This document is not a part of the constitution, but is guidance provided for the assistance of members

Wiltshire Council

Social media guidance for councillors.

Introduction

Social media is the term used for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This guidance covers social media issues over the internet and by email, smart phones, social networking sites, blogging, and tweeting.

Social media increases our access to audiences and improves the accessibility of our communication. It enables us to be more active in our relationships with citizens, partners and stakeholders and encourages people to be involved in local decision making, enabling better engagement and feedback, ultimately helping to improve the services we provide.

For the purposes of this guidance, the term 'social media' covers sites and applications including but not restricted to Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, discussion forums, wikis and any sites which may emerge after the creation of this guidance.

Wiltshire Council acknowledges social media as a useful tool however, clear guidelines are needed for the use of social media sites to ensure they are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that their use does not expose the council to security risks or breach the Data Protection Act.

Purpose

This guidance applies to councillors in respect of their personal use of social media. It sets out how to use social media, how to effectively manage social media usage and indicates how any risks or pitfalls can be minimised or mitigated. The following risks have been identified with social media use (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection from infected sites.
- Disclosure of confidential information.
- Social engineering attacks (also known as 'phishing').
- Discrimination, bullying, harassment or witch-hunting.
- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation.
- Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.

- Breach of the Wiltshire Council Members Code of Conduct through inappropriate use.

In light of these risks, the use of social media sites should be regulated to ensure that such use does not damage the council's employees, partners and the people it serves. As such this guidance aims to ensure:

- Council information and computer systems/networks remain secure and are not compromised through the use of social media.
- Users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation..

Councillors must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly and that their use will not adversely affect the council or its business.

Responsibilities of councillors

You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media, in the same way that you are responsible for letters or emails you send. Publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may incur a libel action.

Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important to ensure you are confident of the nature of the information you publish. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without your consent, used in different contexts, or further distributed.

Make use of stringent privacy settings if you don't want your social media to be accessed by the press or public. Read the terms of service of any social media site accessed and make sure you understand their confidentiality/privacy settings.

Do not disclose personal details such as home addresses and telephone numbers. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the council's Data Protection Policy Statement.

Safeguarding issues are paramount because social media sites are often misused by offenders. Everyone has a responsibility for protecting and safeguarding children and adults who may be vulnerable. If you have concerns that a child or adult is suffering or is likely to suffer from any form of maltreatment (whether financial, physical, sexual, emotional or neglect) this should be reported in the following ways:

(a) if a child or vulnerable adult is in immediate danger or left alone, contact the police or call an ambulance on 999;
(b) in all other cases involving children, referrals should be made to Wiltshire social care services via the Council's 'Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub'

> (MASH) on 0300 456 0108 (or out of hours via the 'Emergency Duty Service' on 0845 607 0888);

> (c) in all other cases involving adults, referrals should be made to the Council's customer advisers on 0300 456 0111 (or out of hours via the 'Emergency Duty Service'), e-mail customeradvisors@wiltshire.gov.uk.

Do not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal (where no members of the public are present or it is of a confidential nature) or are Part 2 reports (which contain confidential information or matters which are exempt under the provision of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985).

Copyright laws still apply online. Placing images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about or seek permission from the copyright holder in advance.

Don't send or post inappropriate, abusive, bullying, racist or defamatory messages to members of the public, other councillors or officers either in or outside the work environment.

The council will not promote councillors' social media accounts during the pre-election period.

In any biography, the account should state the views are those of the councillor in question and may not represent the views of the council.

Do not use the council's logo, or any other council related material on a personal account or website.

Social media must not be used for actions that would put councillors in breach of the Wiltshire Council Members Code of Conduct For example, don't publish on social media something you wouldn't say face to face, or at a public meeting.

Be aware of your own safety when placing information on the internet and do not publish information which could leave you vulnerable.

Anyone receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their use of social media should report it to their political group leader, Democratic Services and/or the police.

It is recommended that in the case of Facebook, councillors wishing to keep their personal life and role as a councillor separate create a Facebook page which members of the public can like rather than using their personal profiles.

Conduct
Councillors are reminded that in respect of social media, they are governed by the Wiltshire Council Members Code of Conduct and relevant law.

This guidance is not exhaustive and if you have any queries you should contact the monitoring officer.

Breaches of this guidance may amount to a breach of the Wiltshire Council Members Code of Conduct. Other violations of this guidance, such as breaching the Data Protection Act, could lead to fines being issued and possible criminal or civil action being taken against the council or the individual(s) involved.

The council reserves the right to request the removal of any content that is deemed to be in breach of the Wiltshire Council Members Code of Conduct.

Principles for using social media
You should follow these five guiding principles for any social media activities:

Be respectful – set the tone for online conversations by being polite, open and respectful. Use familiar language, be cordial, honest and professional at all times. Make sure that you respect people's confidentiality – do not disclose non-public information or the personal information of others.

Be credible and consistent – be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent. Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Make sure that what you say online is consistent with your other communications.

Be honest about who you are – it's important that any accounts or profiles that you set up are clearly and easily identifiable. Be clear about your own personal role.

Be responsive – make an effort to share what you know. Offer insights where appropriate and put people in touch with someone who can help if you can't. Respond to questions and comments in a timely manner..

Be confident – don't be scared of participating. Follow this advice and seek further guidance if you need it. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, pause to think about it. Feel confident in what you say before you say it – and say it as clearly as you can.

Guidance on capturing social media posts
Posts made using third party sites such as Facebook or Twitter are not held or within the control of the council - posts can be deleted by site administrators without knowledge or consent of the council. In exceptional circumstances, copies of posts may be made and retained by the council, (e.g. as evidence of inappropriate posts) in line with relevant council procedures, (depending on the nature of the allegation). These copies will be held for a period dependent on the type of investigation they are subject to, (e.g. disciplinary, audit, criminal, etc).

Where inappropriate use is suspected, it is suggested that you should pro-actively attempt to capture any inappropriate posts (before they might be deleted). Copies should be made (press, 'alt+Prt Scrn,' and copy into MS Word) and reported to both

the relevant authority within the council as well as following the social media sites own reporting procedures where appropriate. Please note that this is just one means of gathering evidence of inappropriate use; it does not preclude the gathering of other types of evidence, e.g. witness statements.

Relationship with other council information

This guidance should be read in conjunction with:

- Wiltshire Council Constitution Protocol 7 – Media Relations
- Information Security Social Media and Blogging Policy
- Information Security Policy
- Members Code of Conduct
- Data Protection Policy Statement
- Information Assurance Acceptable Usage Policy for email, internet and computer use