



# **Social Media Guidance For Councillors**

**Endorsed by Cabinet – Decision ref C/005/310516  
Review May 2018**

## **Contents**

1. About this document
2. Social media accounts
3. Who to contact for help
4. Choosing the right channel
5. Setting up a social media account
6. Using social media
7. Code of Conduct
8. Pre-determination
9. Criminal Offences
10. Civil Law
11. Managing your social media account
12. Dealing with defamatory or abusive content
13. Security and social media
14. Training

## 1. About this document

This guidance document is for **Councillors** of Arun District Council and has been created to provide information about the Council's social media policy requirements and 'best practice' advice in the use of social media accounts.

This document should be read alongside the authority's **Information Security Policy** and **Internet and Email Acceptable Usage Agreement**. There is a separate social media policy for staff.

Social Media is a fast evolving environment and as such, this guidance is a **live** document which will be updated as significant developments arise. It will be available on the Councillor's intranet.

## 2. Social media accounts

There are four types of social media account:

- Corporate Accounts – managed by the communications team
- Departmental Accounts – professional accounts managed by an officer on behalf of the Council
- Personal Accounts – managed by Councillors for their personal use
- Councillor @arun.dc accounts – managed by Councillors for their ADC Councillor use only

As Councillors do not have responsibilities for managing Corporate or Departmental accounts, this document applies solely to the use of 'Personal' social media accounts.

It is the responsibility of individual councillors to manage their social media accounts.

To ensure the appropriate, safe and effective use of social media, Councillors are advised to follow these guidelines.

## 3. Who to contact for help

If you are unclear about any matter relating to social media for Arun District Council use, please contact our Communications Team for further advice or guidance.

**Contact: [public.relations@arun.gov.uk](mailto:public.relations@arun.gov.uk)**

Arun District Council IT department do not support personal social media accounts, therefore, please do not contact them as they are unable to provide advice or guidance.

## 4. Choosing the right channel

There are a wide range of social media channels available, some of the most popular being:

- Twitter

- Facebook
- You Tube
- LinkedIn
- Pintrest
- Flickr

It is important to consider which channels are most likely to reach the target audience you would like to engage with and the means by which you would like to communicate with them (eg two-way conversation, passing on information, visuals etc):

**Twitter** is ideal for 'talking' to your audience directly to give them timely information. It is more appropriate to use twitter to communicate things that are happening 'now' or within the next day or so as posts have a short 'shelf-life'.

**Facebook** is ideal for posting information and pictures which can be shared by users eg events, what's going on in the local community, developments to previously posted information.

**You Tube** is for uploading video footage for people to watch and is by far the most popular video site on the web today.

**LinkedIn** is an ideal way to connect with likeminded individuals or people with similar career paths and HR departments use it regularly as a recruitment tool.

**Pintrest** is a photo sharing website which takes its name from the term 'pin board'.

**Flickr** is also a photo sharing website and provides a way to create a collage of photographs eg places to visit, and can be used to show how something may be changing over time eg regenerations projects.

## **5. Setting up a social media account**

Managing a social media account can be very time consuming as it needs to be regularly updated. Before setting up an account, you should ask yourself the following questions:

**Why** do you think you need a social media account?

**How** will you manage the account? How much time will you be able to dedicate to it?

**What** information will you be communicating through the account?

***IT IS BETTER NOT TO HAVE A SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT THAN TO HAVE ONE THAT CANNOT BE PROPERLY MANAGED.***

### **5.1 Use of email addresses in setting up a personal social media account**

Councillors must **not** use their @arun.gov.uk email address to set up personal social media accounts, for security reasons. Only personal email addresses can be used

for this purpose and if a Council email address has been used, the account may be closed requiring that a new one be set up.

It is important to note that the closing of a social media account due to the misuse of an email address in this way may result in significant loss to that account eg loss of followers. Arun District Council cannot take responsibility for any such loss.

### **Choosing your user name**

When choosing your username for a social media account, as this name will appear in the public domain, it is important that it is not misleading to your audience. A personal social media account should not give followers the impression that the account represents an organisation.

In particular, if you are setting up an account to support your role as a councillor, you should choose an account name that clearly distinguishes it from that of Arun District Council's social media accounts.

To this end, it is strongly suggested that you choose words that clearly show that the account is a personal one (eg for a twitter account, you might choose @your name or @councillorname but not @aruncouncil or @arunplanning).

Note that a maximum of 15 characters are allowed for twitter usernames.

### **Using a disclaimer**

When setting up a social media account that you intend to use in relation to your role as councillor, it is strongly advised that you must include the below disclaimer on the account so it is clearly accessible to your followers:

*'The views posted represent my own and are not attributed to any other person or organisation.'*

## **5.2 Use of email addresses in setting up a Councillor@arundc social media account**

Councillors must not use an arun email address to set up personal social media accounts. For security reasons, only Cllr email addresses can be used for this purpose.

The Council will control the password so that the site can be removed should the Councillor leave the Council or the site needs to be closed for another reason.

### **Choosing your user name**

When you are setting up an account to support your role as a Councillor, you can only choose an account name that clearly identifies you as a part of Arun District Council's social media accounts ie. CllrMrxy@arun.gov.uk

A standard Council template will be used for these Cllr social media sites so that the link between the Councillor and the Council itself is clearly identified.

## **6. Using Social Media**

There are FOUR principles which should be applied to all social media activity. It should be:

- Meaningful
- Respectful
- Transparent
- Ethical

### **The do's and don'ts for using social media**

Follow the below suggestions for 'what to do' and 'what not to do' when using social media to effectively engage with your followers and to avoid potential problems.

#### **DO:**

***Remember that as a Councillor you are an ambassador for Arun District Council***

- write as you would speak (I / We)
- use appropriate language
- use a positive and engaging tone
- ensure your post is informative
- use common sense
- ensure your post is timely
- make use of available pictures (see our \*'Filming and Photographic Policy')
- include useful and relevant links
- check any links within your post are working
- correct any errors as soon as you are aware an error has been made
- acknowledge and respond to direct messages within a reasonable specified timeframe
- use security settings to block unwanted language
- keep passwords safe and secure
- (\*Please note that the Filming and Photographic Policy is currently under review)

#### **DO NOT:**

- use technical jargon
- post a picture of any person without obtaining their consent
- refer to other councillors or officers without their prior approval
- publish contact details of councillors or officers without their approval
- make discriminatory or offensive comments about people
- criticise councillors or officers
- disclose confidential information
- discuss sensitive matters

- engage in arguments
- use abusive language
- make comments that could be inflammatory
- publish anything that might be interpreted as sexist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith
- try to secure a benefit for yourself or disadvantage others

Remember the press may follow your social media accounts and anything you write **cannot** be deleted or removed from cyberspace.

If you are in any doubt about a post or comment you have received, made, or responded to, please contact the Communications team.

## **7. Code of Conduct**

When you post on a social media site, in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, the Member's Code of Conduct (May 2015) will apply, and when acting in the capacity of Councillor, Members are committed to behaving in a manner that is consistent with certain principles to maintain public confidence in the Council.

If you can be identified as a Councillor when you are using social media, either by account name or how you describe yourself or by what you comment upon and how you comment, the requirements of the Code will apply.

## **8. Pre-determination**

As a Councillor, you are aware that when you act in a quasi-judicial capacity, for example on a Planning Committee or Licensing Committee, you should not make up your mind about an issue that is to be formally decided upon, before you have heard all the relevant information.

You are allowed to be predisposed to a particular view but not to have gone so far as to have predetermined your position. It is important to remember therefore that anything relevant you might have said about particular issues on social media could be used as evidence of your having made up your mind in advance of hearing all of the relevant information. This could prevent you voting on the issue at a later date.

## **9. Criminal Offences**

These generally apply to you already in your conduct as a Councillor, but it is worth considering them as they apply to social media too.

**Harassment** – it is a criminal offence to repeatedly pursue a campaign against someone where this is likely to cause alarm, harassment, nuisance or distress

**Data Protection** – it is illegal to publish personal data about individuals unless they have given you their permission. As a Councillor you are a data controller in your own right and therefore personally responsible for what you publish.

**Incitement** – it is a criminal offence to incite any criminal act

**Discrimination and Racially Aggravated Offences (or any other protected characteristic)** – it is a criminal offence to make a discriminatory remark about anyone based on a 'Protected Characteristic' as defined in the Equality Act (such as their race, religion, sexual orientation etc).

**Malicious & Obscene Communications** – it is a criminal offence to send malicious or obscene communications

## **10. Civil Law**

**Defamation** – It is against the law to make a false statement about someone which damages their personal or professional reputation. If you pass on information originally posted by others (eg retweet), you may still be held equally responsible as the original commentator. This can also apply to publishing images. If you are found liable to another person, you could be ordered to pay large sums of money as damages. *A High Court example is Lord McAlpine-v-Sally Bercow (2013).*

## **Copyright**

The legal ownership of the contents of documents, photos, videos and music belong to the person who created them. You could be in breach of copyright if you reproduce such material without the owner's permission. Always ask permission before you use someone else's material. The cost of legal action may be very expensive.

## **11. Managing your social media account**

We would strongly advise that you maintain separate social media accounts if you intend to manage an account which relates to your work as a councillor and that you do not post personal or family related information on such sites. By keeping your accounts separate in this way, you are able to adjust the security settings for each to suit your appropriate audiences (for example, your 'councillor' account may be open to all, whereas your 'personal' account may be restricted to family and friends).

## **12. Dealing with defamatory or abusive content**

If you receive defamatory or abusive comments on your social media account, most social media sites have an option to report these. Depending on the seriousness of matter, you may wish to take it up with the police.

Councillors who wish to report defamatory comments made by an ADC employee or Councillor should also contact the Communications team in the first instance. This will then be reported internally through the appropriate channels. (4)

## **13. Security and social media**

Security is a significant issue for social media accounts and the online community often use social media to deliver viruses. It is very important that you follow the below guidelines:



- do not use the same passwords for social media that you use to access corporate systems
- do not follow links on social media pages that are posted by individuals or organisations that you do not know
- do not download software posted or recommended by individuals or organisations that you do not know
- if you find content that looks suspicious in any way, close your browser and do not return to that page
- do not share your usernames or passwords with anyone
- do not disclose your username or password to anyone

### **What to do if you get hacked**

If your account is hacked, log into the social networking site and change the password as soon as possible. Delete all the offensive or spam messages sent from the account (you may wish to print a record of these if you are considering taking the matter further). Report the incident to the respective social media organisation (eg twitter, facebook). Depending on the seriousness of the offence, you may consider reporting it to the police.

### **14. Training**

The Communications team provide one-to-one or group training courses in social media skills, depending on your needs.

If you are interested in receiving training in social media, please contact the team at [public.relations@arun.gov.uk](mailto:public.relations@arun.gov.uk) or call Claire Pritchard on 01903 737607 to discuss your needs further.

Please see our Social Media User Guides which give help and advice in getting started on social media:

- Twitter – User Guide for Councillors
- Facebook – User Guide for Councillors
- Facebook – Advanced User Guide for Councillors