SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

Contents

Purpose of this document

Social media is a great way for elected members to engage with their residents, keep in touch with developing trends across the district and share news from the Council and other organisations that may be relevant to their followers. With the ever-increasing use of social media, this guide has been written to provide members with information on:

- Best practice for using social media effectively
- The pros and cons of social media
- Social media and the members code of conduct

Members are not required to use social media in order to fulfil their role; this guide is for those members who already use or are planning on using social media during their time as a councillor.

Social Media Explained

The Oxford Dictionary defines social media as "websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking."[1] Primarily, social media is used as a means of keeping in touch with friends and relatives, to keep up to date with the latest news and trends, and networking with people that have similar interests.

Social media encompasses a number of different platforms; there are over 200 social networking sites in the world. The most popular social media sites are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and LinkedIn. Though they differ in their style, content and purpose, each social media site is a platform for people to share their views – so basically, over 200 different ways of saying the same thing!

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[1] Source - https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/social_media

Benefits for Elected Members

Social media has a number of benefits that will help you fulfil your role as a Warwick district councillor. First of all – it's free! Social media provides you with a cost effective and engaging way of keeping in touch with your residents, letting them know what you're up to, promoting the projects and initiatives you are supporting and highlighting your successes, whilst ensuring you are well informed of any issues or concerns they may have.

More and more people are using social media to find out about news, events and trends, so being active on social media will help them to see what you are doing for the community in your role as a councillor.

Social media is also a great way of co-ordinating campaigns or events that you may be involved in. Facebook in particular allows you to create an event or a group where you can raise awareness and generate discussion. For events it is particularly helpful as it allows you to gauge attendance figures.

Best Practice

There are a number of steps you can take to ensure that your usage of social media is safe, ethical, and in-keeping with the Member's Code of Conduct.

Your profile
It's important to separate your personal life and your role as a Councillor in order to maintain appropriate boundaries. Though your personal life and views may influence your role as a councillor, it is highly recommended that you maintain this separation so that the lines do not become blurred. There are several ways you can do this, depending on the platform you're using.

Facebook differs from Twitter and Instagram as your profile is all about you as the individual, and your Facebook friends will often be people that you know, such as family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances. On Facebook you will need to approve the people that send you a friend request, so if you are looking to use Facebook in your role as a Councillor, it would be beneficial for you to set up a page.

A Facebook page is different to a Facebook profile. A page is open to everyone and allows people to like and follow it for the latest updates. This will enable you to have a platform for you to share with your residents the work you are doing, whilst keeping your private, personal profile limited to your family and friends. For information or advice on setting up a Facebook page, contact the Media Team.

Twitter and Instagram are more open, and traditionally people find themselves following other users that they don't actually know, but rather they share a common interest with. This is usually done using hashtags (see jargon buster). On these platforms, unless you have your profile on 'private', anyone and everyone can see what you post, even if they don't follow you.

If you are setting up a Twitter or Instagram profile, create a username that allows people to find you. Starting your name with 'Cllr' let's everyone know who you are and also indicates that you are using this profile in your capacity as a Councillor. If you are planning on using Twitter or Instagram for personal use then it is advisable to create two accounts – one for personal use, and one for use as a Councillor. What you will need to

consider is how much time you dedicate to your social media, maintaining that balance between personal and private.

You may see professional profiles that state "all views are my own" or "retweets do not equal endorsements"; however, if you have identified yourself as a councillor in your profile in some way, whether professional or private, then any views shared are automatically associated with your role as a councillor and the organisation you represent.

This doesn't mean that you can't add a personal touch when using your councillor profile. People will want to see your personality, so there's nothing wrong with sharing your views on films, TV programmes, music, sport or any other subject you're passionate about. Just remember: all of your activity must adhere to the Member's Code of Conduct.

Sharing & posting
Social media is all about sharing. At its core, it's a place to communicate with friends and family, to share moments and memories, as well as the latest news and developments. People will use social media as a platform to share their views on everything from film to politics, as a way of stimulating debate on topics they are passionate about.

Just like any conversation at the pub, coffee shop or supermarket, there are likely to be comments made and conversations taking place on social media that are contrary to equality and diversity; therefore, it is important to ensure that any comments made or shared by yourself do not land you in hot water!

Social media will allow you to write a post or tweet that comes directly from your account, but you can also share what other people have posted. There are two ways that you can do this. The first is to share it directly, so only the original post will appear in your timeline and will just state that you have shared it. The other is to quote the post or share it with your own comment added to it. The latter is the preferred method as this enables you to clarify why you are sharing this post.

Imagine you're standing in a coffee shop. If you were to say, out loud, a controversial statement that you've just read on social media – they sound like your words. Without context, to everyone in that coffee shop, they are your words and your beliefs. Now imagine you're stood in the coffee shop, but before you say that controversial statement, you add your own words to it by saying that this is something you disagree with and oppose. Now you've added context, there can be no doubt that the words you're about to say don't belong to you.

Once you say something on social media it is out there for all to see, and you can't take it back. If it's controversial, then often even if you delete it, someone will have copied it and will share it far and wide. Therefore, it is important to always think before you write or share something. It's all too easy to join a heated debate and add your comment, but take a moment to pause and think first. If you've had a bad day, are tired or are impaired in anyway, it's best to step away from social media and only post when your head is clear.

This advice also applies to private or direct messages as well. Just because you send a message to someone on social media in private, it does not stop them sharing that message with other people if they wish to do so.

As a councillor, you are always perceived to be acting in an official capacity even though you may not be – public office is perceived to be a 24/7 job, so though you may be "off

the clock", any comments or posts you share will be perceived to be in your professional capacity.

Remember: if you wouldn't want to drive past a billboard with your name, photo and those words next to it for everyone to see: don't post it.

Responding to posts

If you are setting up a social media account, make sure you set some time aside each day to check the account. Social media is *social*, and just like emails, you are expected to respond to people if they contact you. That said, it's also worth noting that any comments that are derogatory, inflammatory or otherwise should not be responded to. Some people use social media to purposefully bait and cause arguments, and being involved in politics makes you particularly vulnerable to this. You are well within your rights to remove their comments or block them completely.

On Twitter, if someone tweets you and you don't respond, only their followers will see it. So if you receive a tweet that is intending to bait you or incite an argument, just ignore it.

On Facebook, if they post on your page, it is available for everyone to see, so you will need to moderate your visitor posts for any comments that may be offensive by either deleting or correcting the comment.

Respect for others

Respecting other's opinions, even if they differ from your own, and engaging in healthy debate is encouraged. The sharing and challenging of views is expected and is in fact enjoyed by many users. It is recommended that you engage in debate, particularly if it relates to local issues or causes, but remember: you can always block someone if the tone becomes derogatory or aggressive.

Social media is the written word, so it is not easy to interpret your tone or inflection – particularly if someone is not familiar with you! So think about how any comments you make may be perceived. You can always read the message back to yourself to see how it comes across before posting.

Things to think about

Social media accounts can be hacked in the same way as an email account. If you receive a message from someone – even if it's someone you know – that says 'Have you seen this picture of you?!' or some other form of enticing message along with a link: don't click it, just delete it. These scams are designed to gain access to your account so it's best to ignore them and delete them straight away.

Don't give out your social media passwords to anyone else. Just like your email account or online banking, social media accounts can be used to imitate you, so keep this information safe and secure.

You may wish to delegate access to your social media account to someone that will post on your behalf. This is beneficial if you are not always able to commit yourself to using social media, however, you are ultimately responsible and accountable for any content that is posted to your account, so consider this carefully before deciding.

Though Council meetings are public record, it is advisable not to use social media during any meetings that you are a member of. Transparency and openness are an important part of public office, but posting on social media during meetings might give the impression that you are not concentrating on the meeting at hand. It is recommended

that you advise your followers that you will provide a summary of the meeting once it has ended.

Social media and members' code of conduct

The code of conduct extends to your use of social media, therefore your actions on social media must follow the code of conduct, namely:

- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Honesty

Further information

Any elected member wanting more information, advice or guidance on the use of social media can contact the Media Team:

- Phone – 01926 456069
- Email – media@warwickdc.gov.uk

And don't forget: if you're on social media, follow us and share WDC's news with your followers!

- Facebook - @WarwickDCNews
- Twitter - @Warwick_DC
- Instagram - @warwick.dc
- YouTube - @warwickdc07
- LinkedIn – Warwick District Council

Social Media Jargon Buster

There's a lot of jargon used across social media. With the advent of this quick-fire form of communication, many terms are abbreviated; some traditional words have been adapted for use online. Here we outline the common words used and what they really mean.

Algorithm

A technical term used to explain how people's posts, pictures, videos, etc. appear on your social media timeline. Social media sites don't list posts in chronological order as businesses would take advantage of this by constantly posting messages. Instead, posts appear in your timeline based on a number of factors, including the types of posts you interact with as well as who you interact with. This is all calculated by an algorithm.

Content

This is everything that appears on social media – text, videos, pictures; it's the message that people are sending out.

DM

Direct message: an option for people to contact you directly in your inbox (a bit like email), where only you and the recipient can see the messages you are sending.

Engagement

Engagement is simply how businesses measure who is interacting with their content on social media. Engagement is measured in a variety of different ways: how many followers an account has, how many people interact with their content, how many people

are talking about a certain company/subject. Social media is all about social interaction, so engagement is a true measure of how well a company is engaging with its audience.

Feed/Timeline

The bulk of what social media is – your feed or timeline is how all of the content is presented on social media. Your feed will be based on who your friends are/who you follow/what type of content you interact with. Expect plenty of cat videos and pictures of people's dinner!

GIF

Stands for Graphics Interchange Format – a small file that allows people to share short, animated images with ease. This has been used recently as a way for people to communicate how they are feeling with a relative, funny video clip. GIFs are beneficial as they don't use any memory so can be played on pretty much any device.

Hashtag

Using the hashtag symbol - # - before a word or series of words automatically creates a link that enables you to see posts by other users that are using that same hashtag. Popular examples include #MondayMotivation, #FridayFeeling and #ThrowbackThursday – but it's not all about days of the week. Anyone can create a hashtag; the more unique, the less likely you are to find other people using it, but that's not a bad thing!

Hashtags can be used on a number of social media sites but are most effective on Twitter and Instagram.

NSFW

Not Safe for Work. Very handy to know! If any video or picture is flagged as NSFW and you're at work – don't click on it! It's likely to be content that features nudity, swearing, or anything else generally considered unsafe for the work place.

Post

A post is basically what you see in your feed/timeline – whether that's text, pictures, videos or GIFs; it's what someone has posted for all of their followers/friends to see.

Retweet

Retweets are specific to Twitter. If someone writes a post, you can retweet it to share the post with your followers. It's important that if sharing something that may be controversial and you don't agree with it but are sharing to generate discussion or raise awareness, that you quote the tweet instead and put your words to it.

Share

Share is the Facebook equivalent of a retweet. Sharing someone else's Facebook post is how you can spread the word about a particular message to a group or your friends.

Streaming

Streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon allow you to instantly access films and television programmes online. These services 'stream' the video content to your device, so you never have a physical copy but can access it anywhere as long as you have a (decent!) internet connection.

Trending

Social media is all about conversation, and social media platforms will use something called 'social listening' to pick up on keywords that people are using in their posts. If enough people are saying the same thing then that particular word, name or topic will 'trend', allowing you to see all posts about that particular subject. Trending is a great indication of seeing breaking news as it happens.

Trending is a great way of measuring how popular businesses or people are making themselves – you've just got to hope that it's for the right reason!

Tweet

Specific to Twitter, a tweet is any post that you make on this social media platform, whether it's text, a picture, video or GIF. Tweets were previously only allowed to be 140 characters long but this has now increased to 280.

Verified

Verified accounts on social media allow people to see that an account is real, authentic and belongs to that particular person or business. This is usually identifiable with a blue tick next to the name.

Social media allows businesses, celebrities and organisations to have a social presence with their audience. These accounts are associated with their brand or their persona, and so everything they say on social media links back to them. Verified accounts ensure that any other 'fake' accounts that pop up cannot be linked to the organisation or person; often people will create accounts to imitate real brands or people in order to cause controversy; verified accounts enable that company to prove that their social media account is the real deal.

Viral

Similar to trending, viral describes a post that is shared rapidly over the country or even the world. A viral post is one that is considered popular because many people can identify with what the post is saying; posts will often go viral in order to 'spread the word' on a particular subject or issue. Other posts will go viral simply for being amusing.

Vlog

A video blog, where someone records themselves talking or carrying out a particular task that they normally would have written in a blog. Very popular on YouTube.