

CITY & COUNTY OF SWANSEA COUNCIL

GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

What is Social Media?

'Social media' is the term commonly given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.

Examples of social media websites include:

- social networking (e.g. www.facebook.com)
- video sharing (e.g. www.youtube.com)
- blogs (e.g. www.london2012.com/blog)
- micro-blogging (e.g. www.twitter.com)
- message boards (e.g. <http://forums.moneysavingexpert.com>)
- wikis (e.g. www.wikipedia.org)
- social bookmarking (e.g. www.delicious.com)

Social media can be useful tools for communicating with our customers and service users, but such media must be used carefully to avoid potential problems and the risk of possible disciplinary action, damage to the Council's reputation and even legal action being taken against the Council.

Scope

This guidance applies to all council employees and elected members. The guidance aims to raise awareness of the implications of using social media, by individuals having some role within the Council, and it provides a framework for making responsible decisions about getting the most out of social media tools.

Currently, access to social media websites from the Council's IT network is only granted for specific service reasons, there is no general access for staff and members. However, outside of the Council, we can all freely access social media sites, from home, mobile 'phones, public internet (cafes, libraries etc). This 'outside-of-work' access needs to be handled in a sensible and considered way so that neither the individual(s) involved nor the Council is put at potential risk of embarrassment, loss, disciplinary action or criminal proceedings.

General Guidelines

To use Social Media safely you should be mindful of the following general guidance:

Personal use of social media

- When using third-party websites (such as Facebook), know and follow the terms and conditions of use.
- Understand how to implement privacy tools i.e. only allowing known people to access information about you / see the content of your site. The more personal information you put on the site the more vulnerable you are to identity fraud
- Never publish or disclose any information about the Council which is not already in the public arena. Be mindful that whatever you publish may be in the public arena for a long time and that doing so may result in disciplinary action being taken against you.
- Do not publish or report on conversations that are meant to be private or internal to the Council. Do not cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers.
- Ensure that your online activities do not interfere with your job, your colleagues or commitments to customers.
- Do not befriend service users you have to maintain a professional relationship with or individuals you support.
- Posting your feelings or just having a moan can give you or the council a very negative image “I am so glad it is Friday, I hate this place at the moment, need a new job” is not the comment you want your team colleagues, customers, the individuals you support or suppliers to read. It gives a very unprofessional view of the service you provide.
- It is very easy to damage your own reputation so be careful. Pictures of that recent lively social event may be great to share between friends but what image of you may they represent to the individuals you support?
- Do not use social media to attack or abuse colleagues, customers or suppliers. Respect the privacy, feelings, reputation and position of others you work with.
- Do not include contact details or pictures of other staff members without their permission.
- Respect copyright laws.

- When you're finished, don't forget to log off / close your account. This is particularly important if accessing your account from a public place rather than a personal device. Forgetting to log off increases the risk that someone else will take and misuse your personal details and information, or that someone will misuse your account to publish undesirable comments or photos.

Professional use of social media

If you are using social media in a work-related professional capacity, then you need to be mindful of the following additional guidance:

- In the following guidelines, the term “**profile**” refers to an account, page or website representing the council, one of its services or an officer.
- The term “**group**” refers to a web page, website, or section of a website where people with a shared interest can interact.
- Before creating a new profile or group, check whether one already exists serving the same audience. It may be more appropriate for the council to join an existing group than create a rival group.
- Work-based profiles or groups should only be created following agreement by your line manager, who should consult with the Head of Communications and the Web Manager before giving authorization.
- New profiles and groups will only be agreed if a clear business need can be proven, and sufficient resources are made available to maintain it and respond to feedback generated by the service or project lead.
- The profile or group will be the responsibility of the service area in terms of content management and must be updated on a regular basis to ensure content is fresh and relevant.
- A single, named person, in the service area requesting the site, must be responsible for maintaining the profile or group and for overseeing the content of the site. This is the role of the moderator. Other approved contributors may also be nominated to assist the moderator.
- Approved contributors should be made aware of these guidelines.
- If a profile or group is set up in the name of a youth group, for example, it is essential that a member of staff becomes a member of it and oversees the content and activity.

- The moderator should monitor site content, conversations, images and other activity of members of the group and challenge, educate or intervene as necessary. The moderator should educate members of the group about online safety, including how to customise privacy settings. (For information and resources see <http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk>).
- Staff must not publish images of people unless consent has been given in writing, using an official photograph consent form.
- Staff should maintain boundaries between their personal and professional lives by customising their privacy settings and avoiding inappropriate personal information becoming visible to members of the group or profile.
- Respect your audience. Do not publish anything that would not be acceptable in the workplace. You should also show proper consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory, such as politics and religion.
- Write in the first person ("I" or "we").
- Wherever possible, disclose your position as a representative of your department, division or team.
- Remember that you are representing the council and be cordial at all times.
- Do not correct contributors' spelling or grammar.
- Do not edit other people's contributions (with the exception of the next point). Instead of editing or removing significant factual errors, you should either make a public response or directly contact the person who made the original comment, or both.
- If a contributor makes a comment that is defamatory or likely to cause extreme offense, edit or remove it where possible. If this is not possible, report it to the operator of the website. Contact the user to explain why you took this action, and if appropriate ask them to post the comment again without the offensive content.
- All feedback to the council through social networking sites should be monitored by the responsible service. Feedback that requires a response must be acknowledged within one working day. Where action is required, bear in mind that excessive delay will have a negative impact on the council's reputation.

Professional Judgment

Social media is just another means of individuals or groups communicating – with a couple of significant features: content and conversations are not private and whatever is written / published can remain on display forever. Therefore, if you are using social media to interact with an individual or group in a work/professional capacity, you need to be mindful of these features of social media and make a professional judgment as to how appropriate such media is to support such an interaction. It is impossible to give rigid guidelines to help with such a judgment and the risks need to be evaluated against the benefits. For many situations the decision to use or to continue to use social media should not be an individual decision but should be taken in conjunction with a supervisor or manager. Where Professional Standards and/or Codes of Practice apply these should be adhered to.

About This Document

These guidelines were produced by the Head of Information & Customer Services and have drawn from a number of similar guidelines drawn from the UK Public Sector. These guidelines were approved by Corporate Management Team on 1 Nov 2010.