

Protocol for Twitter for Safer Neighbourhood Teams

Every safer neighbourhood team has at least one Twitter accounts, which is run and monitored by the team, with the local sergeant having overall control.

All officers and staff contributing to these sites must have a face-to-face briefing with Corporate Communication on best practice, legal requirements and reassuring content.

BEST PRACTICE

Keep it up-to-date and accurate

Out of date or incorrect posts shows a lack of interest and professionalism.

Maintain a presence

It is important to ensure that if you are using Twitter you continue to be a reliable and constant presence. You should post a Tweets at least every other day.

Monitor regularly for feedback and respond quickly (maximum time: within 24 hours). The public expect a prompt response and not to provide this can be harmful to the image of the Constabulary.

Following other Twitter users

You should only follow local groups/organisations or people for a genuine policing purpose. Please do not follow celebrities from a Constabulary Twitter account unless it is for a genuine policing purpose. Following celebrities can give members of the public the impression that officers are 'wasting time' and appear to be an endorsement of the views posted on those accounts.

Getting it right legally

Be aware of legal implications, particularly around Contempt of Court and defamation. If you are unsure a member of Corporate Communication will be available to help on ext. 4581.

Information affecting security, breach of confidence or details that could be prejudicial to an inquiry or court proceedings should never be posted on Twitter.

Never release the name of a victim or witness. Once an arrest has been made, do not post anymore information or comments about the incident as this may prejudice the court case. Offenders' personal details may only be posted upon conviction for an offence.

A member of the Corporate Communication team is always on-call and will be happy to discuss any issues which arise. The on-call press officer can be contacted via Oscar 1.

Be aware of implications to investigation

Remember that an SIO may want to withhold details of an incident for a number of investigative reasons. As a general rule, if the incident involves violence against a person, DON'T put it in the public domain without consulting Corporate Communication. If you are unsure, you can always check with the on-call press officer – or contact Oscar 1. Be aware that in some cases, there could be covert operations running in the background that you may not be aware of.

The media constantly monitor Facebook and Twitter

Remember your posts often prompt calls to Corporate Communication from the media looking for more information. Again this is something to be aware of when a potential serious or critical incident occurs. Also please remember that there may be information the investigation team does not want in the public domain for investigative reasons.

Spelling/grammar must be correct

You are representing the Constabulary and simple grammatical errors can reflect badly on the Force.

Try to be reassuring in your content

Think about the effect of the messages you are issuing. Try to include details of what the Constabulary are doing or provide relevant crime prevention advice.

Keep it informal but professional

Twitter and Facebook are informal mediums but the Constabulary still has a high standard to adhere to. Using text talk can be acceptable but do not use any slang or street talk.

Raise awareness

Let your communities know that you are accessible on Twitter by advertising it at surgeries, public meetings and other engagement opportunities.

Make sure you upload a corporate approved photograph of yourself

Do not use any unauthorised pictures.

Include a generalised description of your team and the work you do

Let people know which team you work with, a little bit about the kind of police work that you get involved with i.e. 'I am a Neighbourhood Officer and work locally to solve local issues in relation to crime and disorder'. Always include in your profile details 'Please do not report crime via Twitter. You can contact police on our non-emergency number 101. In an emergency always dial 999' as well as including the web address to your neighbourhood page.

Use the Constabulary approved Twitter profile design

Do not deviate from the Constabulary profile as a professional and corporate image must be maintained.

Understand the important difference between a public reply and a Direct Message (DM)

When you reply to someone that you are following, using the "@Johnsmith" syntax, everyone following you and them can see your conversation, and a permanent public record is made of the exchange. A Direct Message, using the "D JohnSmith" syntax, is strictly between you and that one other recipient (although in order for this to work both recipient and sender have to be following one another).

Be aware of 'retweets'

People can 'retweet' - send on to their followers - your comment. Please note if you re-tweet something it can be perceived as agreeing or endorsing the message and the account it was sent from.

Watch your 'Ps and Qs'

Twitter is a public forum, and your posts are archived forever. It is always advisable to avoid getting into a war of words with someone. Twitter is the worst possible place to have a disagreement since it is a public forum which is available to everyone.

If in doubt – ASK!!!

If any contentious or non-local issues arise, please liaise with Corporate Communication for a corporate response.