



NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Members' Social Media Policy

JULY 2026

Responsibility:	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Approved by:	Full Authority
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Introduction

- 1.1 'Social media' is the term commonly given to websites and online platforms, apps and tools that allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks, encouraging participation and engagement. Social media helps the Authority in fostering closer relationships with residents, visitors, partners, stakeholders and the media.
- 1.2 Social media is an important and valuable part of many people's lives, offering opportunities for connection, learning and engagement. However, there are inevitably personal and organisational risks associated with social media use, including the potential to put an opinion or comment in writing permanently into the public domain. Members should be aware of this in complying with the wider policy and expectations of their roles.
- 1.3 The objective of this policy is to provide guidance to Members on the acceptable use of public social media and the potential risks. It is intended to minimise the risk of social media activity impacting negatively on the reputation of the Authority or the role of Authority Members. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct – it is worth including the most relevant point from the Code of Conduct in relation to social media use as a reminder, which is –

Whenever a Member is acting in their capacity as a Member or co-opted Member they must not disclose information that they know, or ought to know, is confidential, shared in confidence, or which constitutes the personal data of others, except as permitted by law and with the consent of the information owner, and only after consultation with the Monitoring Officer. This duty continues to apply after the Member has left the Authority.

- 1.4 The provisions of this policy apply at all times where any views expressed can be linked to your role as a Member or by direct connection with the Authority. This includes the use of social networking sites in Members' own time and from Members' own computers and other devices, where that is or might appear to be part of a Member's public role. The Authority's reputation for impartiality and objectivity is crucial. The public must be able to trust the integrity of the Authority and Members must not act online in a way that brings or may be perceived to bring the Authority or the role of Authority Member into disrepute. Disclaimers are often useful when publishing information, however they also need to be carefully considered, scoped and phrased.
- 1.5 Activity within social media platforms brings wider considerations of whether Members may be perceived to be acting in their personal or Authority capacities. A key consideration here is about the perception of the public. We may not always be able to fully control that perception, nor understand how others come to develop their perception of us as acting either as private individuals or as Members. You should be mindful, therefore, that your perception of when you are carrying out official business and when you are acting privately may be different to how it is viewed by a member of the public.

This policy document supports Members in their use of social media and complying with wider expectations of Member conduct.

2. Policy Principles

- 2.1 These principles set out the standards of behaviour expected of Members when using public social media.
- **Be professional:** Members, together with officers, are ambassadors for the Authority. Always make it clear whether you are acting in your public capacity as an Authority Member or in your private / personal capacity, in accordance with the guidelines in this policy. Do not attack or abuse others or post derogatory or offensive material.
 - **Be responsible:** be honest at all times, do not share information which may be inaccurate or is unverified, and always be transparent when altering or reposting third party material.
 - **Be credible:** be fair and thorough and make sure you are doing the right thing.
- 2.2 Failure to abide by the rules and procedures written in this policy will be classed as a breach of this policy. Potential breaches of this policy will be considered in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct - [Members code of conduct - New Forest National Park](#)
- 2.3 All social media accounts and pages for the Authority directly, i.e. anything identifying itself as a corporate account or messaging, must be approved by the Authority's Communications Manager prior to creation / publication. Members must not create content that appears to be part of the Authority's formal social media output.
- 2.4 Always remember that participation online can result in your comments being permanently available and open to being republished in other media.
- 2.5 Members must not publish potential media stories relating to the Authority whether on personal or on NPA social media accounts until they have been promoted on the Authority's main account, eg sharing Ministers' visits in advance of the Authority's media coverage. If in doubt as to whether a particular matter has already become public, Members must consult with the Communications Manager.
- 2.6 Never give out personal details such as home addresses and phone numbers. Never post the personal data (which includes photographs) of third parties without first obtaining their permission.
- 2.7 Please be aware that you may attract media interest in you as an individual, so proceed with care whether you are participating in a business or a personal capacity. If you have any doubts, seek advice first.
- 2.8 Stay within the legal framework and be aware that defamation, confidentiality, copyright and data protection laws apply.

- 2.9 Members are accountable, and should not disclose information, make commitments or engage in activities on behalf of the Authority.
- 2.10 Members are asked to report any defamatory posts or other defamatory social media activity to the Authority's Monitoring Officer.

3. Guidance – Minimising risk on social media

- 3.1 The guidance below contains Do's and Don'ts which are intended to support Members using social media, whilst also managing the risks associated to both Members and the Authority. If there is any doubt when using social media please contact Communications colleagues before posting.

Do:

- A) Share Authority content from the organisational social media channels and website if you would like to.
- B) Be mindful of the Members' code of conduct and your responsibilities as a member of a public body.
- C) Keep personal and professional accounts separate, and do not create materials using organisational logos or brand assets without permission.
- D) Include a line in your social media bio that states 'Views expressed are my own'. Be aware that it is not guaranteed that this will be seen, cannot be guaranteed to change others' perceptions of you as a Member, and does not remove the need to act in line with the policy.
- E) Ensure that any comment you make that is associated with Authority work is in line with the Authority's key messages, supportive of the decisions taken and / or direction of agreed activity and only contains information that is already in the public domain.
- F) Be aware that taking positions, even on your private account, that contradict the position or values of the Authority could cause reputational harm and lead to investigation / disciplinary action.
- G) Speak to the Communications team for advice and guidance before setting up any account that is specifically dedicated to talking about your work.
- H) Route any information or media requests through standard internal channels rather than responding on social media
- I) Think before you post; consider whether you would say this in person and bear in mind that content can be screenshotted and shared in perpetuity, even after it is deleted. Take your time before posting - always re-read what you have written and/or leave drafts for posting at a later date or time when you have more capacity to fully consider it. On some platforms it is not possible to edit

anything once posted and on many others it can be quite difficult; either way the damage may already be done in haste. Use your best judgement. Remember that there are always consequences to what you publish. If you're about to publish something that makes you even slightly uncomfortable, review the suggestions above and take advice if necessary.

J) Flag any inflamed debates or conversations about the Authority to the Communications team as soon as possible through work contact details.

K) Check and maintain your privacy settings so that you are aware of who can see your content.

L) Ensure you have complied with the law including defamation, contempt of court, copyright, data protection, employment and equalities or harassment provisions and be aware that this applies to the publishing or reposting of data and confidential information/documents etc belonging to others, not just the Authority.

M) Ensure that your entries, articles or comments are neutral in tone, factual and verifiable. In addition, there are usually guidelines on sites such as Wikipedia on adding links. Read the guidelines carefully before submitting or editing an article.

N) Be aware of your association with the Authority in online spaces. If you identify yourself as an Authority Member, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues and third parties and complies with the Code of Conduct.

O) Identify yourself, your name and your membership of the Authority when you discuss the National Park or Authority-related matters, and write in the first person. You must make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the Authority.

P) Avoid confrontation and unnecessary disputes, be the first to correct your own mistakes, and don't alter previous posts without indicating that you have done so.

Q) Ensure you are completely happy with all the wording, inferences, facts and sources used in the original post and any previous posts within its wider chain, if reposting / 'liking' other users' content

R) Try to add value. Provide worthwhile information and perspective. The Authority is best represented by its Members and officers and what you publish may reflect on the Authority as a whole.

S) Before editing an online encyclopaedia entry about the Authority, or any entry which might be deemed a conflict of interest, consult the house rules of the site concerned and, if necessary, ask permission from the relevant content editor.

Don't:

- A) Assume no one can see your content because you only have a small number of contacts.
- B) Enter debates on sensitive topics or respond to criticism about the Authority, even if you're directly tagged, unless you are absolutely confident that your response is in line with the Authority's position, that you have considered all possible sensitivities, and that this will not risk any negative repercussions.
- C) Comment on or share views on issues that could reflect negatively on / undermine the reputation of the Authority, including issues like the closure of a service, a local funding decision or wider political conversations.
- D) Engage in protracted conversations or debates about the work of the Authority on your personal account, even if directly approached. Instead, speak to the Communications team for support and advice.
- E) Share information about the Authority or knowledge that is private, confidential or sensitive, gained through your interaction with the Authority. This includes detail about individual staff or Members involved with making any decision.
- F) Under any circumstances post or share offensive comments about the Authority, other Members, staff, volunteers, or partners online. This may amount to cyber-bullying and could be deemed a breach of the Code of Conduct.
- G) Reveal or publish confidential or exempt information, including details of internal discussions that you may have learned or had access to as part of your role as an Authority Member. This includes personal information about service users, their families or friends or others, e.g. contractors and Authority staff.
- H) Invite customers/service users of the Authority to become your friends in social networking sites where this may appear to be linked to the Authority's work. There may be a conflict of interest and/or security and privacy issues.
- I) Remove criticism of the Authority when correcting errors about the Authority, we should be transparent about who we are. Instead, we should respond to legitimate criticism. We should not remove derogatory or offensive comments but must report them to the relevant administrators for them to take action. For guidance, follow the Authority's Social Media House Rules - [Social media house rules - New Forest National Park](#)
- J) Cite or reference other Members, employees, partners, or contractual third parties without their prior approval, for example attributing a particular point of view to them. When you do make such a reference, where possible link back to the original source.

5 Managing personal social media accounts

5.1 Members are entitled to privacy and to exercise free speech when expressing their personal views, and the Authority supports personal social media use for those who wish to do so. Equally, there is an expectation that in acting as Members you will collectively support and uphold the decisions and support agreed direction and work of the Authority.

5.2 The Authority expects Members to take responsibility for managing their online presence to ensure that it does not risk conflicting with the work, policies or reputation of the Authority. This applies regardless of whether social media accounts are public or private.

5.3 Any requests received through social media, for example media or information requests, should be routed through standard internal channels and not responded to through social media.

5.4 There is a permanence to any material shared or interacted with online, even if it is deleted, and a potential for content to be taken and shared without context, or to suit specific agendas.

6 Video and Media sharing

6.1 Ensure that all photo permissions have been obtained and that video and media (including presentations) are safe to share and do not contain any personal, confidential, derogatory or defamatory information.

6.2 If the content is official and corporate Authority content then it must be labelled and tagged as such and must not appear to be associated with an individual.

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