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Contact Officer:
Maureen Potter 01352 702322

To: Robert Dewey (Chairman)

Councillors: Patrick Heesom, Paul Johnson and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted Members:

Jonathan Duggan-Keen, Phillipa Earlam, Edward Michael Hughes, Julia Hughes and Kenneth Molyneux

6 November 2018

Dear Sir/Madam

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Standards Committee which will be held at 6.30 pm on Monday, 12th November, 2018 in the Caffi Isa, Mynydd Isa Library Community Centre, Mercia Drive, Mynydd Isa, Mold CH7 6UH to consider the following items

Please note the venue for the meeting.

A training session for the Standard Committee members will be held from 6.00pm until 6.30pm

A G E N D A

1 APOLOGIES

Purpose: To receive any apologies.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Purpose: To receive any Declarations and advise Members accordingly.

3 MINUTES (Pages 3 - 8)

Purpose: To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2018.

4 DISPENSATIONS

Purpose: To receive any requests for dispensations.

5 **RESPONSE FROM WELSH GOVERNMENT TO A REQUEST FOR INCREASED SANCTIONS** (Pages 9 - 12)

Purpose:

To note the reply from Welsh Government on the request from the Committee for an increased range of sanctions in the Local Government Bill

6 **UPDATED GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FROM WLGA** (Pages 13 - 52)

Purpose: To update the Committee on the Revised Guidance from WLGA

7 **VISITS TO TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS BY INDEPENDENT MEMBERS**

8

Purpose: To receive any updates from visits to Town and Community Councils undertaken by Independent Members following the meeting of the Standards Committee on 1 October 2018.

8 **OVERVIEW OF ETHICAL COMPLAINTS** (Pages 53 - 58)

Purpose: That the Committee notes the number and type of complaints.

9 **THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES FOR 2016/17**

Purpose: To receive a verbal report on the Annual Report of the Adjudication Panel For Wales for 2016/17. Please refer to the following link to the report:-
<https://gov.wales/docs/apw/publications/180213-apw-annual-report-2016-2017-en.pdf>

10 **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME** (Pages 59 - 62)

Purpose: For the Committee to consider topics to be included on the attached Forward Work Programme.

Yours faithfully



Robert Robins
Democratic Services Manager

STANDARDS COMMITTEE **1 OCTOBER 2018**

Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee of Flintshire County Council held at County Hall, Mold on Monday, 1 October 2018

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Patrick Heesom, Paul Johnson and Arnold Woolley

Co-opted members:

Rob Dewey, Phillipa Earlam, Julia Hughes and Ken Molyneux

APOLOGIES:

Jonathan Duggan-Keen and Edward Hughes

IN ATTENDANCE:

Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Officer

17. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

The Monitoring Officer explained the requirements as set out in the Constitution and advised that the current Chair did not wish to be re-appointed due to work commitments.

Nominations were sought for a new Chair of the Committee. Councillor Woolley nominated Rob Dewey and this was seconded by Phillipa Earlam. No further nominations were received.

RESOLVED:

That Rob Dewey be appointed Chair of the Committee.

(From this point, he chaired the remainder of the meeting)

18. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

The Chair sought nominations for a Vice-Chair of the Committee. Phillipa Earlam's nomination for Julia Hughes was seconded by Ken Molyneux. No further nominations were received.

RESOLVED:

That Julia Hughes be appointed Vice-Chair of the Committee.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

None.

20. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2018 were submitted and approved, subject to a number of changes on minute number 86 and a typographical error on minute number 87.

Matters Arising

In relation to the final paragraph of minute number 86, Phillipa said it was her understanding that the flyer had been circulated on the day of the Forum.

Councillor Heesom made reference to the procedure for a councillor standing down whilst an investigation was taking place. The Chair said it would be useful to share this with the Committee.

The Monitoring Officer agreed to contact his counterpart at Gwynedd Council to ascertain what the document was and whether it was to be tabled at the forthcoming Monitoring Officers' group meeting.

Minute number 88: Forward Work Programme - Julia Hughes queried the outcome from two actions from previous meetings. Councillor Johnson confirmed that he had received a copy of the template annual report. The frequency of reporting on the Overview of Ethical Complaints would be dealt with under the Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the amendments, the minutes be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

21. DISPENSATIONS

None were received.

22. ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES SANCTIONS GUIDANCE

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report on sanctions guidance recently issued by the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW) for use where a councillor was found to have breached the Members' Code of Conduct by a case tribunal or an appeal tribunal. The five purposes of the guidance were detailed along with the five stage approach to determining a sanction.

In recalling discussion at the Standards Conference, the Monitoring Officer explained that although only a small number of cases reached the tribunal stage, a broader range of appropriate sanctions was available for use in England. Whilst the APW was unable to campaign for a change to legislation in Wales, it was possible that councils could make their own representations. The Monitoring Officer advised that the introduction of the Local Government (Wales) Bill next year provided an opportunity to adopt such a change and that the Committee may

wish to consider writing to the Welsh Government to make representations on this.

In moving this suggestion as an additional recommendation, Councillor Woolley said that providing panels with a greater range of options on sanctions could help to reduce the process.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the contents of the guidance; and
- (b) That the Committee supports seeking the range of sanctions and flexibility that existed in England by writing to the Welsh Government.

23. PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2017/18

The Deputy Monitoring Officer presented a report which summarised the main issues from the Annual Report of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) in relation to standards of county and town/community councils. A breakdown of closed Code of Conduct complaints (CCC) for each council was appended to the report.

It was stated that the 14% increase in Code of Conduct complaints was wholly due to a significant rise in complaints about the behaviour of town/community councillors, with the majority relating to the promotion of equality and respect. Whilst most of the CCCs had been closed after initial consideration, there was a decrease in the number of complaints closed after full investigation. Of the three cases which had been referred to the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW), serious breaches were found in two.

The Monitoring Officer gave a reminder that detailed information was available in the Ombudsman's Casebook. Although there was an increase in complaints, this was still a low percentage given the total number of town/community councils in Wales. It was noted that the statistics quoted in each annual report included some cases overlapping between years.

In response to comments from Councillor Johnson on the varying nature of complaints, the Monitoring Officer said that the introduction of the Local Resolution Procedures helped to filter out low-level complaints.

When asked by Phillipa Earlam, the Monitoring Officer reported that there were a low number of complaints received in Flintshire and that an update would be scheduled on the Forward Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the matters relating to the Code of Conduct Complaints reported in the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Annual Report be noted.

24. PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES (PSOW) CASEBOOK

The Deputy Monitoring Officer provided an overview of the outcomes from complaints investigated by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) as shown in the most recent edition of the Ombudsman's Casebook. A link to the Casebook had been included on the agenda for information. Of the three summarised cases, one involved no evidence of a breach and no action was deemed necessary on the other two cases.

On the case where a member with a personal and prejudicial interest had spoken at a meeting, Julia Hughes said that even though the Chair had given permission, it was the responsibility of individual members to know that they should not speak. The Deputy Monitoring Officer agreed and explained that the mitigating circumstances involved in this particular case meant that no further action was needed.

25. NORTH WALES STANDARDS FORUM

Julia Hughes presented her report on the Standards Conference held on 14 September 2018, copies of which had been circulated prior to the meeting. Whilst the report contained her own findings from the conference, she acknowledged that each attendee would have their own viewpoints and invited contributions from the Committee's other representatives who had attended.

She highlighted some of the key points which had been raised by speakers, including representatives from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) and the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW).

Councillor Heesom commented on the low number of elected Members in attendance at the conference which he felt had been well chaired by the Monitoring Officer. With regard to discussion on dispensations, he felt that the process in Flintshire should be reviewed by the Planning Strategy Group, taking into consideration the work undertaken by Gwynedd Council on catchment areas in relation to application sites. In explaining the approach taken in Flintshire, the Monitoring Officer agreed to contact Gwynedd Council and report back the findings to the next available meeting. The Chair suggested that Wrexham County Borough Council also be contacted on the same matter.

The Monitoring Officer agreed to circulate a website link where papers and video clips of the conference were available.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

26. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In considering the Forward Work Programme, the following changes were agreed:

November meeting:

The meeting had been moved to 12 November to encourage attendance by town/community council representatives. The venue had been changed to Caffi Isa in Mynydd Isa and a training session would take place prior to the start. The Monitoring Officer would shortly be contacting all Clerks to give them an opportunity to submit agenda topics. Other items for the meeting were:

- Report by the Deputy Monitoring Officer on training undertaken.
- Information on the dispensations process at Gwynedd Council and Wrexham County Borough Council.
- Annual Report of the Adjudication Panel for Wales.
- The latest version of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Casebook which was shortly due to be published.
- Item to consider the frequency of reporting on the Overview of Ethical Complaints.

For future meetings after November:

- Code of Conduct complaints in Flintshire.
- Feedback from visits to Town/Community Councils.

On the latter point, the Monitoring Officer agreed to provide the Committee with a full list of town/community councils (as the list previously shared may be incomplete) together with the document detailing the purpose of the visits.

RESOLVED:

That the Forward Work Programme, as amended, be noted.

27. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press or public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 7.55pm)

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Chair

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Mr Stephen Phipps

Your Ref Lich Cyl

Our Ref Fin Cyl

RD

Date Dyddiad

2 October 2018

Ask for Gofynner am

Robert Dewey

Direct Dial Rhif Union

E-mail E-bost

robdewey1950@gmail.com

Sent via e mail

Dear Mr Phipps

I am writing on behalf of my Council's Standards Committee which today resolved –

“To request Welsh Government to increase the range and flexibility of the powers of sanction available under the ethical regime so as to mirror that which previously existed in England”

This reflects recent discussion at the biennial Wales Standards Conference which consisted of elected and co-opted members from Standards Committees and Monitoring Officers (or their staff). At that conference there was an insightful workshop, comparing the powers and efficacy of ethical regimes in different countries within Great Britain (including the Republic of Ireland). During that workshop the powers previously available under the standards regime in England (specifically, I am informed, under the Case Tribunals (England) 2008 SI 2938) were discussed and in particular it was noted that:

- 1) The range and nature of sanctions had been much wider;
- 2) Those sanctions could be applied far more flexibly than currently in Wales e.g. sanctions could be suspended or made conditional.

The overall effect in England was that sanctions could be tailored more finely to the circumstances of each case. For example, a Councillor could be disqualified unless he/she issued a written apology and/or gave an apology within 1 month. In the subsequent plenary session, the majority of those in attendance supported the introduction of such powers in Wales.

It is true that the overall proportion of complaints referred by the Ombudsman to either a Standards Committee or the Adjudication Panel for Wales is very small (only about 1%).

However, those cases will nevertheless be of great significance to those involved and also potentially to the wider local government community and public at large. It is therefore

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Neuadd y Sir, Yr Wyddgrug, CH7 6NB
www.siryfflint.gov.uk

We welcome correspondence in Welsh We will respond to
correspondence received in Welsh without delay.

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth Gymraeg Ymatebwn yn ddi-oes i
ohebiaeth a dderbynnir drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg.

important that the range of sanctions available to any body sitting in judgement is sufficient to meet the needs of justice in each case.

My Committee noted that with the forthcoming Local Government Bill there might be an opportunity for Welsh Government to replicate some or all of the previous English legislation, and it would invite you to consider the same.

Yours sincerely

R A Dewey

Robert Dewey
Chair of FCC Standards Committee

Y Grŵp Addysg a Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus
Education and Public Services Group



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Mr Robert Dewey
Chair
Standards Committee
Flintshire County Council

Eich Cyf/Your Ref: RD
Ein Cyf/Our Ref: qA1195031

Sent by email to:

Gareth.Legal@flintshire.gov.uk
Robdewey1950@gmail.com

12 October 2018

Dear Mr Dewey,

Thank you for your letter of 2 October, in which you conveyed your Committee's resolution to request the Welsh Government to increase the range and flexibility of the sanction powers available under the ethical framework in Wales.

I note this issue was discussed at the recent Wales Standards Conference, attended by members of standards committees and relevant local government officers. You will appreciate that were the Welsh Government to act upon your Committee's request, it would be necessary to consult the full range of stakeholders with an interest in this matter in developing appropriate proposals.

The Case Tribunals (England) Regulations 2008, to which you refer in your letter, set out the sanctions available to a case tribunal formed by the Adjudication Panel for England under the ethical framework which applied in England at that time. Similar powers of sanction were available to standards committees in England under the Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008.

Under the ethical framework in Wales, the sanctions available to a case tribunal established by the Adjudication Panel for Wales are set out in section 79 of the Local Government Act 2000. Consequently, fresh primary legislation would be required to amend the powers, if this was considered appropriate. I am afraid there is no prospect of such amendments being introduced by way of the proposed Local Government Bill. The Bill is due to be introduced into the National Assembly for Wales early next year. The lead-in time for the preparation and checking of proposed legislation is such that the drafting of the Bill is already in its final stages. Any proposals for changing the sanction powers would require

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.



BUDDSODDWYR | INVESTORS
MEWN POBL | IN PEOPLE

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Page 11

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www.gov.wales

engagement with relevant stakeholders and formal public consultation for a minimum of 12 weeks, which cannot be accommodated within the timetable for the Bill.

The sanction powers available to a standards committee in Wales are prescribed in the Local Government Investigations (Functions of Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees) (Wales) Regulations 2001 (as amended). These regulations were last reviewed and updated by the Welsh Government with effect from 1 April 2016. The sanction powers available to standards committees were not identified by stakeholders as an issue during the course of that review.

Whilst there are no plans currently to revisit the regulations, we will retain a note of your Committee's views on file and will consider them further when we next come to review the regulations. I am afraid I cannot give an indication at this time of when that might be.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Phipps', written in a cursive style.

STEPHEN PHIPPS
Local Government Department



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Monday, 12 November 2018
Report Subject	Social Media Protocol
Report Author	Chief Officer Governance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The code of conduct does not contain any specific provision relating to the use of social media, however it does contain obligations on:

- treating people with respect
- compliance with equalities legislation; and
- not bringing one's council or position into disrepute
- use of council resources for party political purposes

These provisions only apply where a member is acting in an official capacity and so purely private use of social media does not fall within the ambit of the code.

To date the Council has not adopted a separate social media protocol, and has instead circulated to members the guidance published by WLGA (the Guidance) which addresses the issues raised by social media clearly and comprehensively.

In February this year the Committee resolved to continue to rely on the Guidance, which at that time was 4 years old, but was in the process of being updated. The Committee therefore further resolved to request the North Wales Standards Forum, the Monitoring Officer, the Head of Democratic Services, the Communications Team and the ICT Manager, to submit any suggestions to WLGA to improve or update the Guidance, and to request that the updated Guidance reflects the wider platform of social media channels and highlights the potential dangers to users.

The Guidance was subsequently updated (the Updated Guidance) and separate guidance was also published by WLGA on dealing with online abuse entitled "Councillors' Guide to Handling Online Abuse", a link to which is provided in the Updated Guidance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Committee relies on the Updated Guidance.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	HOW THE CODE APPLIES TO SOCIAL MEDIA
1.01	<p>In most cases the code only applies to Members who are acting in an official capacity. This includes acting or giving the impression of acting in the role of Member. Thus if a Member mentions public issues or Council activity on social media then those comments are likely to be perceived as having been made in an official capacity. Purely personal use of social media, especially where visibility is closed and not public (e.g. limited to friends only on Facebook), will usually fall outside the ambit of the code.</p>
1.02	<p>The code of conduct does not specifically include any obligations in relation to social media. At their essence social media are simply means of mass communication and so the following obligations in the code are potentially relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paragraph 4(a) have due regard to the need for equality of opportunity• Paragraph 4(b) show respect and consideration for others• Paragraph 5(a) do not disclose confidential information• Paragraph 6(1)(a) not to bring office or authority into disrepute
1.03	<p>The Updated Guidance is a very clear and comprehensive guide to social media. The Guidance was circulated to all Members when it was originally published and circulated to members of the Committee. The Updated Guidance contains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A short explanation of the different social media platforms• A positive explanation of the benefits to Councillors of using social media• An explanation of some of the dangers councillors (including to their own well-being) may face when using social media, including “trolling” and how best to mitigate and deal with these issues• Guidance on style and “do’s and don’ts”• Guidance on possible code issues• Commentary on predetermination• Advice on Data Protection and GDPR issues, including a link to further advice on these issues• Advice about Welsh Language standards on social media• A reminder not to use council IT equipment for party political purposes
1.04	<p>The Updated Guidance provides advice on how Members can look after their own safety and well-being on social media, as well as providing a link to new guidance specifically dealing with handling online abuse.</p>

2.00 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

2.01	None associated with this report.
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3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	None.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	The purpose of the Updated Guidance is to enable Councillors to benefit from the use of social media whilst minimising the associated risks such as reputational damage and/or breaching the code of conduct, as well as providing practical advice on how to manage social media in the interests of councillors' personal well-being.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Social Media Guidance for Councillors

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	WLGA Social Media Guidance - http://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=344
6.02	Councillors' Guide to Handling Online Abuse - http://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=1504 Contact Officer: Gareth Owens, Chief Officer Governance Telephone: 01352 702344 E-mail: gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the interests of local government and promotes local democracy in Wales. It represents the 22 local authorities in Wales and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members. The WLGA's primary purposes are to promote better local government and its reputation and to support authorities in the development of policies and priorities which will improve public services and democracy.

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CLILC • WLGA

Social Media

A Guide for Councillors



Contact

Welsh Local Government Association

The WLGA's primary purposes are to promote a better local government, its reputation and to support authorities in the development of policies and priorities which will improve public service and democracy.

It represents the 22 local authorities in Wales with the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities as associate members.

Welsh Local Government Association

Local Government House

Drake Walk

Cardiff

CF10 4LG

Tel: 029 2046 8600

www.wlga.wales

We are indebted to the officers and members who have contributed to this guide, particularly in Denbighshire, Flintshire County Council on behalf of North Wales Local Authority Emergency Information Team Chairs. Lawyers in Local Government, the Heads of Democratic Services, Chairs of Democratic Services Committees, the MSO and Lead Members Network, guidance from the LGA and Scottish Improvement Service and The Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner. Also, to Kevin O'Keefe, then of Excelsa Interim Management & Consultancy Ltd, who contributed to the 2013 first edition of this guide.

Contact Sarah Titcombe – Policy and Improvement Officer for Democratic Services.
029 2046 8638 sarah.titcombe@wlga.gov.uk

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Introduction

Social media is changing the world.

It is changing the way we communicate, the way we receive our news and, increasingly, the way we think about ourselves and others. Social media is transforming politics too; it makes politicians and public institutions more accessible, allows individuals to have their voices heard and helps share ideas or promote campaigns, potentially to millions, in an instant.

It is a powerful tool that can do much good but, in the wrong hands, can cause harm too. The growth of online abuse or trolling is a concern, as is the mounting evidence that organisations or even foreign agencies can exploit social media or use 'fake news' to influence public opinion or even affect democratic contests¹.

Social media's influence is growing, not only are the number of active users increasing but it is also being used more effectively as a medium to communicate, engage and mobilise.

Social media has therefore become a vital tool for councils and councillors to inform and engage with the communities they serve.

Many councillors already use social media and many more are thinking about using it. As a councillor, there are additional things to consider when using it, including the Code of Conduct and managing expectations and workload.

This guidance offers advice for those councillors who are new to social media and some tips for those already using it. Social media is rapidly evolving, so this guidance offers a general overview, some key pointers and principles and references to step-by-step resources online.

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-39830727> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-41355903>

1. What is social media?

Social media is a vast blanket term applied to a range of online multimedia tools; in short, social media allows you to communicate, broadcast or publish to millions in an instant, usually for free and all from a small device in the palm of your hand.

Social media can be set up and accessed via your smartphone, PC, laptop, tablet or smart TV. Social media applications (apps) or platforms allow you to communicate (either with individuals, specific groups or everyone), share information, share photos, create, edit and share audio or videos and play games with others.

Councils now use social media as a matter of course to communicate and consult with their residents who now expect this to be another communication channel, especially for urgent information. Council Twitter feeds include information on community events, school and road closures, job vacancies, sporting events and consultations, as well as details and, occasionally, detailed accounts of council meetings, including links to webcasts. Council scrutiny committees may also be using social media to promote and consult on their activities and undertake service reviews, such as in [Monmouthshire](#) and [Swansea](#).

Although there are some risks to using social media, which will be covered later in this guide, social media can be fun and innovative and can be used as an alternative method of communication and engagement, it can also break down barriers and stereotypes. Councils and other public bodies have used it for positive public relations, for example, it is worth looking at Swansea's [Faces of Swansea](#) social media campaign or the Twitter account [Love the Lagoon](#), or Torfaen's '[In the Depot](#)' video.

Some councils [have asked the public to name snow ploughs](#).

We have social media to thank for [Boaty McBoatface](#)!

Social media has a massive reach and some individuals (typically celebrities or national politicians) have many millions of followers. Social media is growing in usage too, an Office of National Statistics survey in 2017² showed that 66% of people in the UK had used social media in the last 3 months. It's not just younger people who use social media, further research by the ONS showed that that there is significant use across all age groups:

²<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/adhocs/007401socialnetworkingbyagegroup2011to2017>

Age	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
%	96	88	83	68	51	27	66

According to Ofcom³, in 2017:



84%
OF WELSH HOUSEHOLDS
HAD ACCESS TO THE
INTERNET



74%
OF ADULTS USED
A SMARTPHONE



21 Hours
ON AVERAGE SPENT
ONLINE EVERY WEEK BY
WELSH INTERNET USERS

Facebook and Twitter are the most widely used social media platforms and therefore the most relevant to councillors. According to Twitter⁴, and Facebook⁵ there are:



AN ESTIMATED
17.1m
TWITTER USERS
IN UK



30m
FACEBOOK USERS IN THE UK
ON MOBILES ALONE...
AND OVER 2.20bn MONTHLY
ACTIVE USERS WORLDWIDE

This guide will therefore focus on Facebook and Twitter for councillors, and will touch on other platforms too.

³ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0027/104985/cmr-2017-wales.pdf

⁴ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271350/twitter-users-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>

⁵ <https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/>

Blogs

A blog (an abbreviation of “web-log”) is essentially an online journal with your latest posts appearing first. It can be a journal of diary entries, thoughts or ideas or somewhere to publish more detailed articles on particular issues. Anyone can add comments to your blog and you can use the site to link or draw attention to other online comments or sources of information. Blogs are most effective when they are regularly maintained and updated.

Blogs tend to be included as part of an existing website or via Facebook, which means it’s easier to promote and encourage broader feedback.

Some leaders or chairs produce blogs via their council websites, for example in [Caerphilly](#), [Rhondda Cynon Taf](#), and [Chairman of Denbighshire County Council](#).

Other councillors publish their own, for example:

- [Cllr Peter Black](#)
- [Deputy Lord Mayor of Swansea 2018-2019](#)
- [Cllr Neil Prior](#)

Keep at it!

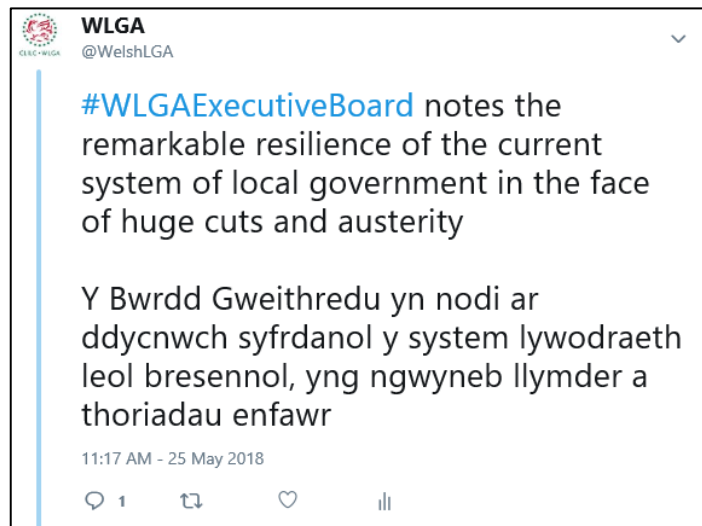
As with all social media, if you start blogging, it’s best to keep it up and keep it up-to-date; all it takes is for someone to find your last blog entry of some years ago and they can criticise you by saying ‘you have nothing else to say’ or ‘you have no new ideas’. If you do stop blogging, think about archiving the material or moving it over to a new social media platform.



Twitter is technically a micro-blog. Twitter allows you to post information, news, photos or videos in messages that are known as **tweets**. Twitter enables you to **follow** people, organisations, news or information that you are interested in and post information and messages of your own. People or organisations in turn can follow you, so they can see all of your tweets; you can even adjust the settings to allow you to be alerted when someone you’re particularly interested in tweets.

Tweets are each limited to 280 characters (characters include letters, numbers, punctuation and spaces). Tweets are not a private means of communication and can be seen by anyone who is following you.

For example:



You can **like** or **retweet** information and someone else's tweets that you would like to pass on to others. For example:



Conversations on the same theme on Twitter are called **threads**. You can search for tweets on a subject that you are interested in by typing your subject into the search box.

Tweets on the same theme are drawn together using **hashtags**. People use the hashtag symbol (#) before a relevant keyword or phrase in their tweet to categorise those tweets and help them show more easily in a Twitter search. Clicking on a hash tagged word in any message shows you other Tweets that include that hashtag.

You can have a private conversation or create a group conversation with anyone who follows you by using the **Direct Message** option. Anyone you do not follow can also send you a Direct

Warning

As a politician, others may consider your tweets 'fair game'. A good rule of thumb is not to commit anything to social media that could at some point be used against you. Even your retweets can be perceived as something you endorse or support.

As with emails, although Direct Messages are private and you may trust the recipients, they can become public if leaked!

Here are some examples of councillors' Twitter accounts:

[@LeaderNewport](#)

[@CllrRobJames](#)

[@PeterFox61](#)

[@Cllrjuliefallon](#)

[@CllrSaif](#)

[@CllrFionaCross](#)

[@elinmwj](#)

[@DebbieWallice](#)

[@Alun_Williams](#)

[@CllrJoshuaPlaid](#)

[@CllrLisaMytton](#)

[@PriorNeil](#)

And some useful organisations:

[@WelshLGA](#)

[@LGAComms](#)

[@WelshGovernment](#)

[@WG_localgov](#)

[@AssemblyWales](#)

[@BBCWalesNews](#)

Message, if you have opted to receive Direct Messages from anyone or you have previously sent that person a Direct Message.

You can **block** or **mute** accounts on Twitter. Once an account has been blocked, those accounts cannot follow you and you cannot follow them. However, even those you have blocked can still access your account through a third party who follows you.

All the details about how twitter works and how you can set up an account can be found [here](#).



Facebook is the most extensively used social network in the world. Essentially, it allows you to easily create your own webpage or group, or an interactive newsletter about you, your life, your interests and friends.

Have a look at these councillors' pages

- [Councillor Neil Prior](#)
- [Councillor Dhanisha Patel](#)
- [Councillor Matthew Dorrance](#)
- [Councillor Steve Churchman](#)

And these authority pages:

- [Wrexham Council](#)
- [Isle of Anglesey County Council](#)
- [Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council](#)
- [Snowdonia National Park](#)
- [Flintshire County Council](#)
- [Vale of Glamorgan Council](#)

To use Facebook, you'll need to create a profile - a **Timeline** where you might add a photo, describe yourself, what you do and your interests. You can also describe your **Status** which would inform your friends about how you are feeling or what you are doing at any given time. You can update this as often as you like.

On Facebook, you can invite people to be your **Friends** and set different levels of access to your account. Some people can see all the information about you or you can make less detail available to others. You can also use Facebook to communicate with groups or individuals. People who find your page, comments or proposals of interest can **Like** you or your latest post, which encourages further use, and is a useful way of taking a straw poll of your ideas. People can also add a **Comment** on your post or **Share** your post on their own timelines.

You may wish to set up a Facebook page about your community, to promote events, announcements or your council activities; many councils and councillors do this and it can be a very effective method to engage and seek views from the community. You should be prepared to receive challenge and criticism however, as it is an open forum and not everyone will agree with your ideas or views; you can however set rules, moderate and edit other people's posts if their language or content is offensive or inappropriate.

You can also set up a Facebook group. When you [create a group](#), you can decide whether to make it publicly available for anyone to join, require administrator approval for members to join or keep it private and by invitation only.

You can send private notes to any "friend" you're connected with on Facebook; they can only be seen by the person to whom they're sent; Facebook's **Messenger** app is increasingly popular. You can also **'Live Chat'** on Facebook. This is a real-time conversation with any of your Facebook friends who happen to be online and signed in at the same time as you are.

Crucially, Facebook lets each user control who can see their personal information and what they post on the network. You can set the level of privacy for different categories of your information and posts and extend different levels of permission to different people who view your site. As a member you might want to differentiate between what you show your close friends and family and members of the public. Find out more and join Facebook [here](#).



WhatsApp is a free messaging app which also allows you to have traditional 'phone conversations'. It is very popular as it allows you to set up groups of friends or colleagues to keep them updated on a particular theme. It may be a quick and easy way, for example, of keeping your political group up to date on key issues. You can download the app from various app stores or visit [the website](#).



YouTube is a video sharing platform. Videos are easy to record via a smartphone and are more easily distributed via Twitter or Facebook, however, some people prefer to use YouTube and it is increasingly being used by councils to post information. Here are some examples:

[Cardiff](#)

[Conwy](#)

[Gwynedd](#)

[Monmouthshire](#)

[Powys](#)

2. Why you may find social media useful

Social media will allow you to open new conversations with the people you represent, and the potential for councillors using social media is huge. Social media allows you to be innovative and responsive as well as providing links to useful sources of information or sign-posting to other organisations.

Don't ignore social media – it's there and won't go away! People are already online and it's growing, and people increasingly expect their councillors to be contactable via social media. If you're not involved people may bypass you or may even 'talk about you' and you'll be missing out on a useful source of intelligence.

- It's a useful way of finding out what people are talking about locally, their concerns and interests.
- It's useful for finding out about breaking news, the latest research or publication or the latest policy announcements from political parties.
- It's a good way of making the electorate more aware of the work you do personally.
- It can help make you appear more human and down-to-earth! People often don't understand what councillors do and may have negative perceptions, but social media can give people a taste of your personal life and remind them that you are just like them, with similar interests – you do need to consider balance though and how much of your personal life you want in the public domain: for example - do you want strangers to be able to identify your family and friends?
- It's an effective way of coordinating campaigns, for example, mobilising support and interest and gathering followers, you can also allow campaign workers access to your Facebook account to post on your, or your campaign's, behalf to share the workload.
- It allows you to have a conversation with a range of people that you would never be able to physically meet and who do not traditionally seek out their local representatives.
- It allows for immediate communication. You can pass on information and receive opinions in minutes. You can forward information from other people equally quickly. "Going Viral" refers to a mass spreading of a piece of information around the world – but be careful, only share information you are confident is correct, Fake News is damaging and there is the risk of defamation if you spread falsehoods.

- The local and sometimes national press will follow councillors on Twitter or Facebook. Social media is a growing source for stories for news outlets as each tweet or comment is effectively a mini-press release. Journalists will know what you are talking about the minute you talk about it.
- Social media is mobile. You can take it around your community, on the train, or to a coffee shop. You can upload pictures and videos, showing for example your role in local events, pictures of potential sites for development, new buildings, local eyesores - a picture tells a thousand words.
- It's free and you probably already have the equipment you need. All you need is time.
- You can receive immediate feedback on your ideas and manifesto to allow you to modify your proposals in line with local thinking.
- Above all, it can be a lot of fun!

What are the drawbacks?

- Having a social media presence means that people can contact you 24/7. This is great in terms of accessibility but means that they may expect you to reply immediately. Technology and social media has raised expectations, people often expect a speedy response and resolution to their query; this expectation, coupled with the fact that social media shows everyone how responsive you are, can create more pressure.
- Using social media can become addictive, many people find themselves answering messages late into the night because they just can't put it down.
- Similarly, too much weight can be given to what goes on in the 'Twittersphere'; sections of Twitter are often described as 'echo chambers' – it may only be a couple of people with a limited number of followers with strong views on a subject who are 'bouncing' off each other – they may be in the minority and not be representative - the rest of the community or the rest of society may be blissfully unaware or may not think in the same way!
- People can post false information, insults or messages that you would not want to be associated with on your social media platforms. These can be spread rapidly via social media.

- Some people say things via social media that they would not say to your face, it's an easy way of taking personal pot shots at councillors. People making these comments are often called 'Trolls' and may not be interested in facts, just in attacking you.
- Councillors, and in particular women councillors, are increasingly the subject of online abuse, bullying and harassment on social media.
- The WLGA has produced a [separate guide](#) on how to deal with online abuse.

It's easier said than done, but try not to get too concerned about what's said online...

You are likely to receive criticism at some point and trolls may try to rile you, but often they will have few followers and their comments may not be seen by many people. Keep calm and the best advice is to ignore, often trolls will crawl back under their bridge...if it does get serious, you can report it

Are you controlling your social media use or is it controlling you?

Recent research has recognised that some people feel out of control in their use of social media⁶.

Ask yourself how comfortable you feel if you cannot access your social media accounts. It is important for councillors to bear in mind that even if the rest of the world seems to be online 24/7, you don't have to be. Being a councillor is a professional role and you can decide how available you want to make yourself. There are some common recommendations for managing your time in front of a screen and you may want to consider some of these:

Top tips to manage social media use

- Establish a routine, check your messages at the same time every day rather than responding to the 'ping' of every new message arriving
- Looking at a screen can disrupt your sleep patterns, consider turning off all screens two hours before going to bed and make the bedroom a screen free zone
- When you are with your residents face to face, give them your undivided attention to help you focus on what's happening where you are and not appear rude.

⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20180118-how-much-is-too-much-time-on-social-media>

3. Getting started

A good place to start is to contact your Democratic Services officers and find out what support and training is available.

Choose your medium and sign up. Signing up is very straightforward and will take you less than five minutes! Facebook and Twitter are good places to start.

If you don't already have an account, ask a colleague, friend or family member for advice, ask them to show you how they use social media. You might want to begin with a trial personal account (rather than calling yourself "Councillor Jones") and experiment with family and friends. Make sure that you understand how people find you and who can access your material.

Remember:

On Facebook you can control who has access to different parts of your account. You can manage what the world sees and what your "friends" see.

On Twitter the whole world can see everything you tweet. You can '**Protect my Tweets**', which essentially makes your tweets private to only your current followers, but that defeats the object of using Twitter to engage more widely.

When you are ready to set up your final account, consider the identity you use. The name you give yourself online is important as it allows people to find you. Prefacing your Twitter account with Cllr lets people know exactly who you are and indicates that the Code of Conduct will apply.

Consider:

- Different councillors have different views, but you might want to consider setting up a separate personal and "councillor" account, at least at first - you can talk about the amazing food in the restaurant around the corner to your friends and followers in your informal account, and the plans for the new bypass to your friends and followers on your councillor account.

Separate accounts can help you manage some of the online trolling that is likely to come your way as a councillor – it can be a way of keeping your home life and councillor life separate.

However, many councillors think that some of their personal comments about food, places they've visited, football matches or TV helps break down perceptions of councillors and proves that they are normal like everyone else!

- Make it easy for people to find you online. Many people will start their search for the area that you represent, so make sure you mention your location frequently as this will then be picked up by search engines. You will also want to make sure that your social media account details are on your business cards, posters and flyers.
- Increase your social media following by following other people, retweeting other people's tweets, liking tweets or posts or commenting on people's Facebook posts. Find people on Twitter with links to your community, county or region or with similar interests by searching using the 'hashtag' (#) symbol to prefix your search term for example #llandrindod, #powys #midwales.
- Reach more people on Twitter by timing your tweets when the audience you want to reach are online. Ask your friends for a retweet, use hashtags and include photos for a larger and more noticeable post.
- Be disciplined about making time available to write new content and answer your "friends" and "followers" at a regular time each week to update your Facebook status and throughout the day to check Twitter. If you use your mobile phone, you can set notifications to alert you each time you are mentioned in a tweet.
- If you do not want to be available every hour of the day or night, tell people when your account will be checked, for example you might add "available 9.00-7.00 weekdays" on your profile.
- Decide on what you are going to talk about and how. This could be
 - Weekly updates of your own activities as a councillor - don't forget your pictures! This works better on Facebook as you can include more detail. Remember a tweet is only 280 characters and tends to be more instant and timely.
 - Regular updates on council policies and actions of interest to your community.
 - Links and re-tweets of other relevant national activities.
 - Issues on which you would like feedback.
 - Notice of events and public meetings.

- Using social media is all about two-way communication, it's good for providing information to your community or flagging up press statements, but it's better as a tool to get useful feedback. You will get feedback and you should expect some people to challenge your ideas or enter into a debate with you online. This is part and parcel of social media.
- Keep your communications clear, positive, polite and professional. Plain language helps. Many people use abbreviations on Twitter – you'll pick these up as you go along!
- On Facebook, you will need to monitor and, if necessary, censor the contributions that other people make to your page; or group and delete them if they do not match your required standards of behaviour or language. Defamatory and offensive language could be attributed to the publisher (that's you!) as well as the original author and could incur financial liability. It is up to you to decide if you want to remove posts that disagree with your political position, however if you do remove them you may be accused of censoring contributions on political grounds.
- It is up to you to decide if you want to remove posts that disagree with your political position, however if you do remove them you may be accused of censoring contributions on political grounds.
- Bear in mind that constituents may find party political point scoring tedious and prefer to hear information about what you are achieving.
- If appropriate, consider setting up an account for your ward with your fellow ward members – this way you can share the administrative tasks.
- If you don't have anything to say...don't say anything. Even though it's tempting to let your followers know how busy you are they will soon become bored with constant updates on your day without some relevant or interesting information.

Monitoring social media

It can be difficult to keep on top of what's happening online; people are posting and tweeting all the time and if you are following many people or organisations, social media can become 'noisy' and you could miss things of interest or significance.

A quick way to check up on things on Twitter is to visit the Twitter page of some of your favourite people, organisations or news outlets to see what they've been saying. You could also search for a particular theme or issue with a hashtag#.

If you're keen to find out what people are saying about you, your local area or local council for example, there are social media management applications that you can use such as [Hootsuite](#) or [Buffer](#). These are simple to set up and use and can allow you to see how often people read or retweet your tweets. It also allows you to schedule tweets, for example, to send a pre-prepared tweet at a certain time of day.

The Welsh Language

As a councillor you will want to use and promote the Welsh language and culture as much as possible. There are also legal requirements which apply to the use of the Welsh language on social media. How these rules apply, depends on the type of work you are doing and which of the Welsh Language Standards apply to your local authority.

When you are representing your local authority, the same standards will apply to you as they do to officers. So, if you are, for example, a cabinet member tweeting about a new policy decision, a mayor blogging about your recent activities on behalf of the council, the chair of a scrutiny committee undertaking a formal consultation on behalf of the committee or letting people know about the forward work programme of the committee, then you may be subject to the standards which apply to the officers in your authority.

This may mean that your communication, including responses to messages, must be translated and the content and format of the message must treat the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. Your authority will provide you with guidelines for how your local Welsh language standards apply when you are representing the authority – if you are in any doubt, it's best to contact the council for guidance.

If you are acting in the capacity of a ward member, acting on behalf of individuals or communities then the same rules apply as if you were a member of the public. So, regardless of your role on the council, if you are tweeting about a local fete, commenting on a council decision in, for example, your role on a local pressure group, or retweeting a complaint about pot holes then you may communicate in the language of your choice.

The exception to this is when you are communicating in relation to an activity for which you are using council resources (beyond the standard remuneration and equipment provided to you as a member) for example council buildings for a community meeting.

Some of the [practical guidance](#) in the Welsh Language Commissioner's guide for businesses and charities about using Welsh on social media may be useful.

4. Staying safe and dealing with trolls

Some form of online disagreement and criticism is inevitable and, if you're not online, you or your policies may already be subject to debate without you. Disagreement and challenge is a key feature of democratic debate, however, online it can easily spill over into abuse or harassment.

You will therefore need to prepare yourself for some uncomfortable reading, which may cause some upset. You cannot prevent online abuse, but you can take control of how and whether you respond and, if it becomes serious, you can report it.

The WLGA has produced separate guidance on dealing with online abuse which you may find useful. You can read it [here](#).

Some advice

- **Take Control**

Decide for yourself and make it clear on your homepage what you expect from people who are engaging with you on social media. You might say, for example, that whilst you welcome an open and frank exchange of views, any inappropriate comments will be removed and that any comment which is libellous or threatening or becomes harassment will be reported.

- **Remember that you don't have to put up with abuse or harassment just because you are a political figure**

Be prepared to 'Mute', 'Block' or 'Unfriend' abusive users from your account or ask them to remove comments. If a comment crosses the line into abuse or harassment you can report this to Facebook or Twitter or even the police.

- **Respond or ignore?**

When faced with an abusive comment give yourself some time to decide whether to respond or ignore it. Trolls often have few followers or few followers of significance – if you reply it can lead to a tit for tat argument fuelling further confrontation and provides the troll with the "oxygen of publicity" or the satisfaction of seeing you riled. Chances are you'll have far more followers than the troll, so if you reply, all of your followers will be aware of the troll's original tweet. Ignoring the comment can lead to short term allegations of dodging an issue but may succeed in the long term.

Don't feed the troll!

- **Stay calm and polite**

Not every criticism is from a troll – sometimes a frustrated member of the public may be critical or angry with you initially on social media, particularly if they are trying to resolve a council service issue. If you respond constructively, their tone will change and they may even apologise or show you appreciation online.

Bear in mind that for every troll there will be many more legitimate and sensible followers. Think of them when you respond. One approach is to respond with facts only or to refer the troll to a longer factual statement about the situation or a set of “frequently asked questions” that you can post to pre-empt queries. You might want to invite the troll to a public meeting. They may find it harder to be abusive in public. You may also want to remind the troll that you are more than happy to have a political debate in your role as a councillor but that personal comments about you or your family are unacceptable.

The [Facebook](#) and [Twitter Help Pages](#) have full details about how to block users and how to report abuse

A Criminal Offence?

If someone sends threatening, abusive or offensive messages they may be committing an offence. If you receive a message which you consider falls into this category, do not respond to it, check out the guidance provided by the [police](#) and [CPS](#) and if appropriate report it.

5. Support from the council

A good place to start is to contact your Democratic Services officers and find out what support and training is available

Councillors are generally provided with the ICT equipment that they need to do their job. The Independent Remuneration Panel expects that this will include equipment, support and training.

It is also reasonable to expect that you should have access to social media sites via council ICT equipment to enable you to carry out your councillor role more effectively. You do not need the council to set you up with a personal social media account, but you should take advantage of any training or guidance provided to help you use it properly.

Most councils have a social media policy. You will need to abide by this and any social media protocols that may have been agreed when using your "councillor" account.

It's worth remembering that the council is responsible for any information provided on its website and is subject to legal responsibilities. **You** are personally responsible for the material that you broadcast via your own social media accounts or websites – but more of this later.

Advice will be available to you from a number of council officers. The Monitoring Officer, Head of Democratic Services, the Communications Team and the ICT Manager are likely to have useful advice.

Using social media in an emergency

During emergencies (such as severe weather events, pollution incidents or major fires) partner agencies such as local authorities, police, health, Natural Resources Wales and fire and rescue services will use social media to provide information to help people prepare, keep them informed and to signpost where they can get help.

It's important during these situations that the most up to date and correct information is communicated to the public and the partner agencies will coordinate the content and timing of the information to be provided.

In an emergency situation, the council will also identify an official spokesperson - an officer or a senior member - who will use the approved information to speak on behalf of the council.

It's always best in these circumstances to restrict your own social media activity to sharing official communications from the partner agencies responding to the situation.

For more information about how your council operates in these circumstances please contact your council's civil contingencies team so that you know what to do in an emergency.

6. Social media and council meetings

Your council's social media policy and/or council constitution will provide you with guidance about if and when you can use social media during council meetings. Other than what your constitution or social media policy says, there is no legal reason why you shouldn't use social media during meetings. However, some common sense does need to apply.

Tweeting on meeting progress and receiving comments from the community can be helpful for transparency and engagement BUT excessive use of Twitter may give people the impression that you are not concentrating on the business in hand or are even relying on guidance from outside the meeting. For that reason, it is probably sensible not to use Twitter during a planning or licensing debate. Committee chairs may want to decide how to address this in their meetings and you should abide by the rules set out in your constitution.

Many politicians tweet their contributions or questions to meetings or debates to keep their followers informed of how they're representing their communities' interests. Remember, you may not need to tweet about the detail of a meeting if the meeting is being webcast. Your council may have official" twitter feeds for live on-line conversations to run alongside the meeting webcast.

Remember that you should not tweet or communicate in any way the content of exempt or confidential business dealt with by local authorities in closed session such as when making formal appointments.

7. Golden rules

- Think before you tweet or post on Facebook. Do not say anything, post views or opinions that you would not be prepared to:
 - Discuss face to face with the person you are speaking about.
 - Write on a placard and carry down your high street and discuss and defend with anyone who sees it.
 - Be prepared to have minuted in a public meeting – remember, Twitter or Facebook effectively publicly minutes everything for you as you go along!
- Remember that once you have said something it may be seen by millions - friends, supporters, political opponents and the press and could be re-tweeted around the world in minutes.
- Keep your messages professional, polite and positive.
- Remember to try to keep tweets and texts separate – many people tweet comments that they would have texted to someone privately before the advent of social media; this may be about meeting up later (do you want all your followers knowing your plans and gate-crashing your lunch!?) through to 'in' jokes or banter that could be misinterpreted.
- Exercise discretion when choosing who to follow on Twitter or 'befriend' on Facebook, for example, some council employees might find it a bit uncomfortable or inappropriate to have a councillor hanging on their every word. If you follow or are Facebook "friends" with council employees, contractors who have been procured to provide services to the council, a company or member of the public making a planning application or pressure groups, this might be construed as having a close personal association with them and therefore a personal interest.

Warning

Don't discuss casework on social media or encourage people to contact you about issues that might be personal to them.

Encourage them to use more secure channels.

- If you make a mistake admit it. Mistakes happen so don't try to cover it up as there will always be a record of what you've said.
- Don't tweet or post on Facebook when you are "tired or emotional"! It's probably sensible to turn off your phone at any time when you think your judgement may be impaired. Even if you exercise social media control, other people will still have their smart phones, so may post a photo or video of you 'enjoying yourself'; you need to let your hair down, but it's just one extra thing to consider as a councillor in the age of social media.
- As with your own leaflets or newsletters, ask permission before taking a picture that you intend to use. NEVER take photos of children without the express permission of their parents based on an understanding of what you intend to use the picture for. Your council will have a policy on taking pictures of children, take advice on this before taking or using pictures.
- Do not allow anyone else access to your social media accounts. Protect your passwords and use robust, unique passwords and change them regularly especially if you use a public or shared computer.
- Just like email, you can be hacked on social media! Be wary about direct messages via Twitter, even from people you know, with messages such as 'Hi, have you seen this photo of you on Twitter?' Delete these before opening, as the spam could then be sent to all of the people you are following. Do not open videos or links on, for example, Facebook Messenger if you are not expecting them. It could be a hack.

THINK before you post; even if you later delete your post, someone may have already taken a screen shot.

CHECK before you share or retweet information.

Is it true?

Who said it and why?

Do you trust the source?

8. Keep on the right side of the law...

Councillors new to social media tend to be concerned about the legal implications. It is an important consideration, and some councillors and other politicians have fallen foul of the law, but with careful use and following some ground-rules you will be fine!

The style of communication employed in the social media environment tends to be fast and informal. Messages can appear lightweight and transitory.

Whenever you post something on social media, it becomes a publication, you have effectively made a broadcast. As it is now in the public domain, it is subject to both the **Code of Conduct** and to various **laws**.

Code of Conduct

If you conduct yourself on Twitter or Facebook as you would in person on the street or in your leaflets, then you will be fine.

Remember that according to guidance from the Ombudsman, the Code of Conduct applies to you whenever you are "Conducting the business of your authority, acting, claiming to act or give the impression you are acting in your official capacity as a member or representative of your authority" Also the Code applies if you "Conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or your authority into disrepute"⁷

If you can be identified as a councillor when you are using social media, either by your account name or how you describe yourself or by what you comment upon and how you comment, the requirements of the Code of Conduct apply. If you say something that could be regarded as bringing your office or authority into disrepute the Code applies even if you are not apparently acting in your official capacity or do not identify yourself as a member.

Remember that the Ombudsman's guidance states that "Making unfair or inaccurate criticism of your authority in a public arena might well be regarded as bringing your authority into disrepute"

⁷ <https://www.ombudsman.wales/guidance-policies/>

In the same way that you are required to act in council meetings or in your communities you should:

- **Show respect for others** - do not use social media to be rude or disrespectful
- Not disclose confidential information about people or the council
- **Not bully or intimidate others** - repeated negative comments about or to individuals could be interpreted as bullying or intimidation
- Not try to secure a benefit for yourself or a disadvantage for others
- **Abide by the laws of equality** - do not publish anything that might be seen as racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic, anti-faith or offensive to any of the groups with protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010. Even as a joke or "tongue in cheek"

Predetermination

As a councillor, you are aware that when you act in a quasi-judicial capacity, for example on a planning or licensing committee, you should not make up your mind about an issue that is to be formally decided upon before you had heard all the relevant information. You are allowed to be predisposed to a particular view but not to have gone so far as to have predetermined your position.

It is important to remember therefore, that anything relevant you might have said about particular issues on social media could be used as evidence of your having made up your mind in advance of hearing all the relevant information.

Don't become a troll yourself!

Social media is a great tool for councillors to challenge and scrutinise, but always think about what you are saying, how you are saying it, how often and about whom. If you are perceived to be too aggressive or too confrontational or too frequent, it could begin to damage your reputation, undermine your relationship with colleagues or you could risk breaching the Code of Conduct in terms of bullying, intimidation or lack of respect for others.

It's therefore not appropriate for you to use social media to criticise your council's officers, who often will not be in a position to defend or respond publicly.

Many councils have apps or member referral services; it is often best to use these mechanisms to request council services or report local concerns as you are likely to receive a resolution to your request.

Criminal Offences

Don't panic! These generally apply to you already in your conduct as a councillor, but it is worth considering them as they apply to social media:

Harassment - It is a criminal offence to repeatedly pursue a campaign against someone where this is likely to cause alarm, harassment nuisance or distress.

Data Protection and the General Data Protection Regulation. - It is illegal to publish personal data about individuals unless they have given you their consent. This might apply to your constituents or service users. As a councillor you are a data controller in your own right and therefore personally responsible for what you publish. Make sure you understand the requirements of the GDPR and Data Protection Act. There is more information about this [here](#).

Contact the Data Protection Officer in your council for more information.

Incitement - It is a criminal offence to incite any criminal act.

Discrimination and Racially Aggravated Offences (or any other protected Characteristic) - It is a criminal offence to make a discriminatory remark about anyone based on a "Protected Characteristic" as defined in The Equality Act 2010 (such as their race, religion, sexual orientation etc).

Malicious & Obscene Communications - It is a criminal offence to send malicious or obscene communications.

Remember

If you receive a message or someone posts something on your page that you consider to be unsuitable remove it as soon as possible. If you "like" or appear to endorse or retweet a message or image you are regarded as having published it, and will face any legal consequences. It is therefore important to regularly check and moderate any site on which others can post. If you are in any doubt about how to deal with a message you receive, consult your Monitoring Officer.

Civil Law

This is where things get riskier for anyone who uses Twitter or Facebook, whether they are councillors, members of the public or celebrities:

Defamation - It is against the law to make a false statement about someone which damages their personal or professional reputation. **Crucially - even if you simply retweet or pass on information originally posted by others, you may still be held equally as responsible as the original commentator.** This can also apply to publishing images. If found liable to another person, you could be ordered to pay large sums of money as damages.

Copyright - The legal ownership of the contents of documents, photos, videos and music belong to the person who created them. You could be in breach of copyright if you reproduce such material without the owner's permission. Always ask for written consent before you use someone else's material.

Political Comment and Electioneering - Remember that although it is acceptable to make political points or canvass votes via your own social media accounts this will not be permissible if you are using this via council supplied computer equipment, certainly in the run-up to elections. The Electoral Commission has further information about the return on expenditure that candidates need to provide on advertising or campaign literature.

Beware of Fake News!

Social media is breeding ground for fake news or 'click bait' (where a deliberately salacious headline with a link tries to draw you in, often to a very mundane news item accompanied by lots of pop-up adverts); view all news or gossip with a discerning eye – it could be embarrassing if you retweet or promote fake news and, worse, you could be breaking the law if you circulate false statements about someone, even if you are just retweeting something someone else has posted.

9. Further information, interesting sites and sources of help

Bear in mind that information, sites and terminology change quickly. The next big social media platform will soon be on its way. Here are some current examples of information and useful sites but bear in mind that they may be quickly out of date.

Social Media websites

[Sign up to Twitter here](#)

[Sign up to Facebook here](#)

[Social Media Checklist for Councillors](#) (Local Government Association)

[#FollowMe - A guide to social media for elected members in Scotland](#)
(Scottish Improvement Service)

[Nextdoor](#) is a social network for neighbourhoods where people who live within the same or neighbouring communities can share information, organise events and take opinion polls. It's a useful platform for members to raise awareness and tap into what is interesting or concerning local residents.

10. Links

Here is a list of the links that were used in this guide:

Monmouthshire County Council - https://twitter.com/Mon_CC_Scrutiny

Swansea Council - <https://twitter.com/SwanseaScrutiny>

'Faces of Swansea Council 2018' Twitter campaign - <https://twitter.com/hashtag/facesofswansecouncil2018>

Love the Lagoon - <https://twitter.com/lovethelagoon?lang=en>

'In the Depot' campaign, Torfaen County Borough Council - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6UerjFCLdI>

Naming gritting lorries, BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-42026485>

Public using social media to choose the name 'Boaty McBoatface', BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-36064659>

Blogs

Caerphilly County Borough Council Leader's blog - <http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/My-Council/Councillors-and-committees/Leader-s-blog>

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council Leader's blog - <https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/TheLeadersBlog/RhonddaCynonTafCouncilLeadersBlog.aspx>

Denbighshire County Council Chairman blog - <https://denbighshirecouncilchairman.wordpress.com/>

Cllr Peter Black - <http://peterblack.blogspot.com/>

Deputy Lord Mayor of Swansea 2018-19 - <http://swanseamayoralmusing.blogspot.com/>

Cllr Neil Prior - <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/year-county-councillor-surviving-thriving-elected-life-neil-prior/?published=t>

Councillor Twitter accounts

Cllr Debbie Wilcox - <https://www.twitter.com/LeaderNewport>

Cllr Rob James - <https://twitter.com/CllrRobJames>

Cllr Peter Fox - <https://twitter.com/PeterFox61>

Cllr Julie Fallon - <https://twitter.com/Cllrjuliefallon>

Cllr Saifur Rahaman - <https://twitter.com/CllrSaif>

CLlr Fiona Cross - <https://twitter.com/CLlrFionaCross>
CLlr Elin Walker Jones - <https://twitter.com/elinmwj>
CLlr Debbie Wallice - <https://twitter.com/DebbieWallice>
CLlr Alun Williams - https://twitter.com/Alun_Williams
CLlr Joshua Davies - <https://twitter.com/CLlrJoshuaPlaid>
CLlr Lisa Mytton - <https://twitter.com/CLlrLisaMytton>

Useful organisations' Twitter accounts

Welsh Local Government Association - <https://www.twitter.com/WelshLGA>
Local Government Association - <https://www.twitter.com/LGAComms>
Welsh Government - <https://www.twitter.com/WelshGovernment>
Local Government Section, Welsh Government - https://www.twitter.com/WG_localgov
National Assembly for Wales - <https://www.twitter.com/AssemblyWales>
BBC Wales News - <https://www.twitter.com/BBCWalesNews>

Councillor Facebook pages

CLlr Neil Prior - <https://www.facebook.com/cllrneilprior/>
CLlr Dhanisha Patel - <http://www.facebook.com/dhanisha4ogmore/>
CLlr Matthew Dorrance - <https://www.facebook.com/CLlrMatthewDorrance/>
CLlr Steve Churchman - <https://www.facebook.com/councillorstevechurchman/>

Local Authority Facebook pages

Wrexham Council - <http://www.facebook.com/wrexhamcouncil/>
Isle of Anglesey County Council - <http://www.facebook.com/IOACC/>
Snowdonia National Park - <https://en-gb.facebook.com/visitsnowdonia>
Flintshire County Council - <https://www.facebook.com/Flintshire-County-Council-124912774260207/>
Vale of Glamorgan Council - <https://www.facebook.com/valeofglamorgancouncil/>

Council YouTube pages

Cardiff Council - <https://www.youtube.com/user/cardiffcouncil/featured>

Conwy County Borough Council - <https://www.youtube.com/user/ConwyWeb>

Gwynedd Council - <https://www.youtube.com/user/CyngorGwynedd>

Monmouthshire County Council -

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZHCKKCI7DqtxDabOkj_Esg/featured

Powys County Council - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCop_U-YVW7OB0jRIt3b8f1Q

Social media support pages

Facebook support pages - <https://en-gb.facebook.com/help/tools>

Twitter support pages - <https://help.twitter.com/en/safety-and-security/cyber-bullying-and-online-abuse>

Welsh Language

Welsh Language Commissioner guidelines on using the Welsh language on social media -

<http://www.comisiynyddygybraeg.cymru/hybu/SiteCollectionDocuments/Using%20Welsh%20on%20Social%20Media%20SA.pdf>

Guidelines

WLGA Councillors' Guide to Handling Online Abuse -

<http://www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=1504>

Police social media guidelines - <https://www.askthe.police.uk/content/Q770.htm>

Crown Prosecution Service guidelines on social media communications -

http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/a_to_c/communications_sent_via_social_media/

The General Data Protection Regulation - Information for Councillors, WLGA -

<https://www.wlga.wales/gdpr-information-for-councillors>

Local Government Association (LGA) social media guidelines -

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/comms-hub-communications-support/digital-communications/social-1>

Scottish Improvement Service Social Media guide for elected members -

http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/elected_members/follow-me-guide-to-social-media-for-elected-members.pdf

Useful links for social media websites

Twitter - <https://twitter.com/>

Facebook - <https://en-gb.facebook.com/>

Nextdoor - https://nextdoor.co.uk/about_us/

WhatsApp - <http://www.whatsapp.com/>

Hootsuite - <https://hootsuite.com/>

Buffer - <https://buffer.com/>

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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Monday 12 th November 2018
Report Subject	Overview of Ethical Complaints
Report Author	Chief Officer Governance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the third such report giving a running total of the ethical complaints alleging a breach of the code that have been submitted to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. As per the committee's resolution at its meeting in March the complaints distinguish between different Councils and Councillors whilst still remaining anonymous.

There have been further complaints submitted in respect of a single town council since the last report. One complaint came from a member of the public, which the ombudsman has decided to investigate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Committee notes the number and type of complaints.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	Number of complaints
1.01	<p>The attached spreadsheet at Appendix A lists in summary form the complaints received during 2016/17 and 2017/18. Each entry lists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ombudsman's reference number (year/4 digit reference) • the type of Council (Community, County or Town) • the complainant (Councillor, officer, public) • the provisions which are alleged to have been breached • the decision at each of the 3 stages of investigation

1.02	A significant number of complaints have been submitted in respect of one Town Council. One of these is from a member of the public and is being investigated and this investigation is still underway. It is inappropriate to comment in detail whilst the investigation is underway. Indeed, the details of the complaint are the subject to an obligation of confidentiality under the Local Government Act 2000.
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2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None associated with this report.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	None.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	None

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	A - Number of complaints.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None Contact Officer: Gareth Owens, Chief Officer Governance Telephone: 01352 702344 E-mail: gareth.legal@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Public Services Ombudsman for Wales – the Ombudsman investigates service complaints and alleged breaches of the code. The ombudsman will not investigate and alleged breach of the code unless there is clear evidence of a breach and it is in the public interest to expend public funds investigating.

PSOW Reference	Council	Councillor	Complainant	Alleged breach	Gatekeeper	Investigation	Hearing
16/0483	Town 1	A	Councillor	Disrepute and improper advantage	Not acting in official capacity		
16/1611	County	B	Officer	Bullying, disrespect	Investigate	Evidence of breach	APW disqualified for 14 months
16/6253	Town 1	A	Councillor	Failure to declare an interest, voting with an interest	Investigate	Apology given by councillor. Not in public interest to proceed	
16/7019	Community 1	C	Officer	Bullying, disrespect, disrepute	Insufficient evidence		
16/7020		D	Officer	Bullying, disrespect, disrepute	Insufficient evidence		
16/7053	Community 1	C	Officer	Failure to co-operate with local resolution	Not in public interest		
16/7054	Community 1	D	Officer	Failure to co-operate with local resolution	Not in public interest		
16/7173	Community 1	C	Councillor	Bullying, disrespect, disrepute, making malicious complaints	Insufficient evidence		
16/7174	Community 1	D	Councillor	Bullying, disrespect, disrepute, making malicious complaints	Insufficient evidence		

PSOW Reference	Type of Council	Councillor	Complainant	Alleged breach	Gatekeeper	Outcome by stage	
						Investigation	Hearing
17/0516	County	A	Public	Disrepute, respect	Alleged actions not a breach of the code		
17/2548	County	B	Public	Disrepute	Alleged actions not a breach of the code		
17/7733	Community 1	C	Public	Disrepute	Alleged actions not a breach of the code		
17/7836	Town 1	D	Councillor	Bullying	Duplicate of a complaint that will be investigated		
17/7924	Town 1	E	Councillor	Voting with a prejudicial interest	Duplicate of a complaint already being investigated.		
17/7925	Town 1	E	Councillor	Voting with a prejudicial interest	Investigate	Clr following MO advice so no breach of code	
17/7956	Town 1	F	Councillor	Respect	Alleged actions not a breach of the code		
17/7957	Town 1	G	Councillor	Bullying	Alleged actions not a breach of the code		
17/7965	Town 1	E	Councillor	Voting with a prejudicial interest	Duplicate of a complaint already being investigated.		
17/8009	Town 1	E	Councillor	Voting with a prejudicial interest	Duplicate of a complaint already being investigated.		
18/0177	Town 1	E	Public	Bullying	Investigate		
18/0178	Town 1	H	Public	Bullying	Investigate		
18/0179	Town 1	I	Public	Bullying	Investigate		
18/0180	Town 1	D	Public	Bullying	Investigate		
18/1691	County	J	Public	Disrepute, misuse of position			
18/1844	Community 1	C	Public	Disrepute	Allegations not capable of being a breach. Possibly acting in private capacity		
18/2293	Town 1	K	Public	Disrepute	Comments in private capacity and not in public interest		
18/2299	Town 1	K	Public	Disrepute	Comments in private capacity and not in public interest		
18/4124	Town 1	L	Public	Disrepute, respect	Insufficient evidence and complaint not sufficiently serious to warrant investigation		
18/04263	Community 2	M	Public	Disrepute, bullying, respect			

PSOW Reference	Type of Council	Complainant	Alleged breach	Outcome by stage		
				Gatekeeper	Investigation	Hearing

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FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL – STANDARDS COMMITTEE – FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

Date of Meeting	Topic	Notes/Decision/Action
1 July 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Dispensations • Town and Community Council Visits by Independent Members 	
3 June 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Dispensations • Members' Code of Conduct • Town and Community Council Visits by Independent Members 	
29 April 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Dispensations • Town and Community Council Visits by Independent Members • Town and Community Council Referrals to the Ombudsman 	
1 April 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Dispensations • Town and Community Council Visits by Independent Members 	
4 March 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Dispensations • Town and Community Council Visits by Independent Members 	

4 February 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Dispensations • Town and Community Council Visits by Independent Members • Town and Community Council Referrals to the Ombudsman 	
7 January 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Dispensations • Officers Code of Conduct • Town and Community Council Visits by Independent Members 	
3 December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Dispensations • Planning Code of Practice • Town and Community Council Visits by Independent Members 	
12 November 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Dispensations • Councillor Training 2018 • Response from WG to a request for increased sanctions • Revised Social media Guidance by WLGA • Town and Community Council Visits by Independent Members • Town and Community Council Referrals to the Ombudsman 	<p>Verbal report</p> <p>Report by Matt Georgiou Verbal update by Ken Molyneux</p> <p>Verbal update</p>

1 October 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Dispensations • Standards Conference September 2018 • APW Sanctions Guidance • Public Services Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2017/18 • The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Case Book • 	<p>Verbal update by Julia Hughes Report by Matt Georgiou Report by Matt Georgiou</p> <p>Verbal update by Matt Georgiou</p>
3 September 2018	Meeting Cancelled	
<p>To be scheduled –</p> <p>Report by the Deputy Monitoring Officer on training undertaken. Information on the dispensations process at Gwynedd Council and Wrexham County Borough Council. Annual Report of the Adjudication Panel for Wales. The latest version of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Casebook which was shortly due to be published. Item to consider the frequency of reporting on the Overview of Ethical Complaints.</p> <p><u>For future meetings after November:</u></p> <p>Code of Conduct complaints in Flintshire.</p> <p>Also, on the July minutes, there was an item:</p> <p>Upcoming vacancy in November – consideration of the process</p>		

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