

Twitter Guidance



Preventing crime, protecting the public and helping those in need
www.west-midlands.police.uk





Why we use Twitter

Twitter provides our officers with a quick and easy way to reach out to and communicate with communities across the West Midlands. As a force, we have embraced the use of Twitter and actively encourage officers in many different departments to get involved.

The overall objective is to inform, reassure and publish information that could help the public.

We have more than 250 Twitter accounts, with a combined reach of more than 1m followers. This guide is aimed at helping you understand how to use Twitter and find out what sort of information is good to post.

New to Twitter?

Twitter will automatically suggest famous people to follow, but we also suggest following people from the organisation you are in e.g. @WMPolice or for those that share a common interest e.g. @sandwellcouncil @TerrorismPolice

Tip – Look for a blue tick on a Twitter profile to ensure the account is verified – this means they are who they say they are.

Send a tweet – If you want to let your followers know what you're doing, click the feather quill icon and type into the 'What's happening?' text box. To post the tweet, click on the 'Tweet' button. Note that tweets are limited to 280 or fewer characters. Remember, you can't edit tweets once they are posted. Even if you delete a tweet because you've decided it was a bad idea, people may have seen and screenshotted it while it was live. Always think before you tweet.

How to delete a tweet – If you accidentally post something with a spelling mistake, or need to remove a tweet for any other reasons click on the three horizontal dots found at the bottom of the tweet and select 'delete tweet' from the dropdown menu. When prompted confirm you want to remove it by hitting delete.

Tip – You can add a picture, video or gif using the icons!





Using Twitter

How to @mention someone - When tweeting, using '@' followed by a username (with no spaces) in your tweet will send a mention to the user you choose. For example, @WMPolice will send a mention to West Midlands Police account, and the entire tweet you post will show up in their '@mentions' section.

What is a retweet and how to do it? To retweet is essentially to share someone else's tweet on your timeline. A retweet quickly lets you share someone else's tweet with your followers. For example if a major incident was occurring key messages would be shared from the @WMPolice account - you could then share these to your followers using a retweet. Look out for the (symbol beneath their tweet) add your own message if you want, or simply retweet. Think carefully before retweeting - it can be seen by some as an endorsement, even if you don't agree with the contents of the message you are sharing.

What is a direct message (DM)? A direct message is a private message on Twitter which can only be sent to someone you follow and someone who follows you back. It's unlikely that you'll need to use DMs from your police account but if someone wants to contact you privately this is a way of doing it.

Tip - If you are using this function, you should treat it exactly the same as your work email account. If you wouldn't be happy e-mailing information to an individual, you shouldn't send it via DM either.

What is a hashtag? A hashtag is a key word or phrase that helps Twitter users find content on a given topic. It's done simply by putting a # before a word in a tweet.

If a big event is happening in one of our cities it is likely be a hashtag will be used. For example, during Pride in Birmingham the event planners and partner agencies all used the hashtag #BrumPride to enable tweets to be easily searched for.



Best practice

What you can use Twitter for? The number one thing to ask yourself when posting a tweet is – What is the policing purpose? Everything we tweet must have a policing purpose behind it. Remember that Twitter isn't about having the most followers, it's about reaching people in your local area with useful and engaging information.

Twitter is a great place to share good news from events such as PACT meetings, beat surgeries and community events. You can also tweet about low-level local operations e.g. to tackle anti-social behaviour or criminal damage in a particular area.

Twitter is also great for sharing crime prevention advice, campaigns and sharing key messages from partner agencies using retweets.

You are free to tweet photos of your proactive work, but bear in mind if you are tweeting images which show children, their parents/guardians should give permission first.

Also consider if tweeting a photo could compromise an investigation. It's also important when tweeting images of vehicles to block out registration numbers.

Keep it interesting - Vary your tweets to keep them interesting and add photographs, videos, GIFs or relevant links to your tweets on occasion if possible. Tell people what you do as often as you can and keep an eye on other relevant accounts within the force and retweet if you find something interesting.

Frequency of tweets - There is no set number of tweets that you should send a day but we would encourage Twitter users to use their accounts every day they are on duty where

possible. If there are long periods of time where accounts are not used they will be closed down or handed on to somebody else. Obviously use your common sense. If you inundate your followers with hundreds of tweets a day they will quickly switch off and un-follow your account.

Your account represents West Midlands Police- Avoid making comments or giving opinions that may seem controversial. For example, avoid political statements, comments about unrelated news stories and comments that criticise other people or force departments.

Tone and how to engage with followers - It's important to keep your tweet style reassuring, friendly and engaging. Avoid police jargon and abbreviations that the public don't understand. You may understand what 'Two IPs with minor injuries following a RTC' means, but Joe Public doesn't! Don't use too much text message slang, or too many emoticons.

Tip - Be engaging and encourage questions and feedback from your followers

Responding to tweets - It's inevitable that your Twitter account will receive questions and comments from other people on Twitter – and they won't all be positive.

Be warm, friendly, polite and reassuring. Do not be abrupt or rude. Try and be helpful wherever you can and signpost users to the correct page on the website if they are asking for advice. There is a wealth of help and advice available on crime and non-police matters e.g. parking, dog fouling and noise complaints!



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If someone is being generally abusive, do not respond.

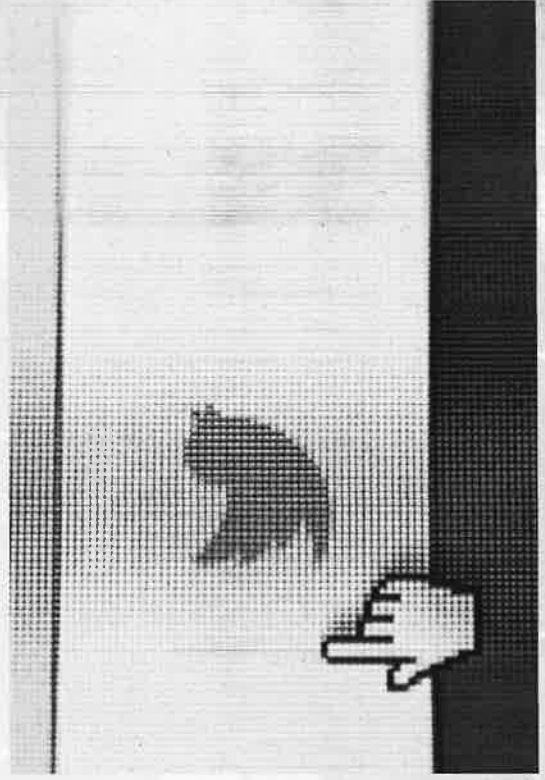
Complaints, questions and reputational issues - We advise you to tweet the user, empathise with them and direct them to the complaints section on the website if they wish to make a formal complaint.

For example: "Hi Jim, We're sorry that this has happened to you, please visit our complaints form to register your complaint."

OR:

"Hi Sue, sorry for the confusion. You need to go to <http://www.wmnow.co.uk/> and sign up. You'll receive a confirmation email to activate your account, and a secondary email soon after with your discount code. If you have any more issues DM us and we'll send you a code."

If you are sent information or images that could have a reputational risk to the force you should contact Corporate Communications as soon as possible. We will review and advise on a case by case basis.



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Other useful info

Reporting crime on Twitter - All of our accounts clearly indicate that crime cannot be reported over Twitter. If someone wants to report a crime they need to call 101 or 999 in an emergency. For advice they can visit www.west-midlands.police.uk

Receiving intel on Twitter -

[Redacted]

Major incidents -

In the event of a major incident all of the Reporting crime on Twitter - All of our accounts clearly indicate that crime cannot be reported over Twitter. If someone wants to report a crime they need to call 101 or 999 in an emergency. For advice they can visit www.west-midlands.police.uk

Receiving intel on Twitter -

[Redacted]

Major incidents -

In the event of a major incident all of the key messages and updates will be shared from the @WMPolice account. You will be asked not to tweet anything in connection with the incident but retweet messages from @WMPolice and key partners to your followers.

Social media policy -

By using an official social media account you agree to adhere to the force's Digital and Social Media Policy. You can find this on the intranet here.

Corporate Communications Social Media contacts -

Corporate Communications is open from 6.30am to 7pm from Monday to Friday and 7.30am to 3.30pm on Saturday and Sunday. An on call rota operates out of hours via the FCC Inspector.

Key contacts within Corporate Communications:

[Redacted]

Other online resources:

Getting started with Twitter - <https://support.twitter.com/articles/215585>

Twitter FAQs - <https://help.twitter.com/en/new-user-faq>

Ready to take the next step in your digital journey? Download our interactive presentation here – (link)

