Chesterfield Borough Council's social media policy

Social media policy – the quick guide

1. **Use common sense – only say what you would be prepared to say in a public meeting.**
2. **Be genuine – be a human being. People respond better to seeing the human face of an organisation than to reading corporate jargon.**
3. **Be honest**
4. **Be respectful**
5. **Be careful – only highlight information in the public domain and protect personal data**
6. **Think before you post on your personal social media pages - don't negatively comment on colleagues, customers or the council**

Social media policy – the full version.

It's our hope that employees will embrace social media as a way to reach out and engage with the public about the work of Chesterfield Borough Council.

The opportunities offered by social media far outweigh any risks that may come with doing it. For many people social media is now the way that they expect the council to talk to them. It should be considered a fundamental way of holding two way conversations with the public – and not an 'add on'.

We are particularly keen to encourage social media use by 'frontline officers' as the public can associate with people actually delivering the services as they can tell a story with the 'human angle'.

Part A: <u>Our policy</u>

By following six simple rules you can take advantage of all the opportunities offered by social media.

1. Use common sense

This is the most important rule of all. Online communications are permanent. Since they can be shared by other people – whether you like it or not – you should assume that everything you write is, or will become, public.

When posting on social media think: 'Would I be prepared to say that in a public meeting knowing a journalist was sat there?' If not, then don't say it on social media either because journalists get many of their quotes from what people say on social media.

If you are about to publish something that makes you stop and think then you probably shouldn't be doing it.

You are responsible for what you write. When people know where you work then what you say can reflect on our brand, reputation and the way people think about us.

2. Be genuine – be a human being

Social media is all about people talking to other people.

So be genuine, personable and talk in a way they understand – don't baffle them with jargon or our latest strategy. Talk as if you were explaining an issue to someone you had never met before.

Give them the information they ask for not just what you want to tell them. If you know our website or another information source can help them out then tell them but don't pass on irrelevant things.

If you aren't an expert on a subject it's probably best not to jump in. Pass the conversation on to someone else in the organisation that can make a valuable contribution.

Where appropriate to the subject, speak in a language used by others on that social media site - although remember to always be respectful (see rule 4).

Try to have a call to action. We are using social media for business reasons so always try to include a short link to the relevant page on our website where they can find out more (see guidelines in part C on how to do this). Equally don't be afraid of sharing links to partner organisations or other reputable sources that will help the resident get the answer they need.

3. Be honest and clear

Be honest about who you are and what you do. Identify yourself as a Chesterfield Borough Council employee in any conversation if that is not clear from the name of your account.

When using an official council account you are talking on behalf of the council as well as yourself.

Remember that the media now get many quotes and stories from reporting what people say on social media. So assume that what you say could appear in newspapers, on radio or on TV.

4. Be respectful

Each social media community has its own culture, etiquette and norms – understand and respect them before you start joining in.

You would never swear, be abusive, racist, sexist or discriminate against anyone when meeting them face-to-face so don't ever do it online either.

Even if a poster is irate with us we should respond politely to them. Take care not to alienate people. Don't forget your message is being read by others and they will form opinions of us based on how you respond.

5. Be careful – only highlight information in the public domain

One of the myths of social media is that you have to know the answer to everything asked straight away. You don't, so don't be tempted to say things off the cuff if you don't know whether they are council policy or not. If you don't know the answer to something, tell the person and say that you will find out for them and give them a timescale by which you will respond.

Don't make comments that may reflect poorly on the council. Always ensure what you say is in line with our policies and respect the law (including laws governing defamation, discrimination, harassment, the protection of personal data and copyright – check with the legal team if you are not sure).

There is no anonymity on the Internet. Using a screen name doesn't mean comments cannot be traced back to you. Write as if everyone knows exactly who you are and where you work.

Protect yourself by not sharing personal information online – either about yourself, your family, colleagues or our customers.

Never share information that is not already in the public domain. Leave corporate communication messages, discussions about policy or comments on council decisions to the communications and marketing service, cabinet members or the senior leadership team.

6. Think before you post on your personal social media pages about council issues - don't negatively comment on colleagues, customers or the council

Social media can blur the lines between personal and business. Just because a page is set up in a personal capacity doesn't mean you can say what you like. And don't assume that a comment made on a personal site will not become public - it often does.

If using a social media site in a personal capacity outside of work tell people it is your personal opinion. Even if you don't say that you work for the council people might know (or be able to work it out from other social media sites) so might assume that you are giving the 'council line'.

Never negatively comment on colleagues, customers or the council as it could lead to disciplinary action under our HR policies. Staff have been disciplined because comments they made on personal sites became public knowledge and brought the council's reputation into disrepute.

Be aware that our data protection duties, particularly around protecting personal data, apply on personal sites as much as on business ones.

Many people decide that the safest option is not to comment on work issues on personal social media accounts.

In addition to the five basic rules below are some do's and don'ts that mean your experience of social media will be a good one.

Social media offers many opportunities but also carries some risks. So protect yourself and the organisation by following these 'do's and don'ts'.

Do:

1. Ensure you talk to the communications and marketing service before opening any social media account. We will give you training and support, arrange access to the IT systems for you and ensure you understand the rules of the game.

All council-run social media sites must provide the communications and marketing service with access to all passwords so that they can help monitor social media sites and use them in emergency situations.

This also enables the council to ensure consistency across sites and to put details of all our social media pages on the council website.

2. Comply fully with our ICT, HR and data protection policies – failure to do so will lead to disciplinary action and could mean you losing your job.

3. Change social media site passwords each month. This improves security and prevents access by unauthorised people. If a site is hacked the password must be changed immediately.

4. Understand when a conversation should be taken offline. Don't have arguments or discuss personal issues in public arenas. Ask them to direct message or email you or get someone to ring them instead.

5. Check the accuracy and sensitivity of something before you post it or make it live. If you are unsure seek advice from the communications team, HR, your line manager or service manager.

6. Have a clear idea of your objectives in using social media for a work purpose eg communication, behavioural change, service delivery, consultation.

7. Remember social media is one of many communications channels – build your working relationships with customers/partners on and offline.

8. Ensure our social media accounts are linked up with each other and the website. Part of the power of social media is that people access it in different ways eg somebody on Twitter might post a link from something on Facebook.

9. Be the first to admit a mistake and correct it publicly. If the issue is not a serious one then try to do this with a bit of humour as social media users often respond well to that.

10. Bear in mind the same principles, ethical standards and confidentiality requirements apply online as in the 'offline' world.

11. Delete posts on our sites that are offensive or that criticise a named individual member of staff but explain why to the poster. Complaints about staff should be dealt with under our normal complaints procedure and not be aired on social media.

12. Be aware that under our ICT policies the council reserves the right to monitor social media posts as part of its ICT policy.

Don't

1. Click on any link on a social media site which you are unsure about without checking – it could put a virus on our machines or system.

2. Join a campaign or petition on a council social media account unless a cabinet/council decision has been made to do so. The view you express by doing so might go against the official position of the council. Just because someone invites you to sign up doesn't mean you have to.

3. Make any political comments on council social media accounts – leave that to the politicians.

4. Take part in discussions that have absolutely no relevance to our work – you may be fascinated by the latest thoughts of Lady Gaga or Stephen Fry but unless they or you are talking about an area of our work don't get involved.

5. Engage with users who are aggressive or abusive.

6. Respond to everything – sometimes just listening is as valuable as engaging. Intervene:
   a. Where something is wrong and needs correcting
   b. You can add value to a conversation
   c. Someone asks you a direct question

7. Open a social media account you cannot maintain. If people are asking questions and we don't respond or if they are regularly visiting a site and there is no new content it will only annoy users and give us a bad reputation. This is worse than not having an account at all.

8. Use social media profiles to judge a candidate or find out information about them when recruiting to a post.

9. Post pictures of children unless you have a signed parental consent form (available on the intranet) giving you permission to do so.

Part B: The business case for using social media

1. <u>There is no option but to be part of the online conversation.</u>

   Whether we like it or not, people are talking about us and our work all the time. We can either let them do that without us being involved, risking them saying inaccurate things, or we can get involved and lead the debate.

   If we are not aware of rumours within groups who use our services – or perhaps those who don't – we cannot address those issues. If we are part of the debate we can get the facts out there quickly and easily and reduce the risk of inaccurate information shaping opinion.

   Being part of the conversation enables us to engage with online communities and get them to talk to and work with us. They can become places where people who are interested in

what we do can talk to each other, and to us, sparking new ideas.

While announcements of key decisions and policies should be left to the corporate communications team social media offers opportunities for staff to get across some of the work they are doing at a service level.

2. <u>The need to communicate with the public in places where they are.</u>

In the past many people read local newspapers so it made sense to devote energy to communicating through the local media.

Today far fewer people do but the majority of the UK public uses social media channels, including some groups who have not traditionally engaged with local media.

Communicating in the places most of your audiences are will be more effective and efficient and saves times, resources and money.

Certain groups use different social media channels more – so know your audience and pick the social media channel that best reaches them.

3. <u>Using social media to consult and engage.</u>

Social media can be used to have discussions with our service users or the people whose behaviour we want to change. Ask them to elaborate on an issue, and if you know something that could help, share it with them.

Options include:
- Crowd sourcing – where you put a problem out to an unknown group of people and ask them to come up with ways of solving it.
- Enabling people to comment on a consultation online
- Just raising awareness of face-to-face consultation events or paper based consultation processes

- Just listening to what is generally being said about an issue – you might pick something up that our organisation can respond to.

4. <u>It lets us be more transparent and accountable.</u>

Explaining what, how and why we do the things we do is a crucial part of our work already (paper documents, websites etc). Social media adds a further level of transparency and accountability to the public.

It allows people to input into decisions and question them and for replies to be seen by many people rather than just one person. This also allows us to explain and/or defend our decisions in response to questions or concerns.

5. <u>Increasing the impact of our communications.</u>

Stories and discussions started on social media sites are quickly picked up – often started by bloggers, then via news websites and often make it into the newspapers, radio or TV. You have a real chance to either reinforce or prevent those front page headlines with the effective use of social media.

This can apply to emergency communications (eg the riots of 2011), one-off events or more regular events.

Getting something to go viral will bring it to audiences who might never otherwise pay attention to any of our other communication methods.

6. <u>Internal communication matters too</u>.

An area that is often overlooked is the benefits of using social media for internal communication. Sites can offer opportunities for staff to share ideas, talk to each other despite being at different bases, or for managers to consult on issues.

Part C: Guidelines on how to use social media

Social media etiquette – getting it right

- Do tell people what you are doing and give some atmosphere. For example, if you are a park ranger tell people where you are working and why. Social media users love this as it shows the 'human face' of the council.

- Make it timely. Our social media comments/posts should be about issues of relevance today or events/opportunities coming soon. We should always try to give on-going campaign messages a current 'hook' to make people want to read them.

- Avoid flooding our followers' streams – check the number of posts that day before deciding whether to add a new one. Equally don't post too infrequently. People will stop following sites not regularly updated.

- Link to photos or videos where you can. Active content like this is proven to get a better response than just text.

- The more that you can write once and publish in multiple social media locations, the more likely that your content is going to reach your audience.

Tips

On Facebook

- Facebook works better than Twitter for holding consultations

On Twitter

- Make it easy for others to retweet our most important announcements by restricting those Tweets to 132 characters or less.

- Use hashtags (eg #chesterfield) to make your tweet part of a wider conversation that will be seen by more people interested in that topic rather than just your followers. This helps build up our follower numbers.

- Reactive retweeting – generally aim to honour requests from our partner organisations to retweet their material.

- Proactive retweeting – seek opportunities to retweet content that helps position the council as an opinion former, expert in its field or active supporter of the partnerships we are involved in. It is also worth retweeting information of general interest to the town eg Highways Agency posts about current road closures.

- Shorten website links - Unless they are already very short we will seek to shorten tweets using link compressing sites (eg tinyurl.com; bitly.com) or through social media management systems (eg Hootsuite).