



Members general guidance for using social media

Although the best use of social media is conversational in tone, publishing to the web is still publishing, which means what you've 'said' on the web is written down and permanent.

While there's no additional legal or ethical burden around using social media, the usual legal rules (such as complying with the council's code of conduct) still apply and must be considered when using social media.

The key to whether your online activity is subject to the council's code of conduct is whether you are giving the impression that you are acting as a councillor.

Since the judgment of whether you are perceived to be acting as a councillor will be taken by someone else, it's safest to assume that any online activity can be linked to your official role. This is particularly true if you hold a lead member role and you are commenting on policy or decisions within your portfolio.

If the content of your online activity is objective, balanced, informative and accurate, and you maintain and demonstrate an open mind on any matters on which you may be called upon as a member to make a decision, you substantially reduce the possibility of a successful legal challenge to the content being made.



To make sure you comply with the council's code of conduct and to ensure your use of online media is well received, we suggest the following advice:

DO

- Set appropriate privacy settings for your blog or networking site – especially if you have a private, non-political blog.
- Keep an eye out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on your blog or page and remove them as soon as possible.
- Be aware that the higher your profile as a councillor, the more likely it is you will be seen as acting in your official capacity when you blog or network.
- Be aware that by publishing information that you could not have accessed without your position as a councillor you are likely to be seen as acting in your official capacity.
- Make sure that any comments on policy or decisions within your portfolio reflect your role as lead member.
- Use a disclaimer. Whenever you publish content to any form of digital media, make it clear that what you say they are a representative of your views and opinions and not necessarily the views and opinions of Dacorum Borough Council. However, remember that it is difficult for the audience to separate you from your official role at Dacorum Borough Council, particularly if you are a lead member.
- Treat others with respect – avoid personal attacks or offensive comments.
- Refrain from publishing anything you have received in confidence.
- Ensure you don't bring the council or your councillor role into disrepute.
- Comply with equality laws.

DON'T

- Blog in haste
- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or in a public meeting. Word spreads faster online than through any other form of communication.
- Publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation as they may take libel action against you.
- Use council facilities for personal or political blogs.
- Publish personal data of individuals unless you have their written permission.

