

# Social media guidance for employees 2022

**Welcome to your social media guidance - we want you to use this guide to help you get the best out of social media. Many of you are probably already active on social media, and we want to encourage and give you the freedom to support the council with the proper guidelines.**

Social media is a website or app that helps you create and share content and communicate with others. Social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr Nextdoor and YappApp. It also includes SharePoint, MS Teams and Yammer. This list is not exhaustive and consists of any platform, website and application that focuses on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. The guidance also covers any new platforms which will be developed in the future.

You should follow this guidance if you're an employee of Barnsley Council. This also includes relief and agency employees, contracted companies that deliver services for the council, consultants, apprentices, volunteers, trainees and people on work placements. This information also applies to employees in schools where the governing body has adopted the policy.

For info...throughout this guide, the terms 'we' and 'us' describe the Communications and Marketing Service.

## **Key points:**

- Whatever you say on social media, remember you're likely to be considered as representing the organisation – even when on your own personal pages. We want you to feel confident and safe using social media as a communication channel.
- When posting and commenting on digital channels, your integrity is displayed for people to see, so be ethical, respectful, truthful, and decent. Anything you publish must be true, not misleading, and all claims must be substantiated and approved.
- Protecting the council is part of your job. Do not post any confidential information on any social platforms. If the council has not officially released the information, don't discuss it. This includes financial data, service data and information, and legal information.
- If you're unsure whether to post, comment on or share something, err on the side of caution and don't.
- Your interactions with the public can be used and re-used on social media. This could include emails, pictures and videos. Bear this in mind in how you interact and respond to the public in your day-to-day role.

# Your personal social media pages

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Social media can be a powerful force for good, and we want to encourage you to use social media in positive ways, including promoting the council as an employer of choice. When you're online, we have two requests for you: use good judgment when posting and protect the council's reputation.

## Showing that you work for the council

We want you to be proud to say you work for Barnsley Council. This is fine if you want your employer information displayed as part of your profile.

It's good practice to have a disclaimer to clarify that comments are your personal views and do not represent the council's view. This makes it clear that you may understand the council better, but you're not making official declarations. Use wording in your profile such as 'Views expressed are my own'.

If you're carrying out a legitimate role that involves posting comments on social media, for example, as a trade union representative or a community action group representative etc., you need to make clear in which capacity you're making your posts.

## Using your personal social media pages during work hours

You can use your personal social media sites while you're at work, using council or your own equipment. This should be in your own time and must not interfere with your job or service delivery. The council reserves the right to monitor the use of social media through line management and monitoring of excessive or inappropriate usage.

## Your responsibility when using social media

Even though you're using your personal account, the world will always see you as a reflection of the council.

Anything you post on your personal site is your responsibility. Content can be there permanently, regardless of whether you try to remove it. There'll always be a permanent record of everything you post. Irrespective of your privacy settings, posts can, and often do, become publicly available through screenshots, hacking and other methods.

We firmly believe that although people have differing views on many issues, any form of online bullying is not acceptable on any platform. Consider what you're posting and how this may reflect upon the values and reputation of the council as an inclusive employer.

Do not engage in content that is classed as online hate, abuse or bullying under our [social media acceptable use policy](#) that can impact other people and brings the council into disrepute or has the potential to adversely affect the council's reputation or business. This includes inappropriate content concerning the council and its work, council employees and elected members, residents, businesses, customers or suppliers. You'll be asked to remove the content, and the council may investigate and start disciplinary action against you, which could ultimately lead to your dismissal. Depending on the content, we may also report it to South Yorkshire Police.

If you're tagged in a post or tweet that is considered defamatory, derogatory and offensive against the council, please follow the guidance on dealing with unacceptable behaviour in the No place for hate section.

**Examples of this could be:**

- 1) “Thanks to the councillor for coming to support me today in my role. Some councillors don’t care and are only in it for backhanders and brown envelopes.”
- 2) “Two men living together should not be allowed in my community. We should get rid of them all. If I ever see any of them in my area, they better watch their backs. I’ll be waiting for them.”

If you had posted comment 1, we would instruct you to remove them, and the council may investigate and start disciplinary action against you, which could ultimately lead to your dismissal.

Hate and harassment can be criminal or non-criminal and include offensive comments or images on social media or text messages. If you had posted comment 2, you would be reported to South Yorkshire Police for hate crimes. The council may investigate and start disciplinary action against you, ultimately leading to your dismissal.

## Share our news

We promote the council’s work across the borough. We encourage you to share information and help us to spread the word about what’s happening in Barnsley. Unless it’s part of your role within the council, you should never make official announcements on behalf of the council via any communication channel.

## Joining social media groups

If you want to join a social media group that has a conflict of interest with the council’s services, such as a campaign group, you should follow the guidance on personal interests in the [Code of conduct for employees](#).

## Politically restricted roles

If your role is politically restricted, use good judgement when using personal and work-related social media. This includes speaking and writing in public, including on social media, where the work appears to be intended to affect public support for a political party. Be aware of what news and pages you’re sharing or retweeting. If in doubt, err on the side of caution and don’t engage. You can read more about this in the [Politically Restricted Posts guidance notes](#).

## Quick reference guide:

- Check your facts before you post or share content.
- Respect the law, including copyright law.
- Avoid saying things that could damage the council’s reputation or other organisations or brands associated with the council.
- If you have a work-related issue, please don’t raise it via social media. Use the council’s [dignity at work](#) or [grievance procedure](#).
- Don’t divulge confidential information about, or belonging to, the council, people who use our services, employees or elected members.
- Don’t impersonate other employees or elected members on social media sites and forums.

- You can share photographs, images, video footage and comments of employees or elected members with their consent.
- You should not share photographs, images, video footage or comments from people who use our services on your personal sites. You can [read more information about consent on the intranet](#).
- Be aware of what's in your photographs, images and video footage. Make sure that there isn't any confidential information on view and that it conforms with our [social media acceptable use policy](#).
- Be aware of [GDPR regulations](#).
- You don't have to accept 'friend' requests from anyone at the council or associated with your work at the council if you don't want to.
- Don't start or accept an online relationship with people using our services on a personal social media site. Like your offline work, where you have a close relationship with someone who uses our services, you must let your manager know.
- Check your privacy settings and make sure you understand what people can see and what they can do with your content. Social media is a public place, and it's best to assume that anyone can see all your posts.
- You need to follow the council's [Information and security and computer usage policy](#) and the [Code of conduct for employees](#) when using council equipment and your council login.
- Outside of work, using your own equipment, you still need to follow the [Information and security and computer usage policy](#) and the [Code of conduct for employees](#).
- If you end your employment with Barnsley Council, please remember to update your employment information on your social media sites.

## **Dedicated service social media pages: being a representative of Barnsley Council**

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We want to support you using social media platforms to promote your services. This could be to advertise an event or service, to encourage community engagement, to share job or volunteering opportunities or for many other purposes. The uses of social media continue to increase as technology develops.

## Posting on the council's main social media pages

We manage the council's main social media pages, which have a large established following of people.

We already work with a lot of services to promote their campaigns, but if you have something which you think would benefit from being posted on social media, please get in touch with us at [communications@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:communications@barnsley.gov.uk).

## Dedicated service social media pages

Some services have their own social media pages. They have these pages because we have identified that the service benefits from having a targeted audience, the appropriate channel, and the service can manage it effectively. Services solely run these pages and are accountable for the content and management of the account. We offer guidance and support when needed.

**Please do not create any social media pages without our permission.** This might seem like we want to control this, and in a way, we do. As good as social media is, it takes a lot of resources to get it right and holds a significant reputational risk if you don't.

If you're accountable for a social media account, you will be asked to sign a social media agreement to acknowledge your responsibility for the account.

You can complete a [short business case](#) (available on the intranet) to tell us why you think you need a dedicated account.

You must follow the page owner's guidance if you manage a social media page.

## Consider adding social media management to your contracts

All suppliers, including subcontractors, are expected to uphold the council's social media guidelines; we also expect them to follow our social media acceptable use guidelines as well.

It's good practice to discuss their approach to social media in promoting good, positive content and handling harmful content. If you need support with this, please contact us at [communications@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:communications@barnsley.gov.uk).

## Managing unacceptable content on council social media pages

Our social media pages are governed by our [social media acceptable use policy](#) (social media house rules). It covers all of the council's pages and outlines the standards we expect on our social media pages; it's a key enforcement step in establishing a positive behaviour change on online pages. You can read more guidance on dealing with unacceptable behaviour in the no place for hate section.

## Legal guidance on using social media

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Comments made on a public forum are in the public domain. Updating your site settings to private will not protect you if you're found in breach of this guidance.

Consider whether your comments or actions could be considered defamatory, derogatory or offensive, as this could result in somebody taking legal action against you as well as against the council or making a formal complaint about you. If someone is taking legal proceedings against an employee because of their

defamatory comments or actions on a social media site or online media outlet, the council is entitled, in appropriate cases where the person has acted reasonably and in good faith, to support them in defending those legal proceedings.

If you do not follow the guidance in this document, it may result in disciplinary action under the council's [disciplinary procedure](#).

Tribunals and courts can consider communications recorded on social media sites. It's highly likely that online content, postings and messages will be used as evidence, regardless of the privacy settings of your page.

All employees have a common law duty of fidelity and trust, and confidence to their employers. A breach of this nature could be treated as a breach of the council's [Code of conduct for employees](#), and you could be subject to a disciplinary procedure which could ultimately lead to your dismissal.

Be aware of [GDPR regulations](#) and consent.

## **No place for hate in Barnsley**

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People are free to express their opinion, and most people who follow our pages do this in a balanced way. It's okay for people not to like the service we deliver or to disagree with decisions, and they are free to communicate this. We won't act against these comments, as frustrating as they may be.

We do not accept content that is defamatory, slanderous, discriminatory, inciting or intimidatory behaviour, or is classed as misinformation (false, misleading or out-of-context material regardless of the motivation behind it) or disinformation (a deliberate attempt to mislead using material that the deceiver knows is untrue, designed to be widely shared).

### **Managing unacceptable content on council social media pages**

Our social media pages are governed by our [social media acceptable use policy](#) (social media house rules). It covers all of the council's pages and outlines the standards we expect on our social media pages; it's a key enforcement step in establishing a positive behaviour change on online channels. We're always here to help you with managing content on your pages. Contact us at [communications@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:communications@barnsley.gov.uk)

### **Managing situations when you're out working in the community**

You might encounter situations where people try to stop you from doing your job or start to take pictures or film you when you're working out in communities. Almost everyone has a smartphone, which means nearly everyone has a camera. That means the odds of people filming you at work are pretty high.

This can be an unsettling experience. Your behaviour – positive or negative – can get filmed and posted online. It takes seconds and has the potential to catch the attention of thousands of people.

Most of our work happens in places open to the public. That means anyone filming you at work isn't breaking the law, strictly speaking. They could be breaking the law if they're filming you in a place which has sensitive information or activities happening in it. Examples include a family centre with children in the area or a meeting discussing someone who uses our services.

Follow this guide on how to deal with it:

- It's essential to keep calm, even if it isn't always easy.
- Be polite, respectful and courteous – even if they are not.
- Ask them to stop taking pictures or recording a video of you.
- Offer them a point of contact for more information on the work you're doing.
- If possible, remove yourself from the situation quickly and calmly.
- Do not retaliate with a heated conversation or by filming them back.
- Do not be disrespectful to people or mock them.
- Let your manager know what happened as soon as possible. Write down the date, time, location, a description of the person filming you, and a statement of what happened.

## **Managing unacceptable content on non-council social media pages**

We can't control or manage non-council platforms or users, but we'll take steps to try to remove unacceptable content or correct the information. This could include approaching the organisation, site moderators, or the person who has posted it directly to take action. We'll also report it to the platform directly. We'll work with colleagues in legal services to consider whether any legal action can be taken.

We can only approach people using the Barnsley Council account if they like and follow the main Barnsley Council account. This will sometimes limit how we can approach pages. As a Communications and Marketing service, we'll not use our personal accounts to do this.

Please be our eyes on social media pages. If you see anything unacceptable towards the council:

- Screenshot the content and get a link to the thread and the page (make sure you get the platform name, date and time on it) – this is important so we can investigate it. Please send this to us at [communication@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:communication@barnsley.gov.uk)
- Report the content using the platform's reporting process.

## **Unacceptable content directed at our employees**

The council has a duty of care to take all reasonable steps to ensure your health, safety and wellbeing. Customers and residents have the right to expect the best service from the council, and the council will always try to provide that service politely and respectfully. In return, we expect the same treatment. This includes any comments made on social media pages.

Unfortunately, our employees are sometimes subjected to online abuse. This content could include a comment, image or video. More extreme content could show our employees being filmed doing their jobs. It could show situations out of context and spread misinformation and disinformation. What might be seen as just a comment or someone showing their frustrations is still directed at someone just doing their role.

We're clear on our stance - we'll not tolerate any violent or aggressive behaviour, discriminatory or hate crime comments towards a council employee, be it online or face to face.

## **Steps to take**

### **If the content is on a council-run social media channel and is related to an employee of Barnsley Council**

Follow the steps in the social media owner guidance.

### **If the content is on your personal social media pages and is related to you as an employee of Barnsley Council, you should:**

- Screenshot the content and get a link to the thread and the page (make sure you get the platform name, date and time on it) – this is important for us to have this for further investigation.
- Fill in a [violence and aggression report](#) as soon as possible. This allows us to make an official record and get you the help and support you might need.
- Report the content using the platform’s reporting process.
- Delete the comment.
- Block their access to your social media pages.
- Check and review your personal privacy settings. Stay safe online and consider who is looking at your pages and your details. This includes any photographs and videos you share and your links to your family and friends’ pages.
- Speak to your manager for support.
- Send evidence to your manager and [communications@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:communications@barnsley.gov.uk). We’ll look at how we take steps to support you.
- Depending on the content, we’ll consider whether it needs highlighting to legal or the police.
- Follow the guidance in our [Personal Safety and Violence and Aggression at work – Code of Practice](#), particularly the escalation process where a threat is made.
- Our [wellbeing section on the employee hub](#) has information to help you stay healthy and happy at work and in your personal life if needed.

**If the content is on a public social media channel and is related to you as an employee of Barnsley Council, you should:**

- Screenshot the content and get a link to the thread and the page (make sure you get the platform name, date and time on it) – this is important for us to have this for further investigation.
- Report the content using the platform’s reporting process.
- Fill in a [violence and aggression report](#) as soon as possible. This allows us to make an official record and get you the help and support you might need.
- Block their access to your social media pages.
- Check and review your personal privacy settings. Stay safe online and consider who is looking at your pages and your details. This includes any photographs and videos you share and your links to your family and friends’ pages.
- Speak to your manager for support.
- Send evidence to your manager and [communications@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:communications@barnsley.gov.uk). We’ll look at how we take steps to support you.
- We’ll contact the community page for you and try to get the comment removed. We’ll also remind them of their responsibility as page administrators.
- Depending on the content, we’ll consider whether it needs highlighting to legal, our health and safety service or the police.
- Follow the guidance in our [Personal Safety and Violence and Aggression at work – Code of Practice](#), particularly the escalation process where a threat is made.
- Our [wellbeing section on the employee hub](#) has information to help you stay healthy and happy at work and in your personal life if needed.

**The content might be on your personal social media pages and not related to your employment or role at Barnsley Council. This can still be upsetting, and you can take the following steps:**

- Screenshot the content and get a link to the thread and the page (make sure you get the platform name, date and time on it) – this is important that you have this if it needs further investigation.
- Report the content using the platform’s reporting process.

- Delete the content from your account.
- Block the account.
- Check and review your personal privacy settings. Stay safe online and consider who is looking at your pages and your details. This includes any photographs and videos you share and your links to your family and friends' pages.
- Depending on the content, consider whether it needs highlighting to the police.
- Speak to your manager for support.
- Our [wellbeing section on the employee hub](#) has information to help you stay healthy and happy at work and in your personal life if needed.

## How we'll support you

We'll provide support and guidance to anyone affected by online hate and abuse.

This includes support to complete the actions in the no place for hate section and Health and Safety and wellbeing support through the [Personal Safety and Violence and Aggression at work – Code of Practice](#).

Your manager will give you personal day-to-day support.

Our legal services will try and support you in dealing with a difficult situation and the law.

Our HR services will support you in understanding and applying the code of conduct and other relevant policies.

Our [wellbeing section on the employee hub](#) has information to help you stay healthy and happy at work and in your personal life.

## More information

If you need information or support, please contact us at [communications@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:communications@barnsley.gov.uk) or call (01226) 773443.