Social Media Matters

A guide for members

Gloucester
City Council
Transforming Your City

Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

Contents

1 Introduction

Social media is increasingly popular form of communication for individuals and organisations and is used both socially and for business.

Social media is used to describe any kind of on-line tool that you can use for sharing what you know, including blogs, photo sharing, video sharing, social networks and mobile phone applications.

Unlike a telephone conversation or email, it is an interactive broadcast medium - your messages are likely to be viewed by a much wider range of people than just the intended recipient. This also means that once your message is out there on social media there is no delete button! Even if you delete a post it's likely someone could have seen it and shared it. The golden rules then are:

• **Think before you tweet/post anything** – never publish anything you wouldn't be happy being formally recorded

• **Do not comment, post or tweet anything when you are angry, tired or have consumed alcoho**l

With this caution in mind, there are many benefits to engaging with social media. It's simple and free to use. It can give you a personal connection and dialogue with different types of residents that you may not reach via other channels. Conversations are already happening out there – this is your opportunity to get involved!

This guide has been developed for Councillors who would like to use social media as a tool to share information, open new dialogues with the people in their communities and beyond, and engage publicly in productive and immediate two-way conversation. Please read it alongside the *Member Code of Conduct* and relevant protocols. Read on to see how making effective use of social media can make you more connected as a councillor.

2 What is social media?
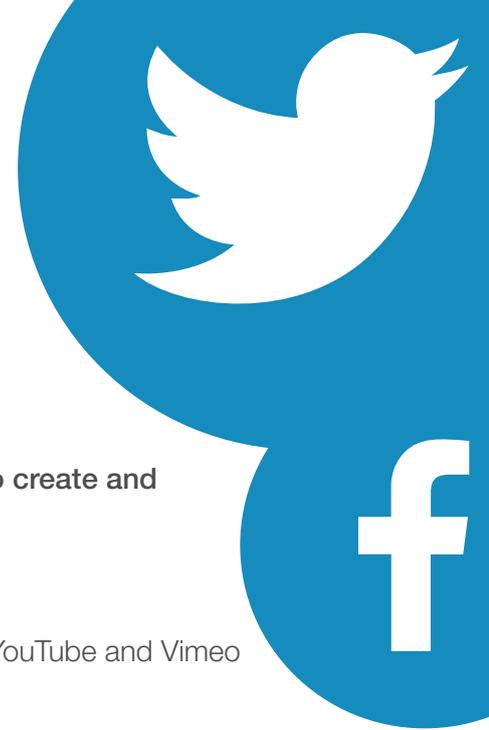
- **Social media is a collective term used to describe easy ways to create and publish on the internet**

- **Facebook and Twitter are the most popular social media sites**

Other useful platforms include Flickr and Instagram for pictures, and YouTube and Vimeo for videos

It is also easy to set up a blog – an online journal where you can share information, activities and the things that mean the most to you.

Some good sites to get started include:

www.wordpress.org
www.tumblr.com
www.plus.google.com (you will need to set up a google account)

3 Why use social media?

- **Social media offers an easy way to talk and to listen to residents, local businesses and other partner organisations** – you have the potential to establish two-way communication with all of them

- **It is a valuable way of finding out what people are talking about locally, and globally, and their concerns and interests**

- **It's a useful way of finding out about breaking news, the latest news, the latest research or policy announcements from political parties**

- **It's a good way of making your communities more aware of the work you do**

- **Social media is mobile** – you can take it around your community or wherever you are out and about

- **You can upload pictures and videos** – so you could share for example pictures of you at a local event, or potential sites for development, new buildings, old buildings …a picture can tell a thousand words

- **It's free! Accounts cost nothing, and it's likely you already have the equipment you need** – devices that access the internet

4 How to use social media

- **When you set up an account, consider what name you use.** For your professional role, 'It will help people to find you if you preface with 'Cllr'

- **Remember that your contact details including your home address are published on the Council website,** so for example saying that you are enjoying two weeks abroad on holiday, is letting people know that your house is empty

Remember who can see what:

Facebook You can control who has access to different parts of your account, and manage what the world sees, and what your "friends" see. But please be aware that your 'friends' may refer to your comments in the public arena, where it is possible for your comments to be taken out of context.

Twitter The whole world can potentially see everything that you tweet. Your tweets will appear on all of your "followers" feeds, and each of them can re-tweet – so all of their followers can see your tweet – and so on.

- **Make it easy for people to find you** – many people will search for the area you represent, so make sure you mention your location frequently.

  You can use (and search by) the 'hashtag' (#) for example #Longlevens, #FoD, #Gloucestershire - so search by # to help find what people are talking about in your area, and include a # to help people find you

- **Increase your friends and followers**, and your reach by following, linking and re-tweeting other people and sites

- **Do take the time to look after your social media accounts** – your 'friends' and 'followers' will expect quick responses to any queries, and you will only get more friends and followers, or increase your 'reach' by updating your accounts regularly

- **That said, don't be drawn into negative or emotionally driven conversations** – 'trolls', or deliberately disruptive posters will often deliberately try to invoke a reaction/anger – don't feed the troll!

- **Remember social media is about two-way conversation** – you will get feedback, and some of it may be challenging – make sure that all your posts/responses are no different from what you would be happy talking about loudly in public – you must take responsibility for anything that you say online

5 Social media and the law

Generally if you conduct yourself on social media in an objective, balanced, informed and accurate way, then you should be fine! Keep your members code of conduct in mind: *Member Code of Conduct*

Please see the following general legal issues which you should be aware of:

• **Libel/Defamation** if you publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation, they may take action against you. This is also true if someone posts something libellous on your site, and you don't take swift action to remove it. Be aware that the courts can require you to pay compensation in a successful libel claim taken against you.

• **Copyright** using images or text from a copyrighted source, e.g. using bits of publications or other people's photos, without getting permission is likely to breach copyright laws. Don't publish anything you are not sure about without checking first. See *UK Copyright Law Factsheet.*

• **Data Protection** it is illegal to publish personal data about individuals unless they have given you their permission. As a councillor you are a data controller and so are personally responsible for what you publish.

• **Incitement** it is a criminal offence to incite any criminal act. It is a criminal offence to make a discriminatory remark about anyone based on a protected characteristic as defined in the *Equality Act*.

• **Harassment** it is a criminal offence to repeatedly pursue a campaign against someone where this is likely to cause alarm, nuisance or distress.

• **Equality** take care in publishing anything that might be considered sexist, racist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith to avoid for claims for a breach of the equality laws or the *Members' Code of Conduct*.

• **Legal Proceedings** you might find that you are contacted about on-going legal proceedings or those proceedings which have not yet been started by or against the Council. As an elected representative of the Council it is possible for your comments to be referred to in such court proceedings. If you feel there might be an underlying motive behind the query or someone is encouraging you to give a view on a special case, the best option is to put the person in contact with the relevant service department at the Council.

- **Elections and Voting** you should not to post anything onto social media concerning votes when attending elections counts or postal vote verifications. The Representation of the People Act 2002 is clear that it is a criminal offence to publish any information regard the result of an election that may affect the result of that election or undermine the secrecy of the ballot - 66A Prohibition on publication of exit polls (1). No person shall, in the case of an election to which this section applies, publish before the poll is closed– (a) any statement relating to the way in which voters have voted at the election where that statement is (or might reasonably be taken to be) based on information given by voters after they have voted.

6 At a glance - some do's and don'ts

Some do's and don'ts

- **Do** think before you message! Do not say anything that you would not be prepared to discuss face to face with anyone, or be prepared to minuted in a public meeting – social media is like a public record, a digital footprint, of everything you say – even if you later delete a post

- **Do** update your social media regularly – if it becomes redundant, it is better to close it rather than appear unresponsive, or uninterested

- **Do** refrain from publishing anything which you have received in confidence

- **Do** include photos, videos or links to website information to help you make your points

- **Do** make sure that you don't bring the council or your councillor role, into disrepute

- **Do** try to have fun! Social media is a new and exciting way to communicate with your residents!

- **Don't** re-tweet anything you don't know to be true

- **Don't** post comments in haste – particularly when you are feeling angry, or have been drinking alcohol or you judgement might otherwise be impaired

- **Don't** disclose confidential information about people or the council

- **Don't** bully or intimidate others – repeated negative comments about or to individuals could be interpreted as bullying or intimidation

- **Do not** deal with casework issues via social media. There is danger cases could be missed, and there are also data protection issues. If you receive a casework request via social media, please forward your council email address and ask their constituent to email them directly

7 Glossary of terms

Blog term derived from 'weblog' meaning an internet log or diary/journal

Blogosphere all blogs collectively on the internet

Direct Message a message sent via Twitter directly to someone who follows you or who you follow

Facebook an example of social networking

Flickr photo sharing site

Follower someone who has chosen to follow you on Twitter

Friend someone who you have allowed to access your Facebook page - not necessarily a real friend

Forum a virtual discussion area

#Hashtag a hashtag or # is a way of denoting a keyword which can be used as a search term on Twitter.

Instagram a platform for sharing photos and videos

Microblog short blog e.g. Twitter using a maximum of 140 characters

Pinterest a virtual pinboard for creating and sharing images

RebelMouse a free service that connects to your accounts at services such as Facebook, Twitter and/or Instagram. It integrates all your SM Tweets, postings and blogs automatically into one page, boosting your SM presence without you doing anything extra as it 'runs in the background'. It will save you having to tweet your blogs etc. to get more prominence on search engines

Retweet to forward a message or Tweet seen on Twitter

Social networking Facebook etc

Snapchat a photo messaging application for photos, videos, drawings and text

Spam electronic junk mail

Trending current popular people or conversations as in 'trending on Twitter now…'

Troll someone who disrupts online communities or discussions through un helpful or irrelevant posts
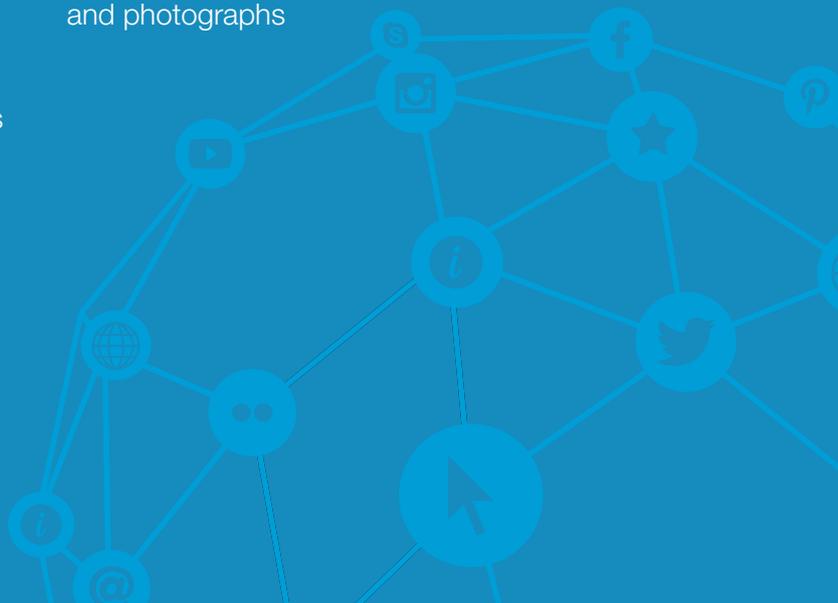
Tweet a message sent on Twitter

Tweety Hall a virtual gathering place for councillors with Twitter accounts – search @tweetyhall

Twitter a social media site for sharing short messages limited to 140 characters called tweets

Vimeo A platform for sharing videos and photographs

You Tube a platform for sharing videos and photographs

Social
Media
Matters

A guide for members

Gloucester
City Council
Transforming Your City

Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL