



Social Media

Guidelines for members

Introduction

In the UK 87.9% of adults use the internet, and only 10.2% have never used it. In Fylde only 15.5% of adults have never been online.

The popularity and accessibility of online social media makes it an excellent tool for promoting services and engaging with the public.

More often than not, social media is free to use, and the different specialised platforms are intuitively designed, making it a versatile resource for local government authorities and officials looking to reach large audiences quickly, with a whole range of digital materials.

Why use social media as a councillor?

- Signpost to services
- Mobilise support for a campaign
- Test the temperature of public opinion
- Connect with your political network
- Give and get moral support
- Help spread news in an emergency
- Better represent your ward

the question is not *if* social media should be used, but *how?*

The power of social media

What makes social media particularly powerful is how fast a single post or message can spread. In 2014 the 'Ice Bucket Challenge' went viral on social media, and as a result the MND Association turned regular weekly fundraising of £200,000 into £2.7 million in just seven days.

Read more at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/26/ice-bucket-challenge-als-charity-gene-discovery>

Recent internet users by age group in the UK (2017)



Source: Office for National Statistics

Handy Glossary

Content, post or update

Something you've written or a picture, video or link that you've added to your page, profile or account

Follower

Someone who has opted to get updates when you post or are otherwise active on your page, profile or account

Follow

When you choose to get updates from somebody else's social media activities

Stream or timeline

The list of updates that you receive from people you follow

Share

By sharing content or a post, you allow your followers to see something you've seen and think is worth them seeing too

Retweet or RT

Sharing something you've seen to your Twitter followers

Hashtag

A way of connecting your post to a topic, making it easy for people to find even if they don't follow you. You can use them in the caption of a video or picture, too. For example #lovemybeach, #StAnnes or #discoverFylde

Trolling

A form of online bullying where people gang up to abuse and aggressively poke fun at an individual or an organisation

Viral

Content or a post which becomes popular through extensive internet sharing, typically over a short period of time

Choosing a Platform

Facebook, Twitter, WordPress, Blogger, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Mashable and networking sites such as LinkedIn or Local Government Knowledge Hub Forums are all examples of popular social media platforms. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and you can choose which platform(s) suit you by finding out what they do best before signing up. Below are some features of the most popular platforms:

facebook

PLATFORM: Facebook **BEST AT:** Text, pictures, links and video

THE ADVANTAGES: The most popular social media site in the world, Facebook is a good place to share content from other social media sites like YouTube or Pinterest, and online news sites. It can also be an effective way to reach online community groups which are often on Facebook.

twitter

PLATFORM: Twitter **BEST AT:** Text, pictures, links and video

THE ADVANTAGES: Twitter is the go-to channel for breaking news, as information and links can be shared very quickly. Post sizes are limited to 140 characters, you don't have to create a detailed profile, and you can reach people with an update more easily

YouTube

PLATFORM: YouTube **BEST AT:** Video

THE ADVANTAGES: Video is hugely popular, and there are billions of hours of content on YouTube, from music videos to training resources and video blogs. With a YouTube account, you can shoot a video with your smartphone, edit and upload it within minutes, and even share your post on another site like Facebook to boost its popularity.

LinkedIn

PLATFORM: LinkedIn **BEST AT:** Text

THE ADVANTAGES: Used mainly as an online CV and for networking, LinkedIn is good for engaging business people, and building a professional profile. It's more powerful for paying users.

WORDPRESS

PLATFORM: Wordpress **BEST AT:** Text, pictures and video

THE ADVANTAGES: On a blog, you can present views and ask questions on a more detailed, personal page. A blog post can be then shared across other social media platforms, like Facebook

Helpful guides to all of these social media platforms can be found online at www.mashable.com

5 things to keep in mind

1. What goes online tends to stay online

The council's Social Media Policy states 'control over posted information can be rapidly lost which makes it difficult to retrieve an inaccurate message once it has been sent'. Be prepared to take full responsibility for anything you post online, and double-check everything before you post it to avoid mistakes.

2. Professional and council standards apply online too

The council's Social Media Policy advises 'updates should be professional even though they may be chatty in style to reflect the channel'. To the public, the lines you draw between your personal and professional conduct may not always be so clear, particularly online, so keep this in mind.

3. Defamation (libel) law applies online

There have been some recent, high-profile cases of councillors defaming rivals online and being successfully sued. A councillor in Wales was forced to pay £3,000 in damages to a rival for posting a libellous comment on Twitter. Be careful to keep material appropriate, and if you're in doubt about anything, just don't post it.

4. People can get nasty

If people criticising you on social media have the wrong information, by all means talk to them. But if they are being sarcastic or abusive there's little point in giving them your time. On most platforms you can choose to completely block abusive users if you need to. But use this function with care, as social media communities can react badly to what they might see as censorship.

5. You can be more than just party political

Some councillors don't talk about party politics at all online. Others will talk about day-to-day matters 80 per cent of the time, leaving the rest to talk a little about politics. It's up to you to find your own balance, but legally, elected members are only allowed to use council-provided equipment and facilities for carrying out council duties, not for party political purposes or campaigning, so be aware of this when choosing topics for posts.

Online Blunders

The internet is a brilliant tool, but care should always be taken not to bring both yourself and the council into disrepute through unscrupulous use of social media. Below are some examples of councillors who made posts they regretted:

- **Cllr Mike Barrowclough of Wyre Council posted a tweet in which he referred to Blackpool as a 'cesspool' and was subsequently criticised for 'juvenile' behaviour.**

<http://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/news/councillor-in-hot-water-over-cesspool-slur-1-8412967>

- **Cllr Jefferson Horsley of Taunton Deane Borough Council shared a parody Hitler video comparing his council leader to the dictator. In response to the incident, the leader of his party removed the whip.**

http://www.thisisthewestcountry.co.uk/news/15078219.Councillor_apologises_after_posting_parody_Hitler_video_on_social_media/

- **Cllr Nick Harrington of Warwick District Council was suspended for posting a racist, anti-Irish tweet in response to the Eurovision Song Contest.**

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/councillor-nick-harrington-suspended-from-warwick-district-council-offensive-tweet-ireland_uk_59185613e4b00f308cf5d579

- **Cllr Anita Ward, former Lord Mayor of Birmingham, 'learned [her] lesson not to press send in a rush' when she accidentally included the names of Paris terrorists in a #JeSuisCharlie tweet.**

<http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/former-birmingham-lord-mayors-embarrassment-8433936>

Useful Ideas

Social media use can support Fylde Council's image locally. Many local authorities and councillors use social media to signpost to services, answer enquiries and advertise local activities, as well as posting party political content. Below are some examples of creative social media use:



Top Tips

Ask yourself, 'Would I say this to my boss or a reporter?'

What you post online reflects you, but also Fylde Council's public image. If you choose to make comments on council-related matters, it is best to make it clear that you are speaking personally, and not on behalf of Fylde Council. Often the easiest way to do this is to write in the first person ('I think' / 'my view is' / 'in my opinion').

Avoid posting after you've had a drink, or others could have had a drink

It is best not to post online whilst under the influence of alcohol. Some elected members even make a point of not posting late on a Friday or Saturday night, because other users may be spoiling for a fight.

Go to where people are

In the same way that we pay most attention to the places with the largest audience in the real world, this is good practice online too. It's worth your time to search for existing audiences; for example, if there's a Facebook group in your community, join it and engage with local people about issues which concern them.

If you've dropped a clanger, apologise

Because social media is so public, it is important to apologise if you offend someone. It's best not to make mistakes, but if you do, people will judge your character on your response, so show them your best side!

'Don't feed the troll'

The likelihood is that trolling won't happen to you, but if it does the best advice is to ignore it. On most platforms you can report abusive posts or users to administrators. Remember, though, that even energetic criticism and disagreement are not necessarily trolling, and should be given fair opportunity.

Stay safe

Hacking is pretty rare but it does happen from time-to-time. To protect yourself against hacking, create a strong password and change it regularly, and don't tick the 'remember my password' box. To protect yourself against identity theft, avoid giving out personal details like your home address, phone numbers, financial information or full date of birth anywhere on social media. Your work email address should also not be used when registering a social media account for personal use. Read more about strong passwords at:

<https://support.google.com/accounts/answer/32040?hl=en>

More advice

The Good Councillor's Guide':

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/publications/801-good-councillors-guide/file>

Fylde Council's Social Media and ICT policies:

<http://intra.fylde.gov.uk/documents/file/fp-52-fyld-social-media-policy-nov-2016/>

<http://intra.fylde.gov.uk/documents/file/fp81-ict-security-policy-feb-2017-may-2017/>

LGA guidance on using social media in local government:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/communications-support/digital-councils/social-media/get-started>

I&DEA 'Connected Councillors: a guide to using social media to support local leadership':

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/172495/response/429528/attach/2/Appx%20%20social%20networking%20connected%20councillors%20guide.pdf>

The beginners guide to Facebook

<http://mashable.com/2012/05/16/facebook-for-beginners/#5HCavucUzuqp>

Twitter guide for beginners

<http://mashable.com/2012/06/05/twitter-for-beginners/#QYI.R34P5ZqT>

YouTube for beginners

<http://mashable.com/2013/10/05/youtube-beginner-guide/#IBQ9MTm2.aqd>

A basic LinkedIn guide

http://mashable.com/2012/05/23/linkedin-beginners/#Ky7J9U._KGqM

The beginners guide to Wordpress

<http://mashable.com/2012/12/05/wordpress-for-beginners/#fSE2GxF9.sqx>