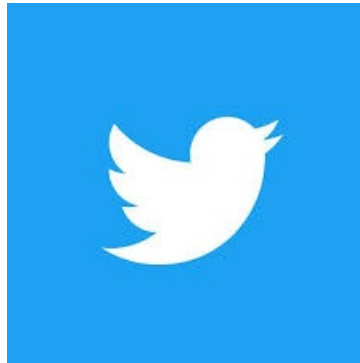


# How to build and manage your Twitter following

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*It (social media) has helped me to engage with a key online audience, including those who are first time/absent voters and a disengaged electorate who have never voted before or fallen out with the political system for a variety of reasons.*

- Cllr David Harrington



Twitter is one of the world's most popular online social networks, with over 300 million active users.

Twitter is used by a vast range of people and organisations for a number of useful purposes. In fact, many councillors these days are using Twitter to communicate, engage and build relationships with their wards.

Read on to learn:

- what Twitter is and how it works
- how to get started using Twitter
- top tips on building and managing your Twitter following

## What Twitter is and how it works

*With social media, start with what you are comfortable with. Use the resources that are out there and keep it simple. To my mind a good place to start is twitter - you have a 140 characters and the basic premise is for you to write about what you are doing now.*

- Cllr Anthony McKeown

Twitter is self-described as “the place to find out about what’s happening in the world right now.” In other words, Twitter is a real-time information sharing website, used by all sorts of people and organisations for a number of reasons — from light entertainment and socialising, to news sharing, to engagement in causes, services and products.

Each Twitter user has a profile from which they can publicly share ‘tweets’ — 140 character-limit snippets of information shared with their ‘followers’ (other Twitter users who’ve opted to follow that person’s tweets).

Other key features of Twitter include:

- **Mentions:** Twitter users can directly address another user by putting the ‘@’ symbol and entering in their username. The other user will then receive an alert saying they’ve been mentioned in a tweet.
- **Direct messages (or DMs):** each Twitter profile also has a message inbox allowing users to privately message each other.
- **Retweets (or RTs):** which is when one user takes a tweet posted by another user and re-posts (i.e. re-tweets) it as their own tweet, automatically crediting the source. This is commonly used as a quick way of referencing, endorsing or showing appreciation for something that resonates with your own interests or those of your followers. For example, if as a councillor, you see an organisation tweet about an event you’re confirmed to speak at, you may want to retweet that post as a sort of shorthand for: I support this, I’m involved and I’m looking forward to it.
- **Trending Topics (TTs) and hashtags:** all Twitter users are able to ‘mark up’ any particular word or

phrase that they think is of wider public interest, by prefixing the hashtag ('#') symbol. E.g. #digitalskills. If many other users also start using that hashtagged phrase, Twitter picks up on that and lists it as a trending topic. It's basically a way for users to understand what the 'hottest topics' are currently being talked about via Twitter at any given moment.

- **Lists:** users can group and categorise all Twitter profiles that are of interest to them. For example, a councillor may create a 'Local charities and non-profits' or a 'Press and media' list to help them to quickly look up particular topics of interest.
- **Real-time reply, retweet, and like counts:** watch the engagement numbers with tweets increase in real-time within the app, instead of refreshing and reloading tweets.
- **Comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-harassment features:** notification filtering, mute options, reporting transparency, safe search, prevention of new abuse, hiding abusive tweets.

Many councillors find Twitter to be a really useful and powerful tool for a number of reasons. For example:

- It's a great way to maintain real-time communication and engagement with their ward.
- It demonstrates a spirit of transparency and accountability to the communities they support.
- It can be a powerful networking tool and means of building new relationships and opportunities with other organisations, public figures and media etc.

## How to get started with Twitter

**Step 1:** set up a profile by visiting the [Twitter website](#) and following the instructions.

**Step 2:** search for and start following relevant people, organisations and groups who may be of interest to you and vice versa.

**Step 3:** tweet something. Click on the 'What's happening?' text box to let followers know what you're doing or thinking and then click on the 'Tweet' button. Remember: tweets are limited to 140 or fewer characters (mastering the art of short and snappy is all part of the fun of Twitter!).

**Step 4:** tweet regularly. To get the most out of Twitter, you need to build a following by letting people know you're there. And to do that, you need to commit to using it regularly as a real-time tool. Tweet regularly (at least once a day) sharing what you're up to, what your plans are, or what your view is on a particular issue etc. The more you do that, the more other profiles who share your interests will follow and engage with you via Twitter.

**Step 5:** promote your profile. Make sure you regularly mention that you can be found on Twitter and share your profile handle (@username) at meetings, events, and on your website, blog, and any wider online channels.

## Top tips for building and managing a Twitter following

### Make a plan and schedule

Having a presence on social media is an ongoing commitment — you get out what you put in. If you're serious about building your Twitter following, it's important to regularly share a diverse mix of content — from updates on surgeries and events you're attending, to relevant news updates and positions on topical issues, to invitations for feedback and opinions from followers.

To help you along, there are dedicated Twitter management and scheduling tools out there such as [Hootsuite](#) and [Buffer](#), allowing you to 'load up' tweets in advance and set the timings and frequency for publication. However, whilst these tools are handy for more static info and messages, remember to actually supplement with real-time engagement and responses to followers — people will be able to tell if your feed is solely 'the work of a robot'.

### Be professional yet authentic

It's obviously important for you to strike the right tone of voice in your tweets. Share relevant, appropriate and authoritative content that's going to put your public image in a good light and build your reputation as a trustworthy community figure.

However, at the same time, people expect public figures to be more 'real' and relatable in their style of communication online. Don't be scared of talking in a more conversational and informal tone of voice on Twitter, or even lightening the mood with a touch of humour when the appropriate opportunities arise.

### Set the rules and moderate appropriately

Hopefully, social media brings about more positives than negatives for both you and your followers. However, we all know that using channels such as Twitter also leaves us more vulnerable to being on the receiving end of negative or inappropriate contributions.

For this reason, it's important to firm up a social media moderation policy that outlines what is and isn't acceptable behaviour amongst followers and enforcing those rules appropriately. There are even moderation tools out there that can help you to filter out any inappropriate content, as well as spam from your social media feeds. For further guidance on managing inappropriate behaviour and comments, see our guide on cyberbullying.

### Online safety information

- Protect your identity and personal information by never sharing your personal details such as your email address, name, and mobile phone number
- Avoid web-based applications that ask you to supply your Twitter username and password
- Regularly change your password
- Avoid clicking unsafe websites by checking the URL
- Beware of unsolicited direct messages
- Remember to block and report spam
- Use an anti-virus and firewall software on your computer or device

### Useful links and wider reading

- [Twitter: Getting started pages](#)
- [Guide to cyber bullying](#)

***This guide was last updated on 15 June 2022***

### Next steps

- ▶ [A guide to cyberbullying](#)
- ▶ [A guide to internet security](#)
- ▶ [How to set up and run your Facebook page](#)
- ▶ [How to signpost residents to digital skills support](#)
- ▶ [How to run a virtual surgery](#)
- ▶ [How to make councillor surgeries more digitally connected](#)
- ▶ [What is Twitter?](#)
- ▶ [How to use Twitter](#)
- ▶ [How to tweet](#)

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