representative of the Council without approval from the Communications team and their manager.

3.3 Where do we post social media messages?

Dacorum Borough Council has developed a well-established presence on social media. To limit the resource needed to monitor and update them and to prevent our social media presence from becoming too fragmented, information and news from across the Council should primarily be channeled through platforms and pages which have already been set up.

Furthermore, wherever possible posts should be concentrated through our main corporate (as opposed to service-specific) pages so that:

- customers understand and recognise which services we provide;
- it is easier to monitor what is being said and so manage the Council's reputation;
- our messages get the widest possible audience and are not diluted.

While some service-specific pages at Dacorum have already been set up, not all have survived. Effective engagement takes time and resources, and a half-hearted attempt could do more damage to a campaign than not having any social media presence at all.

3.4 When are service-specific social media pages necessary?

However, in a few instances there may be reasons for a service to create a service-specific social media page. There are clear ways to determine if this is necessary and how they need to be organised and managed.

The main reasons for creating service-specific pages are:

- if it can be demonstrated that there is capacity within that service to keep the new page alive with regular news and relevant information and respond to customer's queries quickly;
- if there is a substantive business need (such as to address a localised group of users with a specific service interest, such as The Old Town Hall).

Prospective users must undergo CCHQ training and follow user guidance carefully (see Appendix: Practical guidance for social media users).

They also need to appreciate that social media is not a one-way broadcast channel; instead users expect freedom, collaboration and integrity. They want to be able to scrutinise messages, engage in small talk and do things quickly. Failure to understand social media behaviour will result in outcomes such as disengagement, backlash and ridicule.

It is important to remember that our social media communication can form part of a Freedom of Information request or response. Also that newspapers and broadcast media can report on anything they see on our website or through social media.

A service considering establishing a new social media presence needs to ask the following questions:

- Why do you want to use social media and what benefits will you or your customers get?
- Who is your target audience and what is the most appropriate social media channel?
- What information do you have to share?
- Who in your service will manage your social media activity and who will deputise to ensure consistency?
- How will you fit any monitoring and updates into your work schedule?
- How will you get customers to use the channel and build your following?

The Group Manager for the service requesting the social media must sponsor the request which then needs to be submitted to the Communications team for assessment.

4.0

Links to other corporate strategies and policies

This policy links to and should be read in conjunction with the following policies and strategies:

- Employee Code of Conduct
- Conduct Procedure
- Employee Handbook Guidelines
- Corporate Information Technology Security Policy
- Communications Strategy
- Social Media Strategy

5.0

Breach of policy

All internet usage is recorded by the Council's ICT department. Excessive, unauthorised or inappropriate use of social media sites will be recorded and, where necessary, reported to the relevant officer's line manager.

Managers have a duty to ensure that members of staff comply with the social media policy and relevant guidance. Any breaches of this policy by staff should be dealt with in line with council procedures.

Violations of this policy, such as breaching the Data Protection Act, could lead to fines being issued and possible criminal or civil action being taken against the Council or the individual(s) involved.

6.0

Legal requirements

The following legislation has a bearing on, or impinges on the rationale of this policy:

- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Defamation Act 2013
- Recommended Code of Practice for Local Authority Publicity (March 2011)