

Propriety in digital and social media

The principles covering the use of social media by councillors and clerks/officers in both an official and personal capacity are the same as those that apply for any other media.

Digital technology has revolutionised the way in which people communicate and share information at local, national and international levels. Councillors and clerks/officers need to understand these changes so that they can operate effectively in a dynamic media environment.

Councillors must adhere to their Council's Code of Conduct online as well as offline. There is no nationally recommended Code of Conduct (at the present time) for clerks/officers but social media comments may lead to disciplinary action including dismissal

Social media is a public forum and the same considerations apply as would to speaking in public or writing something for publication, either officially or in a personal capacity outside of work.

Top 5 things to remember

Here are the top 5 things to bear in mind when using social and digital media, either at work or in a personal capacity:

- **Common sense:** Social media helps us work openly and connect with the citizens we serve – just remember to apply common sense!
- **Adhere to the Code of Conduct:** Apply the same standards online as are required offline, whether acting in an official or personal capacity.
- **Doubts?** If in doubt, don't post it.
- **Accuracy:** Check the accuracy and sensitivity of what you are posting before pressing submit.
- **Permanent:** Remember that once something is posted online, it's very difficult to remove it.

It may also be useful to look at the Government Digital Service's Social Media Playbook, at <https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2018/08/17/weve-updated-our-social-media-playbook/>

which makes the case for using social media and provides helpful practical tips on creating and running social media accounts.

Language

When using official social media accounts such as Twitter, local government communicators may use more informal language than for other channels. However, local government communicators must remember that they are representing their council in this context and must apply the same high standards of accuracy as for all other official communications.

Checklist for running a council social media account

- **Party Political** – for original messages and retweets check that there is nothing party political within the body of the message, contained within links or in comments below a story. Official accounts must not be used for the further dissemination of messages from party political or otherwise partisan accounts.
- **Partisan** – it is of course acceptable for a councillor to hold strong opinions. However, the council does not hold partisan opinions as an organisation. In carrying out their duties, local government communicators are able to represent the views and opinions of ministers only as they relate to council issues.
- **Polemical** – be sensitive to tone and guard against perceived attacks on particular interests, organisations or individuals.
- **Understanding** – don't act on auto pilot, ensure that you have read and fully understand messages before retweeting.
- **Commercial** – we encourage activity that promotes UK trade and economic growth, and we support partnership working with business, the wider public and private sectors. A Council should not provide links that offer undue endorsement, or may be perceived as offering unfair commercial advantage to third parties, although signposting to websites of community organisations or businesses may be permissible. It is recommended that the Council has criteria for the organisations it will link to (for example any business based within the parish).
- **Confidential** – at all times respect confidentiality, financial, legal and personal information. Do not discuss policy that has yet to be announced.
- **Personal** – do not disclose personal information about councillors or about yourself. An informal tone of voice is often desirable within agreed boundaries, but remember that when using official accounts, you are the voice of the council. Do not make personal comments about tweeters. Never respond to someone being abusive about you, the council, councillors or the clerk/officers.
- **Isolation** – tweets always need to have links and context. Media rebuttals should link to or at least cite the story you're responding to or it will make no sense read in isolation.