

FIFE COUNCIL

GUIDANCE FOR USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Introduction

Social media enables engagement with your community and the wider public and Community Councils should seek to encourage information sharing amongst your members, the community, and volunteers. You should also utilise the expertise of your members and volunteers in generating appropriate social media content. At the same time, social media posts should be in keeping with the image that the Community Council wishes to present to the public, and posts made through its social media channels should not damage your reputation. There should be no posts which could bring your Community Council's political status into question.

Forms of Social Media

Social media describes a range of websites and online tools which allow people to interact. Examples of social media include: blogs; wikis; RSS feeds; social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn or MySpace; microblogs such as Twitter; photo sharing sites such as Flickr; content sharing or bookmarking sites such as Digg and Delicious; customer feedback sites such as Yelp; and video sharing sites such as YouTube. The term social media also includes the Instant Messaging functionality of internal applications such as Outlook Email and Skype for Business, as well as blogs and discussion forums that can be created through SharePoint and other tools.

Facebook

Facebook is an important tool for Community Councils and is an effective way to connect with residents, introduce the Community Council, and to reach out to people who may wish to give their views but find it difficult to attend meetings.

It might be tempting to set one up for your Community Council if you already have your own Facebook profile, but it is important to note that Facebook actively searches for and deletes profiles representing organisations. This is because profiles were designed solely to represent an individual, and not an organisation or a group. You should consider creating **Facebook pages or a group**.

Facebook Pages

Facebook Pages or profiles allow your Community Council to have a public Facebook presence, which is visible on search engines such as Google, and can act as an extension of your own Community Council website.

Facebook Pages have administrators (Admins), who are Facebook users and have been given permission to post on behalf of the Community Council. When Admins post content to the page's timeline, by default the posts show up as the page's name and not as the Admin's. You can also customise the name of your Page as *facebook.com/yourcommunitycouncil*.

Facebook Groups

Groups are better used for smaller collections of people and generally have a more personal feel to them. Groups have the advantage of customised privacy through public or invite-only access. You are also able to send Messages to members of a Group, which is helpful for coordinating group activities or discussions. In addition, Groups allow individuals to schedule events and even share documents with other members.

Unlike Pages, though, Groups cannot have their own Facebook URL which can make it more difficult to find in search engines. You must be logged in to Facebook to be able to see the Group or to join the Group. Another notable difference is that when owners of the Group post, they show up as their personal Profile rather than showing up as the Group.

Facebook Groups and Pages

Community Councils can use both Groups and Pages by creating a Page for their Community Council as a whole, then set up a Group for a specific target audience like local residents or for all members of the Community Council.

Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking service and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based posts of up to 280 characters, known as "tweets".

A Twitter page can be used by any Community Council as long as they are willing and receptive to engage with their community in this way and is a useful platform to engage in a quick and effective way. It is an especially useful tool for getting a brief message out to a wide audience, such as publicising a community event.

Responsibilities

Any communication is capable of being misinterpreted. The immediacy of social media and the lack of face to face contact can magnify any problems. Information and comments made can be broadcast to a large number of people more quickly than other media. The same rules apply to social media that govern other behaviour as a councillor – but extra care needs to be taken given the immediacy and ease of dissemination. Although social media is conversational in tone, it is recorded, and it is permanent, so content and comment must be accurate, informative and thought through.

The Community Council's social media represents the collective Community Council membership and should maintain a professional and uniform tone at all times. Community Council members may, from time to time and as appropriate (e.g. as previously agreed and minuted by the collective membership of the Community Council), post on behalf of the Community Council using its online profiles.

Community Councils should not knowingly post (or enable postings from third parties) which include incorrect, defamatory or misleading information about its own work, the work of other organisations, or individuals or which do not comply with its commitment to Equal Opportunities or apolitical activities. In addition, it will post in accordance with relevant organisations' Copyright and Privacy policies.

Information Sharing

The Community Council should encourage the sharing and reposting of online information that is relevant, appropriate to its aims, and of interest to its members. Before social media posts are made, Community Council members should consider:

- Is the information I am posting, or reposting, likely to be of interest to the members and community?
- Is the information in keeping with the objectives of the Community Council?
- Could the post be construed as an attack on another individual, organisation or project?
- If there is a link attached to the post, does the link work, and have I read the information it links to and judged it to be an appropriate source?
- If reposting information, is the original poster an individual or organisation that the Community Council would be happy to associate itself with?
- Are the tone and the content of the post in keeping with other posts made by the Community Council? Does it maintain the organisation's overall tone?
- If there is any uncertainty about whether a post is suitable, it should not be posted (or enabled to be posted) until the item has been reviewed by the Communications Officer. A few moments spent checking can ensure that the Community Council's integrity is not compromised.

Inappropriate Posts

In the event of a damaging or misleading post being made, the Community Council should:

- remove the offending post immediately;
- where appropriate, issue an apology, either publicly or to the individual or organisation involved; and
- explore the origin of the offending post and take steps to prevent a similar incident occurring in the future e.g. blocking posts which do not comply with the Scheme

Moderating social media

It is important to maintain the reputation of the Community Council, through establishing a safe and friendly environment for its members. From time to time social media forums may be hijacked by trolls, spammers, or attract people who attack other posters or the Community Council aggressively. In order to maintain a pleasant environment for everybody, these posts need to be moderated.

Freedom of speech is to be encouraged, but posts should not contain the following:

- Excessive or inappropriate use of swearing;
- Defamatory or aggressive attacks on the Community Council, other individuals, organisations, projects or public figures;
- Breach of copyrighted material not within reasonable use, in the public domain, or available under Creative Commons license;
- Breach of data protection or privacy laws;
- Repetitive advertisements;
- Topics which fall outside the realms of interest to members and the community, and which do not appear to be within the context of a legitimate discussion or enquiry.

If an individual continues to post inappropriate content, or if the post can be considered spam:

- Remove the post as soon as possible;
- If possible/appropriate, contact the individual privately to explain why you have removed the post and highlight the Community Council's appropriate use of social media policy;
- Ban or block the individual to prevent them from posting again.

Banning and blocking should be used as a last resort only, and only when it is clear that the individual intends to continue to contribute inappropriate content. However, if that is the case, action must be taken swiftly to maintain the welfare of other social media users. The decision to block, ban and remove posts is the responsibility of the Community Council.