

Social Media Guidelines

For employees and members of Denbighshire County Council

Introduction

The widespread availability of social media has brought the opportunity to engage and communicate in new ways and to reach residents who do not engage using traditional communications channels. It is important that we are able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly.

However, it is also important to ensure that we balance this with our legal responsibilities and our reputation. It is important that officers and members are aware that there are a number of legal implications associated with the inappropriate use of social media. Liability can arise under the laws of defamation, copyright, discrimination, contract, human rights and protection from harassment (this list is not exhaustive).

The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that:

- Social media is exploited for business use in ways that are safe and in ways that will cultivate creativity and innovation.
- The council is not exposed to legal and governance issues.
- The council's reputation is not adversely affected.
- Council officers and members have clear guidelines about what is permitted when using social media.
- Users can identify what social media information is legitimately from the council.

Definition of social media

Social media is essentially: "the online tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media itself, thus facilitating conversations and interaction online between groups of people."¹

Social media includes (but is not limited to):

- Blogs (personal and professional)
- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- MySpace
- Ebay
- Personal websites
- Digg

¹ Brian Solis, 2007 <http://www.webpronews.com/blogtalk/2007/06/29/the-definition-of-social-media>
10.12.2010

The feature that all these tools, websites and services have in common is that they facilitate conversations and online interactions between groups of people.

Terms of Use

The council recognises that social media applications can be useful tools for communication and are used by many officers and members. Therefore, the council allows access to these sites.

Officers and members may access personal social media sites on work premises for their own use, provided that this is in their own time, is outside normal working hours (employees should be clocked out if on the flexi system), is not excessive, and observes the restrictions outlined below. Use of equipment for council business **must** take priority. (Please see under Enforcement).

To ensure that we manage our social media responsibly, all proposals for implementing any social media applications must be made to Corporate Communications by completing the Request Form for Social Media Applications. For more information, contact Corporate Communications on ext 6125 or public.relations@denbighshire.gov.uk.

Officers and members must also ensure they comply with the rules of the council's Internet Use and Monitoring Policy.

Useful information

1. Identify yourself—name and, when relevant, role with Denbighshire - when you discuss council related matters. And write in the first person. You must 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 the work you do or services associated with the council, use a disclaimer such as this: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent Denbighshire County Council's positions, strategies or opinions." Again, ensure that you comply with the rules of the council's Internet Use and Monitoring Policy.
3. Respect copyright laws.
4. Don't provide confidential or other proprietary information. Councillors must remember that they are subject to the Members Code of Conduct in respect of duties of confidentiality. Officers must also remember that they are also bound by the Officers Code of Conduct in respect of disclosure of information.
5. Most social media sites require users to agree to Terms of Service. The council holds you responsible for reading, knowing and complying with the terms of service of sites you use.
6. 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, as per the policy.
7. You are not to make reference to any clients, contractors or partners without obtaining their express permission to do so.
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. Be aware of your association with the council in online social networks. If you identify yourself as a council representative, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues and customers.

10. Any council representative who participates in online communication deemed not to be in the best interest of Denbighshire County Council will be subject to disciplinary action. This online communication can include but is not limited to:
- Confidential council information
 - Inaccurate, distasteful, or defamatory remarks about the council.

Enforcement

This policy relies on officers and members acting responsibly and in accordance with the above guidelines. Where you have concerns that colleagues are acting in breach of the above guidelines, you are encouraged to raise these concerns under the council's Whistleblowing procedure.

Failure to adhere to these guidelines by officers of the council may be considered misconduct and could lead to disciplinary action being taken under the Council's Disciplinary Procedures, which may result in dismissal.

Failure to adhere to these guidelines by councillors may be considered to be a breach of the Members Code of Conduct which could lead to an investigation by the Public Services Ombudsman in Wales and possible sanctions such as suspension or loss of office. If a member is in any doubt about the appropriateness of their conduct in using such online communication tools they can contact the council's Monitoring Officer for advice. Members are also under a duty to report any breaches of the code by other members, providing there is reasonable belief.

Internet use will be monitored regularly and the top users investigated more closely for length of time used and sites accessed. If there is a persistent issue, the matter will be escalated to the manager and, if needs be, to the manager's manager and could lead to the individual's internet account being locked down for a period of time and/or a disciplinary investigation.

Any concerns raised will be investigated under the appropriate procedures.

Useful contacts

- Corporate Communications, ext 6125
- Customer Care/Web Team, ext 2672
- ICT, ext 2688
- Monitoring Officer, ext 2562