

Ward: [n/a]

Vibrant, effective and supported social media communications

Report by the Chief Executive

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 Social media has fundamentally changed the way that we are able to communicate with communities and individuals across the world. Used well, it can be a vibrant, exciting way to discuss ideas, share points of view and clearly deliver on open and transparent methods of governance.
- 1.2 As with any communications channel, there is a balance of opportunities to be enjoyed and pitfalls to be avoided. This report presents a policy for Members designed to support them in engaging in vibrant, effective, communications using social media.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Adur and Worthing Councils have been active on social media for the past six years, developing its use for customer service, engagingly promoting activities and warning/informing communities as required.
- 2.2 The Councils' Communications Strategy (as approved at the JSC of 2 December 2014) contained a clear vision to create a supportive environment for social media use across the Councils; one which encouraged uptake of the opportunities while minimising the risks of engagement and protecting the Councils' reputation.
- 2.3 In order to create a common standard and understanding of beneficial social media use, it is important to agree a policy to guide its use. This policy and set of overarching principles (as attached at Appendix 1), is meant to support those who wish to get involved in sharing the Councils' stories and taking part in online public debate, while also providing supportive guidance to help Members avoid potentially difficult situations.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 That the social media policy for Elected Members, as attached to this report, is approved and forms part of the guidance available to Members as they undertake their roles.

4.0 Legal

- 4.1 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.
- 4.2 Alternatively S1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the Council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation

5.0 Financial implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications in accepting this policy.

6.0 Recommendation

- 6.1 The Joint Governance Committee is recommended to adopt the Social Media Policy for Elected Members to provide a supportive framework within which to maximise the benefits of this communications medium.

Local Government Act 1972

Background Papers:

Joint Strategic Committee Report - 2 December 2014 - item 14

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Schedule of Other Matters

1.0 Council Priority

- 1.1 Under 'Catching the Wave' and 'Surf's Up', the Councils adopted forward looking frameworks to guide progress. As part of this, improving and supporting communications was identified as a key priority.

2.0 Specific Action Plans

- 2.1 This report and associated policy is intended as a set of guiding principles, therefore there are no specific action plans relating to it.

3.0 Sustainability Issues

- 3.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

4.0 Equality Issues

- 4.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

5.0 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

- 5.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

6.0 Human Rights Issues

- 6.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

7.0 Reputation

- 7.1 Using social media in a respectful way to open opportunities for dialogue with the community can have a positive impact on the Councils' reputation. Improper use of any kind can damage an individual's reputation and the reputation of the Councils as a whole.

8.0 Consultations

- 8.1 This report and policy has been created by the Councils' specialist Social Media Manager and the Head of Communications, in conjunction with advice from the Legal and Democratic Services teams.

9.0 Risk Assessment

- 9.1 Improper use of social media may harm the reputation of Members and the Councils as a whole. The policy is therefore designed to mitigate risk and provide awareness on the most beneficial way to engage in social media discussions.

10.0 Health & Safety Issues

10.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

11.0 Procurement Strategy

11.1 This report and policy does not require new equipment or software to be purchased.

12.0 Partnership Working

12.1 No specific partnership working relates to this report



Adur and Worthing Councils Social Media Policy for Elected Members

Supporting the Councils through effective, vibrant, social media communications





Introduction

Social media isn't new. If you take its literal meaning – ie the opportunity for an individual to share information with a wide audience in a way which allows others to interact with that information - 'Letters To The Editor' could be one of the earlier forms of social media! Today, the term 'social media' is more commonly used to describe the creation and sharing of content using the internet through a number of different websites or technologies (known as 'platforms').

This policy document refers to the modern definition of 'social media' and is divided into the following sections:

Background

- The purpose and objectives of this policy
- Who is this policy aimed at?
- Who owns (and is responsible for) this policy?
- Why we get involved with social media
- Our social media principles

Policy

Members' use of social media

- Members' Professional accounts

Technical considerations

- IT Policy
- Linked documents and policies

Appendices

[Appendix 1](#) – Definitions of Terms

Appendix 2 - Corporate Social Media Accounts

[Appendix 3](#) – Platform specific check points for corporate accounts

[Appendix 3](#) – Our social management structure



Revision of policy

Social media is a fast evolving environment and, as such, this policy is a live document which may be updated at any time.

This document will form part of the Council's constitution. It will be openly available on the Councils' website and intranet and, when updated, a message will be posted to the Councils' intranet notice boards (and any other appropriate communication channels) to help Members keep up to date with the latest version of the document. It will be supported by a collection of best practice guidelines and training opportunities, promoted through the intranet, to help Members make more effective use of social technologies in their work with customers.

This version is dated January 2016.

For any further information, or to raise any comments/questions, please contact Neil Hopkins, Head of Communications – Neil.Hopkins@adur-worthing.gov.uk / 01903 221242.

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The purpose and objectives of this policy

The objective of this policy is to support Adur and Worthing Councils' Members in the use of social media, providing a clear framework for interacting with customers online while supporting our strategic social media purpose. The outcomes from this objective will include:

- Confident, competent, social media users throughout the organisations, able to inspire conversation and connection with the Councils' customers for mutual benefit
- A wide and inclusive network of social media users who can share good practice, support each other and improve our relationship with our customers
- Development of, and appropriate contribution to, vibrant online communities of interest in which the Councils and Members can have a legitimate voice
- An annual training and networking plan to help users gain the most out of social media
- An understanding of the boundaries between personal and professional social media use
- Clear links to sources of support, coaching and training to maintain confidence and keep developing skills

This policy is also designed to maximise the benefits of social media use to the Councils and to mitigate some of the risks inherent with social media. The outcomes from this objective will include:

- To protect and enhance the reputation of Adur and Worthing Councils
- To protect the Councils' ICT systems from misuse and/or damage
- To support the Councils' overarching strategic objectives as embodied in 'Catching The Wave'

Additionally, our use of social media should also support our Councils' key priorities as laid out in 'Catching The Wave' through fostering connections, sharing information and encouraging dialogue. These priority areas are:

- Supporting our wealth generators
- Cultivating enterprising communities
- Becoming an adaptive council.



Who is this policy aimed at?

This policy also offers guidance to all Members and outlines considerations for Members in their usage of social media communications for professional purposes. The activities of both Officers and Members on social media (and other forms of communication) can have an impact on how the Councils are perceived.

Who owns (and is responsible for) this policy?

We all are responsible for our conduct online, in both our professional and personal capacities – on social media we have the shared opportunity to influence how we and the Councils are portrayed.

Ultimately, the Head Of Communications is responsible for the ownership and implementation of this policy.

Why we get involved with social media

Over the last 6 years our Social Media (SM) presence has grown and it is now an integral part of our communications tool kit.

At Adur & Worthing Councils, we use social media to form meaningful relationships with communities of interest, showing the Councils as an approachable figure of authority and Officers as subject matter experts working for the good of the whole community.

We encourage and empower Members to use social media to share information and open new dialogues with people in their community and beyond.

Therefore, our strategic social media purpose is three-fold:

- To involve and engage the public with the work of the Councils and the local democratic process
- To enable and facilitate the meeting of communities of interest to act for the benefit of the whole Adur and Worthing area
- To protect and enhance the reputation of the Councils through customer focused communications.



What we believe in

To get the most out of social media, the following principles must be maintained at all times:

Meaningful – social media interactions should be meaningful, building on our purpose for using social media and the Councils' overarching priorities. We should avoid idle chatter where possible!

Respectful – our interactions must be respectful, even if other people are not being so. We must ensure that whatever we share online is not harmful, offensive, derogatory or discriminatory to any other person or organisation, and that we uphold the high standards that our Code of Conduct has set for us

Confidential – confidential or privileged information must never be disclosed

Transparent – our social media interactions must be clear and transparent, especially when discussing links with other organisations or community bodies

Ethical – everything that we do must conform to the highest ethical standards.

These principles are in line with our Code of Conduct, which governs all of our actions in our dealings with our customers and our colleagues.



Members' Professional social media accounts

Considerations regarding Social Media usage

The style of communication employed in the Social Media environment tends to be fast, informal and instant. Messages can appear to be 'off the cuff' or 'throw away'. This presents certain risks in the usage of Social Media in terms of damage to individual reputation and legal implications for individuals concerned.

This risk can, however, be managed by following some simple considerations in the use of Social Media. The guidelines below will help you to use Social Media as a valuable and positive communications channel.

- 1) You should follow the Terms and Conditions of the relevant Social Media network or platform you are posting to. These can be found on the website of the relevant social media network and you will be asked to accept them before you create an account.
- 2) Be aware that any posts you make on social media become a publication and are likely to endure even if you delete them.
- 3) Social Media posts you make may also be subject to both the Code of Conduct (specifically in regard to your role of elected Member) and various laws (as apply to both Members and Officers). More detail is given on these areas below.
- 4) Be aware that even if you don't identify yourself as a Member as part of your social media presence your personal and professional identities can easily blur online. Any personal social media activity may have an impact on your professional reputation and that of the Councils.

Code of Conduct

When you make a posting remember that the Councils' Member Code of Conduct may apply when you are deemed to be acting in the capacity of Member. Members are obliged to behave in a manner that is consistent with certain principles to maintain public confidence in the Councils.

If you can be identified as a Member when you are using Social Media, either by account name or how you describe yourself or by what you comment upon and how you comment, the requirements of the Code **could** apply.

In your role as an elected Member you should be aware of the Code of Conduct and particularly keep in mind the following principles when using Social Media:

Show Respect for Others – do not use Social Media to be rude or disrespectful.

Do not disclose confidential or exempt information about people, the Council or third parties.



Do not bully or intimidate others – repeated negative comments about or to individuals could be interpreted as bullying or intimidation.

Do not try to secure a benefit for yourself or disadvantage others

Do not publish anything that might be seen as racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic or anti faith. Even as a joke or 'tongue in cheek'

Predetermination

A further specific area for consideration is to avoid making any comments on Social Media that could be considered to demonstrate predetermination. The fast and informal nature of Social Media communication increases the risk of a comment being taken out of context or misconstrued.

While it is valuable and a necessary part of Member's role to express views on a range of locally relevant issues, care must be taken to avoid giving the impression that your mind is closed on a particular decision making issue before a decision is reached. This is particularly relevant for planning application or licensing matters.

With regard to decision making by Member the above guidance should be read in conjunction with the Code of Conduct for Members, which is of paramount importance.

Legal Considerations

Any inappropriate use or misuse of social media could amount to an offence of harassment, an offence under the Malicious Communications Act, or give rise to a claim of defamation, breach of copyright or breach of data protection legislation.



IT Policy

The Councils' IT Policy is designed to protect our equipment and systems from any damage caused by the downloading or use of malicious software, whether intentional or otherwise, and should be read in conjunction with this document.

Linked Documents

There are a number of policies which should be considered in conjunction with this social media policy. These are:

- The Councils' IT Policy
- The Communications Strategy
- The Adur District Council Members Code of Conduct
- The Worthing Borough Council Members Code of Conduct

These can all be found on the Councils' Intranet, or hard copies can be provided on request. If you're unsure about where to find these, please contact the Head of Communications for advice.



Appendix 1 - Definitions of Terms

Social Media: For the purpose of this document, social media is the collective term used for online platforms that encourage interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks.

Platforms: Any website or technology which facilitates creation or sharing of content. Examples include: Twitter; Facebook; Youtube; Vine; Instagram; Pintrest; Google+; LinkedIn; Quora; Disqus; TripAdvisor; Blogs; Wikis. (This is not a definitive list as there is a constantly evolving number of social media platforms)

Content: Anything created by a user of a social media platform and uploaded to one or more platforms. This could include words, images, videos, files, audio clips or any other format.

Communities of interest: Groups of social media users who come together to discuss particular topics based on their individual interests. This might include place based discussions, hobbies, leisure pursuits or anything else that encourages discussion.

Social media dashboard: The Councils use a tool called Crowd Control HQ to monitor and manage social media. Crowd Control HQ allows content to be scheduled across multiple platforms and into multiple communities. It also offers powerful search and moderation functions to ensure that the Councils are able to track and report on the success of social media use, and identify areas for improvement, as well as providing reputation management/protection.



Appendix 2 - Corporate Social Media Accounts

Corporate Social Media Accounts

Corporate Accounts are those social media accounts which represent particular strands of Council business.

Examples of these include the Councils' [official Twitter feed](#) or the [AWCS Facebook page](#).

It may be useful for Members to follow some or all of the Corporate Accounts and to reshare information posted by these accounts or engage in dialogue with these accounts as appropriate. All users of social media affiliated with the Councils are reminded that any dialogue on social media is public and should follow all usual guidance outlined elsewhere in this policy.

Corporate accounts are allocated to individual teams or projects and are primarily managed through the corporate social media dashboard, CrowdControl. A limited number of individuals have access to each corporate account through CrowdControl to ensure clarity of use and communication.

They are not linked to any single individual, may be updated by multiple colleagues and are used for warning, informing and, increasingly, customer services. Posts are written in the third person ("We are delighted..." "Congratulations to our..." etc).

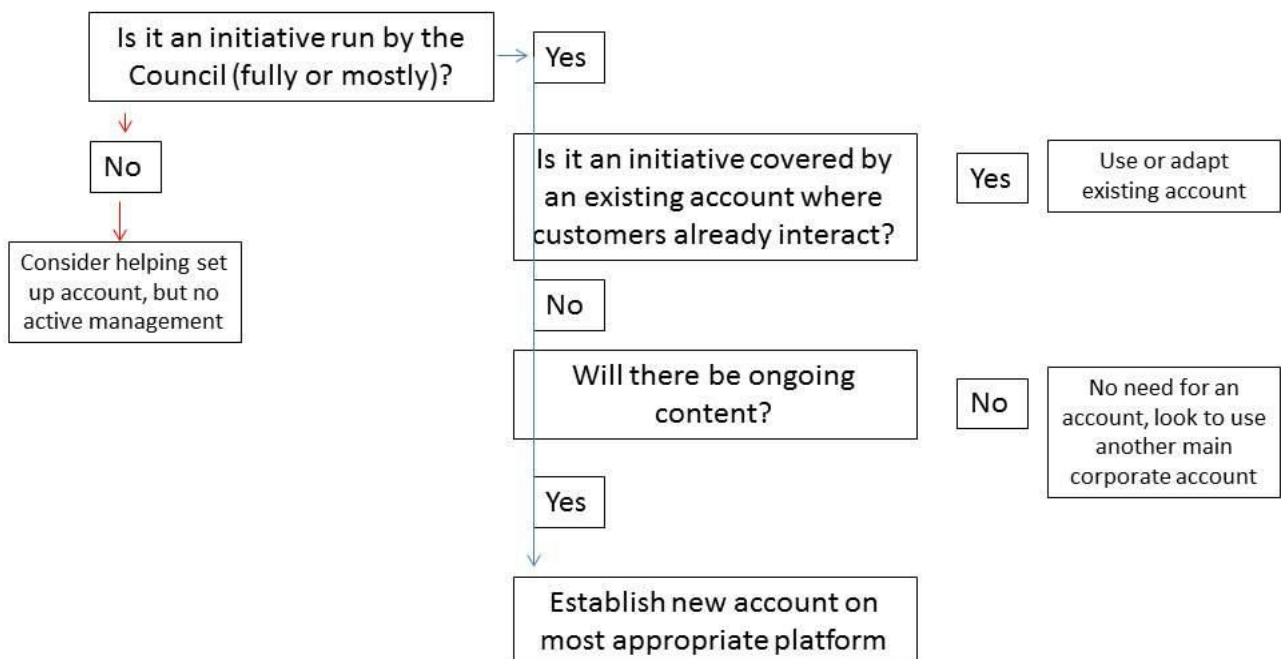
It is our policy that all corporate accounts must be clearly identified as belonging to Adur and Worthing Councils, and any new accounts may only be opened in conjunction with the Head of Communications and Communications Team input to ensure that there is no duplication of effort and that the appropriate training/support may be given.

Easy methods of identifying account ownership will come in the account name, header graphics and user pictures used – the Communications Team can help with this and any other branding issues.

This flow chart on the following page illustrates how the decision to open a new corporate account is made and is applicable for any service wishing to get involved with social media – whether commercial in focus or not. Although not all services will be 'selling' something (in the way that Theatres or Leisure do, for example), we are all competing for the finite attention of the public – known as 'share of mind'. This is why we need to be clear that our content doesn't duplicate other accounts, that it will remain fresh and that it will be clearly branded as belonging to the Councils.

It is our policy that our social media dashboard – Crowd Control HQ – will be used for the majority of direct interactions with the social media community. Crowd Control HQ allows easy scheduling of information, a simple way of tracking incoming messages and a powerful reporting tool. It all allows departmental managers to easily monitor all conversations going on in their area (please see the structure chart at Appendix 4) and respond appropriately if needs be.

Corporate: What gets an account?





Appendix 3 - Platform specific check points for corporate accounts

Twitter + Instagram

- All accounts must be clearly identified as belonging to the Councils with appropriate headers, logos and biographical statements
- Account holders have no control over posts made by other users on Twitter / Instagram therefore there is no requirement for a warning on appropriate behaviour or to police comments made by others.
- Other users who repeatedly post inappropriate or offensive content / replies may be reported to Twitter by the Corporate Account holder.

Facebook

- Corporate Facebook pages may only be administered by corporate account holders – personal profiles should never be used to administer official accounts as there is a danger that personal opinions (or private conversations) may be interpreted as official Council policy. The Head of Communications can assist colleagues in establishing professional Facebook accounts for the sole aim of administering corporate Facebook pages where there is an operational need to do so
- All posts made to corporate pages/groups, or replies to the posts of others, must be signed off using the real name of the person doing the administration.
 - o e.g “Thanks for the comment – I'll make sure the team hear it! Regards, Admin Sarah”
- Our Facebook pages and groups are our spaces and, as such, we require a certain level of politeness and respect from all of those who interact on them. It is entirely correct to put a behaviour warning in the description for any page/group and to enforce it if required.
 - o e.g “We will not condone use of foul or inappropriate language and any comment containing any will be removed / deleted. If you have something to say please express yourself with language that everyone would find appropriate. “

Google+ / Youtube / Periscope

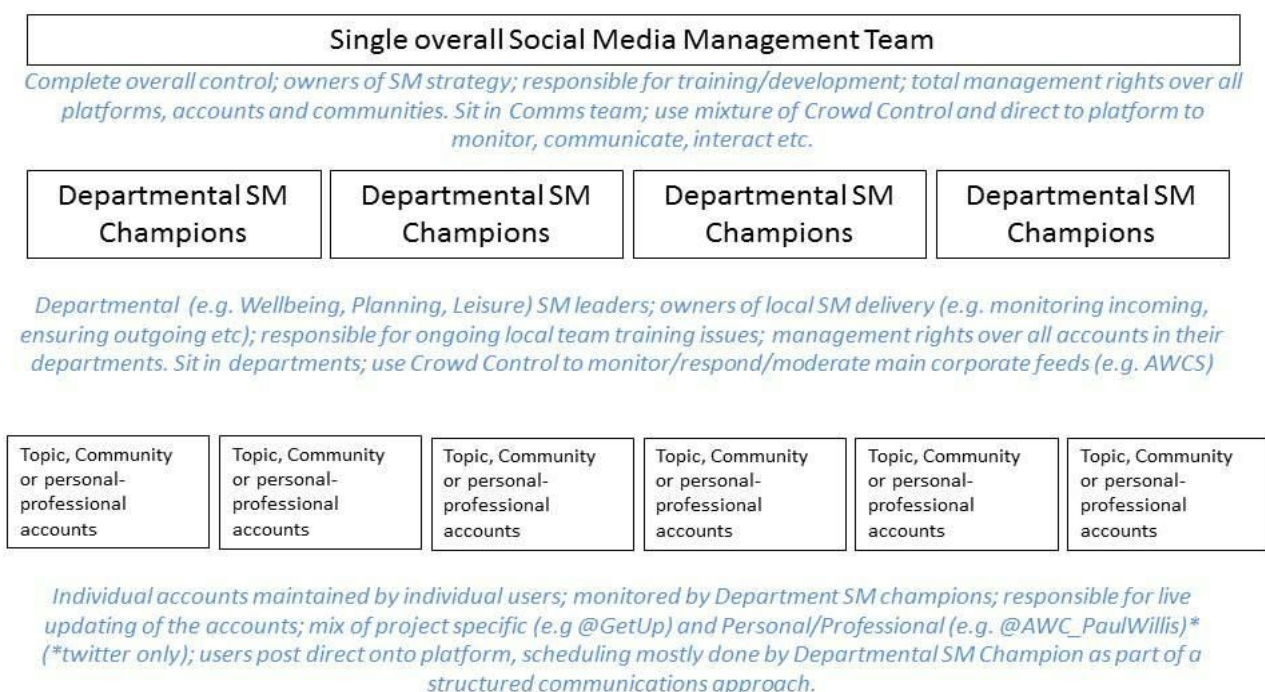
- As with Facebook, our Google+ pages/communities, our Youtube channels and our Periscope channels are our spaces – we should set boundaries for interactions and be prepared to enforce them appropriately.
- Please note that users who post in appropriate comments during a Periscope broadcast can be blocked from further comment during that broadcast by tapping the relevant comment on screen.



Appendix 4 - Our social management structure

The Councils' social media management structure is designed to provide a balance of flexibility and central support.

Account Management Structure



The overall Social Media Management Team will be located centrally in the Communications Team as it has been in the past. They will still provide a certain level support, however there will now key Departmental Champions who monitor for the team and also post for staff who do not have access to CCHQ.

Officers will be identified to have a personal professional presence and they will be responsible for updating their own account. This account will still be monitored via the corporate team and relevant Departmental Champion. All professional/personal accounts users must identify themselves as Adur and Worthing Councils officer with an appropriate head and shoulders shot which will include the AWC swish across the bottom of the image. Please contact the Head of Communications for more details.