

# Social media dos and don'ts

This policy has been developed following a survey of over 120 local government councillors and officers up and down the country. Their valuable feedback should help you to get the most from social media.

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This policy is intended to open the door to social media use in your local authority rather than block it. This policy is also intended to be a template for any local authority to use through a short list of common sense 'Do's and don'ts'. Do feel free to add to them.

Social media guidelines can be as simple or as complicated as you want to make them. Many organisations have their guidelines down to just a single page. Some have reduced their guidelines down further to just five or six golden rules. And some have gone even further and covered them with one single sentence.

If you stick to this one simple rule you won't go too far wrong: don't post any message on social media that you wouldn't happily say in a public meeting.

## LGA policy template: do's and don'ts at a glance

### Do

- **talk** to residents, staff and others. And do answer their questions (quickly and honestly)
- **trust** your teams and staff to use social media
- **be responsible** at all times
- **be respectful** at all times, too
- **innovate** – different approaches work for different people
- have a **personality** – corporate speak or just issuing press releases won't work well on social media
- **share** other people's helpful content and links
- **credit** other people's work, ideas and links
- **listen** (social media is designed to be a two-way channel, just like any good conversation)

- **ask** your own questions. Seek feedback from your residents (but make sure you share the results with them)
- have a **rota** where appropriate – share the load and you'll get more from your accounts
- adhere to your existing **HR policies** – you don't need a separate HR policy especially for social media
- **talk** to your communications team – they are there to help you
- **learn** from others – there is rich learning of good practice social media use across local government via organisations such as the LGA, **comms2point0** and Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands (**IEWM**).
- and more than anything, do use social media in the spirit in which it was intended – to **engage, openly and honestly**.

## Don't

- **broadcast** or talk at people. Your residents will soon spot broadcasts and respond accordingly
- **block** social media – social media is not a risk, blocking its use is a risk
- try to **cover up** mistakes, be honest and you'll get more respect for it in the long run
- build accounts and just hope people will come – sometimes it is best to go to the places where your audiences are already having conversations
- **assume** that social media will look after itself – you will need to invest time, enthusiasm and energy to make it work. And don't leave your accounts unattended for long spells
- post content which will **embarrass** your council or yourself
- **ignore** legal advice, it's there to help you
- think that a **disclaimer** in your bio will save you from potential legal action, it won't
- expect your staff to make do with **old technology** which can be a barrier to effective working
- **share your passwords** with anyone other than your communications leads
- forget that **social media is 24/7** – just because you leave at 5.00 pm doesn't mean the world stops or that residents won't be active. If your account is only staffed 9-5 then you should say so on your profile.