



## Social Media Policy

For Staff and Elected Members of Denbighshire County Council

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## **1. Foreword**

- 1.1 Communication is a strategic priority for the Council, especially during current challenging times of change.
- 1.2 In those times of change, there is more need than ever for effective two way communications and for marketing the Council's services and activities. This in itself presents the Council with many challenges.
- 1.3 We need to communicate and consult more effectively with our residents and key stakeholders and we want to do that through channels that are relevant, popular and provide opportunities for the Council to disseminate messages quickly to the correct audiences and as widely as possible.
- 1.4 Social Media is one of the most effective ways of delivering on this aim and it forms an important part of the overarching Communications Strategy adopted by the Council in 2013. Social Media has been embedded into the day to day work of the Destination, Marketing and Communications team, although a large number of other services/projects are using this medium.
- 1.5 But it's not only about communicating. Social media is an effective way of consulting and engaging with local residents, community groups and associations. Increasing numbers of people are using social media to express their opinions and views, as well as using it as a way to gather intelligence and information on local issues that matter to them. That is why the Council must exploit this opportunity to consult and engage, as well as communicate.
- 1.6 This policy identifies the acceptable use of social media and social networking including clear guidelines for employees and aims to assist managers in terms of managing performance when dealing with matters associated with the use of social media.
- 1.7 This policy also aims to ensure that a fair and consistent approach is applied to all employees, Members and volunteers working on behalf of the Council. But most of all, it considers the benefits of using social media as part of our day to day work, but also highlights some of the pitfalls that we need to be aware of as we go about our day to day business.
- 1.8 Specific guidance has been drawn up for Members by the Welsh Local Government Association. Please refer to Appendix B.
- 1.9 This policy will be reviewed every 12 months.

## **2. What is social media?**

- 2.1 Social media is used to share content, opinions, personal/professional profiles, comments, and links to other media online. The growth of social media brings with it the opportunity to communicate in new ways, and to reach residents who do not engage using traditional communication channels.
- 2.2 Social media includes (but is not limited to):
- Blogs (personal and professional)
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - YouTube
  - LinkedIn
  - Tumblr
  - Personal websites
  - Reddit
  - Wikis
  - Podcasts
  - Online forums
- 2.3 What all these things have in common is that they allow you to have online conversations and interactions with individuals and groups of people.
- 2.4 You can use social media to help get feedback on proposals or campaigns, to gather a following and engage with them about specific issues, or encourage people to attend an event.

## **3. The Benefits and Risks of using social media.**

- 3.1 There are a number of key benefits to using social media.
- Modern method of communication
  - Dissemination of timely messages instantaneously
  - Reach a wide audience
  - Effective way of communicating
  - Consultation tool
  - Engagement tool
  - The ability to follow/monitor accounts of partner organisations
  - Great opportunity to market Denbighshire County Council and its activities
  - Promotion of council-run events.
  - Ideal forum for communicating messages during an emergency.
  - Re-tweeting messages from other social media accounts.

3.2 There are also a number of risks associated to using social media.

- More opportunity for people to criticise the Council in an open forum
- Greater risk for the Council's reputation through providing foras for discussion and debate
- You have limited control on managing feedback made to your postings.
- People can use social media for negative gossip that could affect the Council's reputation.

3.3 However, there are a number of issues that need to be considered from a legal, data protection and safeguarding perspective.

3.4 **Legal** - There can be legal implications to using social media inappropriately, and you may find yourself liable if you don't follow the relevant legislation. Make sure you are aware of your responsibilities under the laws of defamation, copyright, discrimination, contract, human rights and protection from harassment (this list is not exhaustive), and most importantly, the Council's Codes of Conduct for staff and Members. The guide produced by the WLGA makes reference to legal implications for Members.

3.5 **Data Protection** – The Council must ensure that all of its employees adhere to the Data Protection Act. Staff and Members should ensure that no personal information relating to any individual should be released without their express consent for the Council to do so. The strongest, and safest, advice is to avoid using personal information on social media. Once information has been published, it is difficult to retract.

### 3.6 **Safeguarding children and young people**

Professionals working with the county need to be aware of the safeguarding issues related to using social media. The blurring of boundaries between Personal, Private and Professional information shared on social media sites can place individuals vulnerable to challenge and possible disciplinary action.

Further guidance on safeguarding children and young people and the use of social media can be found in Appendix C.

#### **4. Social media in your personal life**

- 4.1 The council recognises that many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity. While they are not acting on behalf of the council, employees must be aware that they can damage the reputation of the council if they are recognised as being one of our employees.
- 4.2 Employees are allowed to say that they work for the council and the council recognise that from time to time that they may wish to discuss elements of their profession/expertise. However, if employees do discuss their work on social media (for example, giving opinions on their specialism or the sector in which the council operates), they should include on their profile a statement along the following lines: "The views I express here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer."
- 4.3 Any communications that employees make in a personal capacity through social media must not: breach confidentiality, do anything that could be considered discriminatory, bullying or harassment, bring the council into disrepute and/or breach copyright.
- 4.4 The personal image you present in social media may reflect badly on the image of the authority. We advise you to:

- Show yourself in your best light

By identifying yourself as a council employee within a social network, you are now connected to your colleagues, managers, and often residents and the rest of the world. Make sure that any content associated with you is consistent with your work for the council.

- Use discretion

Be discrete in all personal communications in social media. When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the council.

Avoid use of your council email address, logos or other council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only by using a disclaimer.

- Know your obligations

You must follow council policies and legislation when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach council confidentiality and information policies, and must adhere to the Data Protection Act and other relevant legislation.

- Show respect to all

You should be respectful of the authority and your fellow employees, Members, volunteers and the public. Derogatory comments are always wrong. All employees and Councillors must familiarise themselves with the Respect Booklet (available on the intranet), which offers guidance on equality, diversity, and respect.

Before you post anything on social media – make sure your online activities do not interfere with your job and that it does not impact on services to residents.

The Code of Conduct for Staff can be found by clicking on the following link:

**[http://intranet-ad/sorce/apps/sorce\\_doc\\_manager/Actions/view\\_doc.aspx?docid=1281&revid=1297](http://intranet-ad/sorce/apps/sorce_doc_manager/Actions/view_doc.aspx?docid=1281&revid=1297)**

The Code of Conduct for Members is contained within Part 5 of the Council's Constitution and can be found by clicking on the following link:

<https://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/en/your-council/about-the-council/council-constitution-en.pdf>

Please bear in mind that official postings made on behalf of Denbighshire must adhere to the Council's Welsh Language policy, unless you are responding to a direct comment made to the Council by an external individual or organisation. In that instance, you should respond in the language that the comment was made.

## **5. Enforcement of this policy**

5.1 This policy relies on officers and members acting responsibly and in line with this policy. The Staff Code of Conduct (available from the HR Direct section of the intranet) and the Members' Code of Conduct provide the foundation for these guidelines for using social media. The same rules that apply to your actions in general, as found in the Codes of Conduct, apply to your conduct online.

5.2 Any council employee or volunteer who participates in online communication deemed not to be in the best interest of Denbighshire County Council will be subject to disciplinary action. This could include (but is not limited to):

- posting confidential council information online, or
- inaccurate, distasteful, or defamatory remarks about the council.

Whilst the Council respects the rights of an employee or volunteer to have an opinion, careful consideration must be made to ensure that any remarks do not bring the Council into disrepute.

All volunteers working for the Council have a duty to adhere to corporate guidelines and policies and this is the position with this policy.

- 5.3 Where you have concerns that colleagues are breaching this policy or the Code of Conduct, we encourage you to raise these concerns under the Whistleblowing procedure.
- 5.4 Councillors must remember that they are subject to the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of duties of confidentiality and a requirement to treat everyone with respect and consideration. If a councillor fails to follow these guidelines, it can lead to an investigation by the Public Services Ombudsman in Wales and possible sanctions, such as suspension or loss of office. Members also have a duty to report any breaches of the code by other Members.
- 5.5 We monitor internet use across the council, and investigate the top users more closely to see the length of time it has been used and the sites accessed. If we discover any inappropriate or excessive use of the internet, the matter will be escalated to the individual's manager or above, and could lead to the individual's internet account being locked down for a period of time and/or a disciplinary investigation.

## **6. Before you get started - Things to keep in mind**

- 1. Identify yourself in your online communication, giving your name and, where relevant, your role within Denbighshire when you discuss council related matters. Write in the first person, and make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of Denbighshire County Council.
- 2. If you publish content to any website outside of Denbighshire County Council and it has something to do with your work/council services, use a disclaimer such as this: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent Denbighshire County Council's plans or opinions."
- 3. Be wary of overusing social media to promote your event/services – this can be seen as 'spamming', or unwanted advertising, and can create a negative impression.
- 4. Respect copyright laws (including use of copyrighted images) and be careful not to plagiarise another's work.
- 5. Never post confidential information online. You must not refer to any clients, contractors or partners without their permission.
- 6. Most social media sites require users to agree to terms of service. You are responsible for reading and complying with the terms of service of sites you use.

7. Some sites, such as LinkedIn, allow people to "recommend" current or former co-workers. Any references given should be in accordance with Denbighshire County Council References Policy and Procedure. Any character references given must be from a personal perspective, in line with the policy.
8. Respect your audience. Don't use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the council's workplace.
9. You must follow the council's Welsh Language Scheme, which clearly states that any public-facing information must be treated as equal and must appear bilingually. The only exception is in an emergency, when information can be issued in English first, with the Welsh to follow as quickly as possible. Information must be identical in both English and Welsh. If you are asked for information via social media, you should respond in the language in which the request was made.

## **7. Examples**

Below are some examples of how social media should not be used.

Give serious consideration before joining social media groups that have been set up with the sole intention of criticising the authority.

Bear in mind that joining certain groups could result in a conflict of interest with your day to day work responsibilities in future.

Social workers and teachers should not have children and young people/ pupils/students in their list of friends or contacts on social media.

## **8. Training on Social Media**

The Council is drawing up guidance on the use of social media for staff. That work is under development.

Members have already received social media training as part of their development programme.

Any member of staff or councillor requiring training on any aspect of social media should contact the Destination, Marketing and Communications Team on 01824 70(6222)

## **8. Useful contacts**

- Destination, Marketing and Communications Team, ext 6222/6007
- Web Team, ext 2672/6181/2623
- HR Direct on (INSERT NUMBER)

## **Appendix C**

### **Safeguarding**

Denbighshire County Council encourages positive use of social media. employees members and volunteers who work to support the council in discharging its duties should uphold the values and reputation of their profession and the policies and procedures set out in the county Social Media Policy.

Denbighshire County Council recognises the opportunities and challenges social media presents to all staff that work and support the council.

The development of a professional relationship and upholding and maintaining this reputation together with maintaining professional boundaries, the sharing of information, confidentiality and managing risk and challenging discrimination are issues when using social media and form part of the professional role and reputation of Denbighshire County Council.

Staff and volunteers must be aware of the possible risks to their own practice and service users, when using social media as a way of communicating with staff, services users and particularly the vulnerable and young people.

A professions working with the county need to be aware of the safeguarding issues related to using social media. The blurring of boundaries between Personal, Private and Professional information shared on social media sites can place individuals vulnerable to challenge and possible disciplinary action.

Staff and Volunteers need to:

1. Understand the potential benefits and disadvantages of social media in their own work and communication with service users.
2. ensure that their online presence is professionally appropriate.
3. use social media as a positive platform for exchanging ideas and knowledge and to promote their own profession positively.
4. act as an ambassador for the work of the county council
5. maintain appropriate and personal and professional boundaries in their work with service users other individuals and employer
6. consider personal and work communication between “service users” being kept separate for example it is not acceptable to accept a service user as an online friend or on a personal network as it creates a personal relationship outside of the workplace. Examples of service users are:

- Social Worker / Child
- Teacher / Child
- Taxi Driver / Child

7. be responsible for understanding how to use social media, checking personal security settings and the implications of social media being a public and permanent record. Privacy of communication should consider the use of the “phone” for interaction rather than social media at times.
8. be vigilant to keep their own identity safe and that of friends and family. Consideration should be given to putting personal information on sites such as work. For example photographs, contact details, family details thought should be given to the implications of such action and loss of your own privacy and others?
9. alert their employer / manager to any concerns they may have about the use of social media at an individual employee level including issues of gossip relating to work or potential risk to the workplace or county.
10. share information appropriately and be responsible for what they post using their professional judgement. Make clear in any communication on social media that views expressed are a “personal view” and not necessarily the views of the employer thought should be given to adding a disclaimer which makes clear the views expressed are not necessarily the views of the employer. What ever you write must be able to stand public scrutiny and not bring your employer in to disrepute.
11. know what support and action will be taken by the employer if they experience abuse, harassment or hate mail as a result of their work, the county will apply the harassment policy in these circumstances.