

Social media guidelines

April 2013

Context

We're living through a time of unprecedented cuts for local government. At the same time, we're facing a digital revolution that's changing the way people communicate, socialise and share information.

The use of social media (web-based networking through sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube and Flickr) as an effective and cost-free communications platform is increasing.

Effective use of social media to promote events, initiatives and services is growing in local authorities.

The legal framework around social media use is still developing, and the frequency of landmark cases is increasing.

This document contains guidance on how best to use social media to

promote the work of the council. It includes:

- Guidelines for personal social media use by employees
- Guidelines for business use of social media
- Social media and recruitment

80% of the population have a social media account

Half of Facebook's users log on every day

YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world

95% of councils in a 2012 government survey had a Twitter account

Only 3% of local authorities had no social media account at all at January 2012

35% of the UK population have visited a local authority website

Personal use of social media

Most people – and therefore most employees – have internet access at home. Many also have it at work. This can lead to a blurring of boundaries where social media is concerned, and banning access at work doesn't address this.

Guidance for employees:

- Be aware of the need to use social media responsibly both in and outside of work.
- Anything you put online has the potential to be seen outside your immediate circle of friends or followers.
- Defamatory, offensive, obscene, libellous, discriminatory or harassing online behaviour is not acceptable – including on personal accounts.
- Making derogatory/negative comments about the Council, staff or customers will be treated as a

potential issue of misconduct under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and may lead to action up to and including dismissal.

- Anything negative or damaging you say about your work, the council or its staff or customers has the potential to be seen by your employers.
- Don't use social media during work hours for non-work purposes – your employers will see that you're not doing your job.
- Don't post any information that you've come by through the course of your work that may be personal or confidential.

Gedling's Information Security Policy states that, 'Personal internet use is only allowed during the employee's own time with the manager's permission, and should not interfere with an employee's work or that of

colleagues. Internet usage may be monitored and any personal use considered excessive will be reported to managers.'

Last year an Argos employee was sacked for criticising his bosses online. Tom Beech, 20, was fed up after a bad day at work so he logged on to Facebook and set up "I Work At Argos And Can't Wait To Leave Because It's Shit".

Ex-workers have also used Facebook to launch attacks on former employers, as seen in the case of the directory enquiry service 118 118. They launched a Facebook group to moan about former bosses – the group rapidly turned into a repository for scornful comments about customers.

In June 2012, James Brennan was fired from his job at Waitrose after writing an obscene remark about the 'Partnership' – referring to the John Lewis Partnership, owners of Waitrose, on Facebook. He thought it was only visible to his online friends, but a colleague printed off the remark and showed it to his boss, who fired him on the spot.

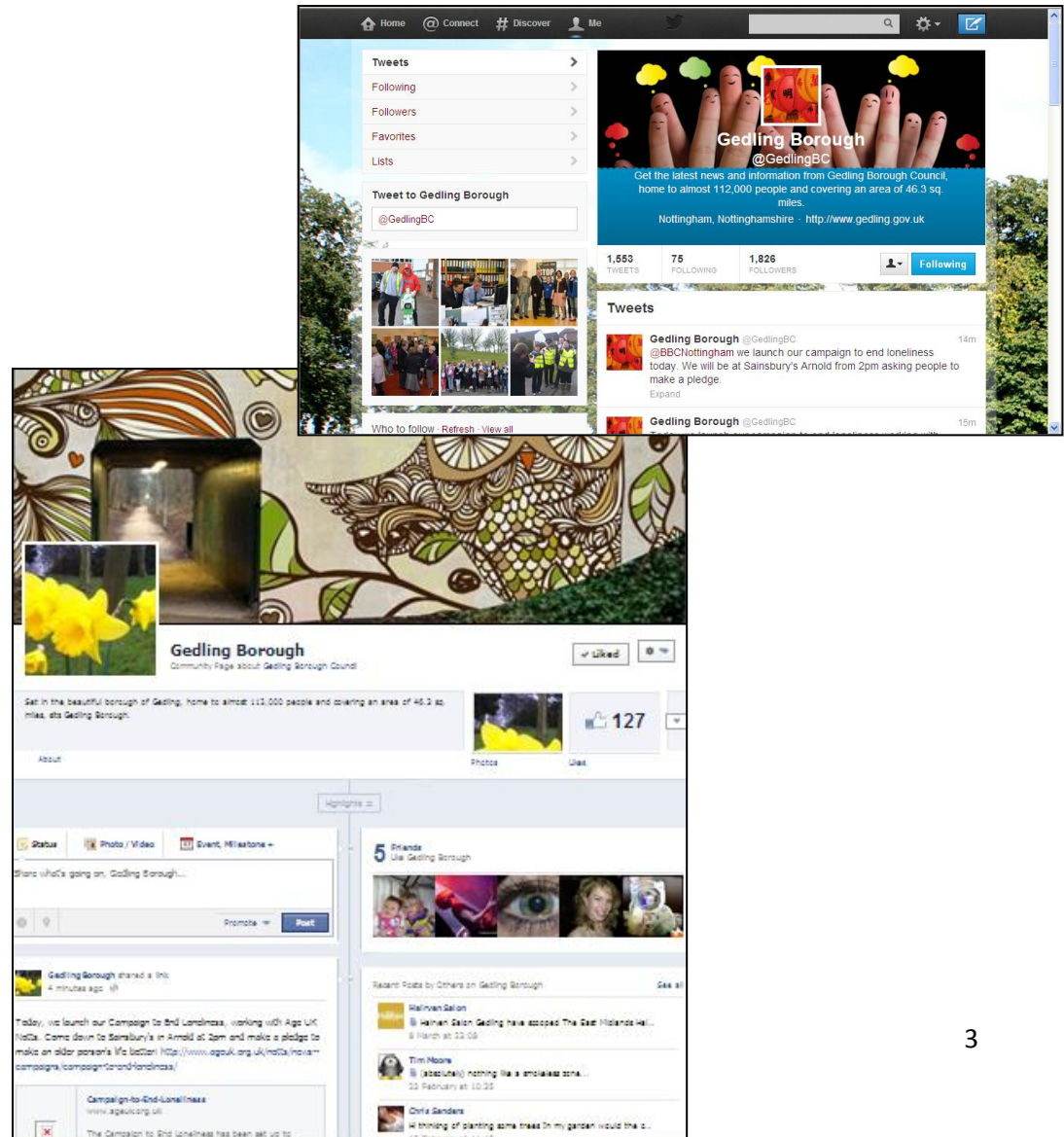
Business use of social media

Gedling Borough Council is responsible and liable for any content created by its employees in the course of their work.

The council has central Facebook and Twitter accounts, as well as others for specific services.

Every social media account in the council has an owner. A list of owners is kept in the communications office. If you would like to establish a social media account for your area of work, please talk to the Communications Manager.

All Gedling Borough Council's social media accounts must be monitored daily, and third party comments moderated appropriately so that if anything offensive, derogatory, obscene or libellous is posted, it can be removed.



Social media and recruitment

It's becoming more and more commonplace – and more and more acceptable in some circles – to informally 'vet' potential employees by taking a look at their social media presence.

This is an area where legislation has yet to be established. If marital status, sexual orientation, religious belief or race are disclosed on social media, then inferences of discrimination may be drawn by unsuccessful candidates.

Social media and politics

None of the council's social media accounts may be used to support party political aims or groups.

Politicians love social media – whether they're at central or local level, their Twitter and Facebook accounts give

them a voice and a platform from which they can communicate with the people and communities they serve.

Many of our politicians here in Gedling have their own Twitter and Facebook accounts. They tweet and post in their personal capacity as councillors, rather than on behalf of the council – whilst they may promote the work of the council, their accounts, and views, are their own, not those of Gedling Borough Council.

Remember...

There's really no such thing as 'delete' on the internet

Please – Think before you post.

Some subjects are controversial

Be careful discussing subjects over which emotions run high – politics and religion, for example. Respect others' opinions. Never, ever respond to an offensive post on a council account as yourself – leave it to the council to deal with.

Your job comes first

Don't let social media affect your work – whether it's overuse in work time, or inappropriate posts on your personal accounts.

Think about the overlap

Don't post about a wild night out and then don't turn up to work because you're 'ill'. Remember that what you say and do outside your working day could fundamentally breach the trust that the council has in you.

Play nice

Be respectful and considerate.

Advocate if you wish

If the council is doing something that you think is great – whether it's for its employees or the public – then shout about it. However, please do so in your own time and from your own account!

Don't wash dirty laundry in public

If the council is doing something that you don't agree with – whether it's with employees or the public – address it appropriately and professionally via your manager, through the established channels. Don't try and address it by using social media.