Social Media Policy and Guidelines

Appendix I

1. Introduction

Social media has become a way of life for the British public and is increasingly making its presence felt in the public sector. In the last few years technology has changed the way we pursue and share information, how communities work, and how information is disseminated.

According to the Ofcom Adults Media Use and Attitudes report, published in August 2014:

- 54% of UK adults now use social media;

- 82% of UK households have an internet connection;

- 57% of UK adults use their mobile phone to access the internet;

- 2% of time UK adults spend consuming the media is spent consuming print;

- 18% of time UK adults spend consuming the media is spent using social media;

- 50% of adults over 65 have access to the internet;

- 75% of 16 to 24-year-olds use social media; and

- use of social media by adults over 65 has increased by over 50 per cent between 2013 and 2014.

These figures demonstrate the extent to which the internet and social media have become part of our everyday lives.

The Council is increasingly using social media as a key communications tool to raise awareness of our services and shape policy development through communicating updates, photos, videos, latest news, events, supported campaigns, and information about our Council services and from other local authorities and partners. As such it has delivered many benefits to the Council, delivered at no cost beyond the cost of officer time to manage it.

It also provides an environment to encourage conversation online and gain feedback on what people think about particular topics. No posts are automated, so all posts and responses to queries are added by officers. As a result it has proved very popular with our local residents as a communications channel, encouraging conversations with our residents, businesses, and visitors.

Interest in social media has grown as follows:

	April 2014	November 2014	Growth
Facebook 'likes'	1,100	1,812	65%
Twitter 'followers'	2,716	3,392	25%

The Council Facebook page as of November 2014 gets an average of 16 'likes' per week, and a weekly reach of up to 27,000 people. The Council Twitter page gets an average of 22 new 'followers' per week. With increasing numbers every month, it clearly shows the engagement with users continues to grow.

As such, a Social Media Policy is required to set out how the Council, its officers and Members will approach the use of social media. The Policy defines what the Council wants to achieve from this channel of communication, and the service standards our residents can expect as a result.

2.   What is social media and networking?

The idea behind the act of social networking is building social networks, interacting with other people, communities, partners, voluntary services, and businesses to exchange information. Social media, on the other hand, is the actual medium through which all this "networking" takes place. It isn't an action like networking; it is more of a canvas upon which we paint our content.

The best way to define social media is to break it down. Media is an instrument of communication, like a newspaper or a radio, so social media would be a social instrument of communication.

Because social media is such a broad term, it covers a large range of websites, with new ones appearing all the time. But the common link between them is that you are able to interact with others.

These online services, platforms, and websites focus on facilitating the building of social networks or social relations among people and communities, so allowing users to engage, discuss, debate, share ideas, photos, activities, events and interests.

3.   Benefits of using social media

The benefits of using social media include better:

- **digital engagement:** which leads to better explanation and discussion of what the Council is trying to achieve and, by listening, a better understanding of what people need;

- **transparency:** which allows information to be shared openly on decision-making, showing how and why decisions are made;

- **insight:** greater engagement through social media can aid in residents' needs giving insight to help inform the decision-making process;

- **communications:** greater engagement can also help an organisation to communicate decisions and, by doing so, help shape the discussion and debate that arises;

- **leadership:** which enables Council services to use social media promoting understanding and contributing to conversations; and

- **decisions:** meaningful engagement through understanding and transparent and concise communications leads to better decisions.

4.   Risks of using social media

Using social media is not without risks. Appendix A outlines these risks and how this Policy will mitigate against them.

5.   Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the Council's use of social media are to:

- act as the informal / human voice of Swale Borough Council and promote understanding of key messages in a new way;

- create an effective and positive presence for the Council in the social media sphere;

- reflect our overarching purpose to 'making Swale a better place,' by adhering to our priorities, competencies and values as set out in our Corporate Plan;

- extend the reach in the online sphere of the Council's priorities for effective communication, as set out in our Communication First Strategy;

- encourage and facilitate channel shift, as set out in our Customer Access Strategy, encouraging people to do business with us online rather than face-to-face;

- increase opportunities for the Council to interact and consult with the public generally;

- provide timely updates in cases of emergency, disrupted service, or other unusual events;

- heighten public interaction with us about where there are issues and to help us provide assistance where it is most needed;

- build on existing and create new relationships with key audiences including the public, journalists, key stakeholders, partners and businesses;

- respond to messages of dissatisfaction and promote positive responses; and

- correct factual inaccuracies about the Council and its services in a speedier way.

6.   What social media channels do the Council currently use?

6.1   Facebook

This social networking site allows people to post updates about what they are doing along with photos and videos. People are able to 'like', share, and comment on these updates.

Users 'like' our profile (opt-in to get our posts) and our news will be posted to their 'wall.' The Facebook interface makes it easy for people who 'like' or share our posts; and when they do, their friends (the average user has 130 friends) will see this activity, therefore putting Swale in front of an audience we may not normally have access to.

6.2   Instagram

Instagram is an online mobile photo-sharing, video-sharing, and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos and share them simultaneously to Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms.

6.3 Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blogging social media site. Posts come in at 140 characters or fewer and can be organised via 'trends' – identified via hashtags (#). Twitter can been described as SMS (short message service) of the internet, because posts are short, sweet, and to-the-point.

Twitter differs from Facebook in that users 'follow' each other. Therefore it is easier to gain a following, connecting with people and/or other businesses.

6.4 Flickr

Flikr is a photo-sharing and hosting service with advanced and powerful features. It supports an active and engaged community where people share and explore each other's photos. You can share and host hundreds of your own pictures on Flickr.

6.5 YouTube

YouTube is a video sharing social media site. People are also able to leave comments on the videos posted.

6.6 LinkedIn

Linkedin is a business-oriented social network that helps professionals to build and maintain a list of connections. These connections can then be used to find a job and find out more about potential employers.

A more in-depth list of social media sites that are used worldwide can be found on Wikipedia.

Our social media presence will not just be limited to what we currently use - we will continue to evolve as social media itself continues to go to grow. With this aim in mind, more channels of social media will always be considered within our Policy.

Converting social media followers/users into engaged customers will remain a continual objective of this Policy.

7. Social media monitoring

Evaluation is key for social media use. Tools are used to monitor the Councils' level of influence and impacts on target audiences. A list of the current tools used, are set out in Appendix B.

8. Corporate social media accounts

8.1 Which departments have corporate accounts?

A list of all existing social media accounts within the Council are referenced in Appendix C. This document will be updated as required.

8.2 Setting up social media accounts

Officers must not set up accounts, groups, pages, profiles, or take part in any social media activity on behalf of their service area without first consulting the Communications Team and the relevant Head of Service.

Prior to the creation of a new Council-affiliated social media account, a business case will need to be produced outlining the purpose of the account. This should then be discussed with the Communications Team. A business case template is set out in Appendix D.

8.3   Policy for social media accounts

All accounts approved by the Communications Team will need to adhere to the following Policy.

Setting up an account

- All accounts which will be used to conduct business on behalf of the Council must be approved by the Communications Team.

- The Communications Team manages the Council's social media channels, including setting up of any additional accounts. The Communications Team are able to assist and support where required.

- Accounts can be in the name of Swale Borough Council, a particular department, or a campaign, but not in the name of an individual. All account names must be approved by the Communications Team.

- All accounts will make it clear that they are an account run on behalf of the Council.

- Officers cannot use any social media tool for Council business unless they have received appropriate training. The Communications Team will provide this training.

- Administrators/editors for all social media accounts will need to be in politically-restricted roles.

- The email address used must be the generic department address. ICT will need to be advised if a departmental email address is needed.

Managing an account

- Information/biography pages should include an alternative contact method (website or email address) and information on what times the account will be monitored so that people know when they can expect a reply.

- Usernames and passwords must be provided to the Communications Team, along with any changes to administration roles. Passwords are to be changed periodically and be supplied to the Communications Team. In the case of a Facebook page, the Digital Communications Officer will be added as a 'Page Admin' role.

- Settings regarding the use of bad language need to be set as 'high'.

- Accounts must be updated and monitored regularly. Twitter should be updated at least once a day. Facebook should be updated at least three times per week.

Closing an account down

- The Communications Team has the authority to close down any associated accounts which are considered to be inappropriate, are being abused, or have the potential to cause damage to the Council's reputation.

- If an associated account is seen to remain inactive for six months, the Communications Team will ask for it to be deactivated.

9. Using social media for work purposes

9.1 Councillor-specific responsibilities

The responsibilities of Members in using social media are covered in the Members' Code of Conduct, as outlined in section 5 of the Swale Borough Council Constitution. These equally apply to the use of social media.

9.2 Officer-specific responsibilities

- The Officer's Code of Conduct and the ICT Security and Acceptable Use Policy must be adhered to when using social media.

- In particular, all Council officers must not post on social media any inappropriate, abusive, bullying, racist, or defamatory messages to members of the public, councillors or colleagues either in or outside the work environment. This may result in disciplinary action.

- Safeguarding issues are paramount because social media sites are often misused. Safeguarding is everyone's business, and all officers have a responsibility to report any concerns about other site users. The Council's Safeguarding Policy sets out responsibilities under the Children Act 2004 to ensure children, young people and vulnerable adults are kept safe from harm.

- Council policies relating to confidentiality, impartiality, and conflicts of interest also may apply.

- Officers, who in the course of their employment are posting content on behalf of Swale Borough Council, are personally responsible for any content published on any form of social media.

- Follow copyright and data protection laws: for the Council's protection as well as your own, it is critical that you stay within the legal framework and be aware that the laws relating to defamation, copyright, data protection laws and Freedom of Information apply.

- You must advise the Communications Team where you have identified information that is inaccurate or could damage the reputation of the organisation.

10. Guidelines for using social media for work purposes

Types of content

- Ensure messages reflect what is contained within Communications First, the Council's Communications Strategy.

- Wherever possible, use links to relevant websites including our corporate website. Mentioning other profile pages with Facebook and Twitter that relate to the message being posted helps target audiences. This can ensure messages are getting to the right people.

- Text for posts should be clear and simple, and when appropriate a picture to complement the post - photos get twice the engagement as posts without

photos. Remember, Twitter uses up characters whenever an image is uploaded.

- For Twitter hashtags can be used to categorise Tweets by keyword. People use the hashtag symbol # before a relevant keyword or phrase (no spaces). Clicking on a hashtagged word in any message shows you all other Tweets marked with that keyword.

- If using social media for investigation purposes, advice should be taken from the Legal Team as to whether a RIPA authorisation should be obtained.

Tone of content

- Our aim is to develop a single 'tone of voice' which will be recognisable in our digital presence. Therefore, our main Swale Borough Council social media pages and the associated accounts will be anonymous (i.e. they will not be in the name of any single officer).

- The content used should be friendly, factual and polite. Council jargon should not be used - there is merit in keeping things simple and to the point. Use plain English.

- If you see inaccuracies published about the Council, do not be defensive. Instead, be prepared for a two-way conversation, and be aware that people are entitled to their views.

- When you do respond do so politely and sensitively respond - making sure that what you say is factual and avoids unnecessary arguments.

- If you have made a mistake be the first to correct your own mistakes and do not alter previous posts without indicating that you have done so. If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so.

- Be aware of the importance of spelling and grammar as poor spelling and/or grammar will negatively affect the Council's reputation.

Liking, following, sharing and re-tweeting

- As a Council we should 'like' or 'follow' organisation profiles who provide information that is pertinent to our work as a local authority (for example central government accounts, local press, partners and voluntary groups) or those whose information we can pass on for the benefit of our residents.

- There will also be times the Council will need to 'like' or 'follow' an account, individual, or business in order to take part in conversations (via direct messages).

- Share or re-tweet information that will be of interest or of use to the residents of Swale, for example; KCC Highways information regarding traffic incidents within Swale.

Blocking, unfollowing and removal

- The Council reserves the right to unfollow an individual. This may simply be as a result of a review or rationalisation.

- However, if a user account needs to be blocked, this will probably be because the rules have been contravened on a particular social media site, for example

because of use of harmful, illegal or offensive content within comments. Such posts will need to be reported via the site's internal link.

- Inappropriate, political and libellous statements will need to be removed. Abbreviations of bad language will also need to be removed. Where possible, rely on the measures of protection and intervention which the social networking site already has in place.

- A record of any offensive post will need to be recorded and kept as a screenshot.

When to use accounts

- All Council social media accounts are to be monitored daily and will be active Monday - Thursday 9am to 5pm, Friday 9am to 4.30pm (except Bank holidays and public holidays). They are not expected to be monitored twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

- Messages can be posted during non-office hours, for example, in cases of emergencies, bad weather, traffic incidents, stray dogs, and at events that the Council has an interest in.

Responding and replying

- Direct questions in comments to posts will, when necessary, need to be given to Customer Services or to the relevant departments to find out information for the user. This means that it might sometimes take a while before an answer can be given to users. When required, every effort to answer questions should be made within two working days.

- If the answer to a query is not known and cannot be found out within two working days, let the person know as soon as possible. State as soon as possible that the query is being looked into and an update will be given accordingly. Pass on the information to the relevant team who need to answer the query and the time scale for a response.

- If many comments / suggestions are made on any one post with a similar theme in the chain of comments, a generic answer will be provided.

- If a query is posted and the answer is too detailed for a response, this should be explained to the user and an alternative way to contact us is suggested (direct message for example). A response to the query still needs to be given, stating that the answer has been dealt with offline. This way it does not look as if the query has been ignored.

- For complaints and compliments the user will need to be directed with a link to those particular sections on www.swale.gov.uk. This enables our Customer Service Team to log the request officially.

- Information from the Commissioner's Office has confirmed that requests for information via social media should be treated as official Freedom of Information (FOI) and Subject Access Requests under certain circumstances. On these occasions the requester will be responded to and further details obtained before all the relevant information is forwarded to foi@swale.gov.uk or a link to http://www.swale.gov.uk/freedom-of-information/ for the requester to obtain the relevant information on making an FOI request in the standard way.

- Only departmental email addresses and contact telephone numbers should be given in a response to a query.

Using images and video

- It is illegal to use graphics or photographs from the internet without permission. Ensure that anyone giving permission to use an image is the original copyright owner. The licensing agreement of photographs in any existing archives will need to be checked before use.

- No images of children who appear to be under the age of 18 are to be used without the written permission from their parent or guardian.

- Video content required to be uploaded to social media will need to be discussed with the Communications Team.

Pre-election period

- In the six-week run up to an election - local, general or European - all councils have to very careful not to do or say anything that could seen in any way to support any political party or candidate.

- The Council will continue to publish important service announcements using social media, but may have to remove responses if they are overtly party political during this period.

11. Personal Use

The lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred when it comes to using social media. It is your own personal choice whether you choose to participate in any kind of social media activity in your own time – the views and opinions that you express are your own.

However, the Council's reputation is made up in a large part by the behaviour of employees and everything published reflects on how the Council is perceived. Therefore, if you do use social media in a personal capacity, it is expected that officers behave appropriately and in line with the Council's Values.

Officers using social media personally must adhere to the following:

- officers must not imply they are speaking for the Council when posting messages personally;

- a work e-mail address should not be used when registering on social media sites for personal use. Council logos or other Council identification should be avoided; and

- the Council can be held legally responsible for online content published/posted by officers on social media in a private capacity if closely connected to the work environment.

Officers using social media personally should also consider the following:

- what you publish will be around for a long time so consider the content carefully and also be sensible about disclosing personal details;

- be mindful of online privacy settings, understanding who can see the information you publish and who can view your personal information; and

- background information you choose to share about yourself, such as information about your family or personal interests, is your decision. However, by revealing certain details you might be more vulnerable to identity theft.

Risk assessment of using social media

Risk	Mitigation
Criticism from the general public (time, resources, usefulness etc.)	▪ Use holding replies where answers need investigation ▪ Thank users for comments and questions ▪ Manage expectations with published social media service standards
Technical security of the accounts and potential for hacking	▪ Only the Communications Team can create new accounts ▪ Account details and passwords will not be shared with unauthorised users. ▪ Passwords will be controlled and regularly changed by the Communications Team and monitored ▪ Limited users in each team
Publishing confidential information	▪ Officer Code of Conduct ▪ Training
Officers contacting residents/customers directly (using personal social media accounts)	▪ Training
Legal issues (libel, breach of copyright)	▪ Training ▪ Being mindful when sharing posts/ retweeting/ writing content ▪ Ensure the Council is allowed to use images posted
Inappropriate and unsuitable content being posted by the public, such as unsavoury comments on Facebook.	▪ Unsuitable posts and comments will be removed
Inappropriate content being posted in error by officers (inc. politically sensitive information or news release under embargo)	▪ All users of social media on behalf of the Council will have a copy of the policy and guidelines ▪ Training and support will be provided by the Communications Team
Inappropriate comments posted about the Council on officers personal social media accounts	▪ Social Media Policy - personal use to be included in Personal Portfolio (HR) ▪ Making officers aware of this policy periodically via the intranet ▪ Officer Code of Conduct.

Social media tools that we currently use

Tool	Function
http://tiny.cc/	Changes a big internet link (URL) into **tiny** URL. Allows you to monitor traffic statistics from the shortened link, custom tiny links. A free tool.
Hootsuite	Social Media Management System or tool. It helps you keep track and manage your many social network channels. It can enable you to monitor what people are saying about your brand and help you respond instantly. A free tool.
TweetDeck	Part of Twitter. Having trouble with the 140-character limit? Then this allows you to compose longer tweets that include a link for people to read the rest. A free tool.
Twitter Analytics	Part of Twitter. Allows us to measure engagement and learn how to make your Tweets more successful. Followers. Explore the interests, locations, and demographics of your followers.
Facebook Insights	Help you track the number of active users to better understand page performance, including; telling us information about our users, by age, gender and location, and also how many 'liked' your page, how many unsubscribed from your page, and how many commented on your page in a given time period. A free tool.
Meltwater Buzz	Allows us to discover the most meaningful conversations for us by topic, social media channel, language, and geography. We can understand social conversation volume, sentiment, and trends and track ongoing conversations for immediate engagement, and research historical discussions going back six months. Low cost.

Social media accounts within Swale Borough Council

Account / social media channels	Department, Managers and administrators	Purpose
@SwaleCouncil - Twitter **Swale Borough Council** - Facebook **swaleboroughcouncil** - Instagram **Swale Borough Council** - LinkedIn **Swale Council** - Flickr **Swale Borough Council** - YouTube	Communications and CSC: Mike McGann Carole Sargeant Lindsay Oldfield Tim Oxley Nigel Revell Ashden Montella Amanda Hatch Sophia Ramm	Our main corporate account, key council messages, news, service updates.
@VisitSwale - Twitter **Visit Swale** - Facebook	Communications and Economy and Community Services: Lindsay Oldfield Martin Goodhew Christopher Blandford	Promoting Swale as a place to visit.
@activeswale - Twitter	Communications and Economy and Community Services: Lindsay Oldfield Russell Fairman	Encouraging fitness and wellbeing within Swale.
@sus_sheppey - Twitter **Sustainable Sheppey** - Facebook	Communications and Policy: Lindsay Oldfield	A lottery funded programme of projects tackling future climate

	Sarah Porter	challenges
@Talk2Gateway - Twitter	KCC and CSC: Sarah Jane Radley	KCC run social media channel.
@SwaleMeans - Twitter **Swale Means Business** - Facebook	Communications and Economy and Community Services: Lindsay Oldfield Christopher Blandford Lorna Wyrill Jill Read	Helping businesses looking to start, invest or expand in Swale.
@VolunteerSwale - Twitter	Communications and Economy and Community Services: Lindsay Oldfield Sophia Ramm	Promotion of Volunteer Awards, and affiliated volunteering opportunities.
Swale CSP - Facebook	Economy and Community Services: Steph Curtis Tim Hill - Police Sargeant	*Facebook page will need to be changed to an 'organisation page'.*
@SwaleYouthForum - Twitter **Swale Youth Forum** - Facebook	Economy and Community Services: Lindsay Oldfield Russell Fairman	*Facebook not in use*

Request for a social media account

To apply for a social media account, please fill this in this form and give it to the Communications Team. If you have any questions or are not sure how to answer any of the sections, contact mediaservices@swale.gov.uk

Business case

The defined purpose of the account:
Target audiences:
Why you think social networking is the right platform to communicate your message:
Have you already identified a specific solution that you want to use? (For example do you already know that you want a Twitter or Facebook account?)
What resources exist to maintain and monitor the account on a daily basis? Please include the names of officers responsible for maintaining the account(s):
How do you intend to keep records of data that you post on to the social media channels?
Do you have a deadline for implementing this project? If so what?