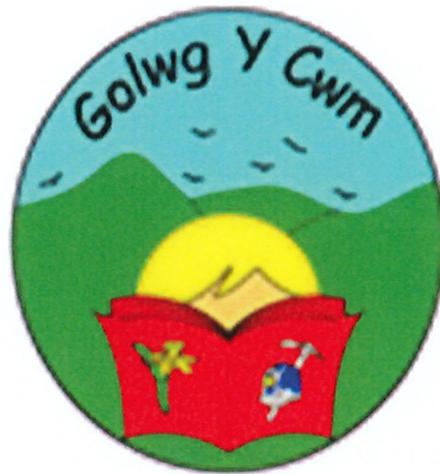
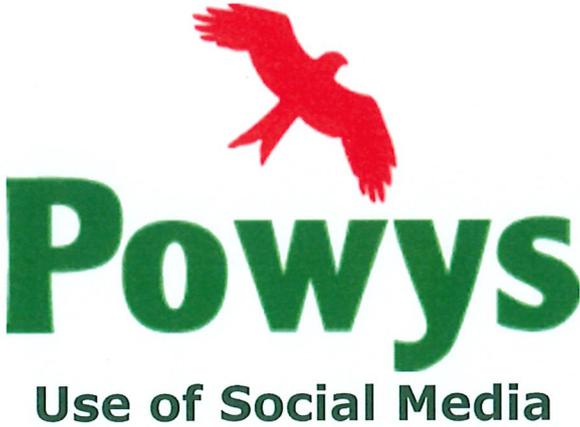


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Social Media Policy

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Powys

Use of Social Media

Policy

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Cyngor Sir Powys County Council

**Use of Social Media
Policy & Procedure**

1. Introduction

This policy sets out Powys County Council's policy regarding the use of social media for both work-related and personal purposes. It applies to all staff employed by the Council which includes contractors, agency staff etc. All social media activity that relates to Council business must be carried out within the context of this policy. Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action. Individual schools may have adopted their own agreed policy or guidance document and there is a separate social media guidance document for Councillors. The Council will ensure all staff are aware of the acceptable use of social media by publishing this policy on the intranet.

2. Principles

Social media is an umbrella term used for websites and online tools which allow people to share and interact with each other. This can include sharing information, pictures, videos, opinions, news, and interests.

When referring to social media in this document, it means any internet sites used for communication and sharing. Popular social media sites include:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- YouTube
- Flickr
- TikTok

Used correctly, social media is a powerful way to connect the Council with its citizens. They are key communications tools which highlight our commitment to openness and transparency and promotes the work and vision of the Council.

However, if used incorrectly there are potential risks to the Council in terms of safeguarding, information governance and reputational damage. It is therefore imperative that measures are in place to ensure the safe and effective use of social media by the Council and its staff.

Social media complements traditional communication channels and opens up new ways to engage with all of our publics including residents, stakeholders and partner organisations.

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The benefits to the Council of using social media include:

- Engaging with more residents, service users, stakeholders and partner organisations quickly, providing 'real time' information;
- Promoting the work of the Council and enhancing its reputation with its citizens and communities;
- Increasing awareness of events/campaigns/services/news;
- Ability to manage perception and expectation and react quickly;
- Ability to be more open, transparent and accessible;
- The cost of posting on social media is cost neutral.

It is important to remember that:

- Whilst deemed as an overall positive, information can be circulated around the world within seconds
- It's well known that bad news travels further and faster
- The Council's reputation could be damaged if not used appropriately

3. Scope

3.1 This policy applies to all employees of the Council, excluding school-based employees and Council Members as separate policies are available for these groups.

3.2 The principles set out within this policy apply to all Council employees regardless of their work base and any other persons who carry out work on behalf of the Council including agency staff, contractors and consultants.

4. Using Council Equipment for Personal Use of Social Media

Policies and procedures for the use of the internet by employees carrying out work on behalf of the Council and/or using Council-owned equipment and facilities is governed by the Internet Acceptable Use Policy. Employees are reminded that this policy states:

"At the discretion of your line manager, and provided it does not interfere with your work, the Council permits personal use of the internet in your own time (for example during your lunch-break)."

All personal usage of Council equipment must be in accordance with this policy. Your computer and any data held on it are the property of Powys County Council and may be accessed at any time by the Council to ensure compliance with all its statutory, regulatory, and internal policy requirements."

5. Use of Personal Mobile Devices during Working Hours

- 5.1 It is possible for employees to access the internet and social media via their own personal mobile phones and other devices whilst at work, including when working from home, provided that such access does not interfere with the smooth operation of Council business.
- 5.2 Accessing the internet for non-work-related purposes must not interfere or impact on your time or availability to conduct your professional duties and must not compromise any other policies regarding the use of mobile and other devices in certain situations and locations (e.g., child protection).
- 5.3 If an employee is deemed to be spending excessive amounts of time attending to personal matters during working hours, it is possible for this to be classed as misconduct and gross misconduct (for repeated instances) under the Council's Disciplinary Policy. Excessive use of personal mobile phones and other devices during working hours for phone calls, text messaging, internet browsing, or social networking is therefore not permitted.

6. Personal Use of Social Media

- 6.1 Whilst the Council respects the legal rights of all individuals, employees need to be aware that what they do and say outside of work can often compromise their position inside work. This policy covers the responsibilities of employees both inside and outside of work time in relation to their responsibilities to the Council.
- 6.2 Maintaining confidentiality: never publish or disclose any information from the Council which is not already in the public arena. A breach of confidentiality could result in disciplinary and / or legal action being taken against the employee, and / or the Council. Do not publish or report on conversations that are private or internal to the Council. Do not cite or reference customers (service users), employees, managers, partners or suppliers. Employees must be mindful that whatever they publish may be in the public arena for a long time and that doing so may result in disciplinary action being taken against them.
- 6.3 Being respectful: using social media to attack or abuse colleagues, customers/the public or suppliers (harassment and "cyber" bullying) will not be tolerated by the Council. Respect the privacy, feelings, reputation, and position of others you work with. Don't upload or tag colleagues in posts which are defamatory, offensive or sensitive. Complaints of this nature will be dealt with under the Council's policies, e.g., Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- 6.4 The Council's reputation: the Council acknowledges that most staff are also local residents. However, regardless of where they live, employees must not make negative comments about the Council as this can be damaging to the Council's reputation and to their professional reputation. This is in line with their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct for Employees.

7. Using Social Media in a Professional Capacity

7.1 Access Requests

7.1.1 Employees must ensure that they have formal authorisation to use social media on behalf of the Council and follow all set protocols.

7.1.2 All service areas wishing to use social media to communicate with the public must request formal authorisation from their respective Head of Service or Senior Manager and submit a business case to the Communications Team through the completion of a [Social Media Access Request Form](#)

7.1.3 Submitted requests will be considered by the Corporate Communications Team, taking into account proposed use, evaluate need and consider how such an account or accounts would impact on other accounts and Council wide communications.

7.1.4 Staff are not permitted to use social media in a professional capacity representing Powys County Council without the approval of the Communications Team.

7.1.5 Once the Communications Team have considered the request, feedback will be provided, and next steps will be agreed.

7.1.6 If approved, the Communications Team will issue the staff member with an authorisation document. This document will need to be signed and accepted by the respective Head of Service or Senior Manager, as well as a representative from the Communications Team. Within this document, the service will need to provide details of the staff member who will act as an Account Administrator and hold responsibility for the account(s).

It should be noted that for the purposes of this policy, the Account Administrator is the nominated member of staff as named in the authorisation document

7.2 Using Social Media

7.2.1 Upon authorisation, the service area can proceed to set up their social media account in accordance with the advice of the Communications Team and this policy.

7.2.2 Authorised social media accounts must be administered by the nominated Account Administrator who will be responsible for the overall management of content, monitoring the account, and setting and administering passwords to secure the account against unauthorised use. Usual good practice must apply in terms of using strong passwords, which are regularly changed.

7.2.3 Where it is not possible to have a corporate social media account with multiple login identities (i.e., Twitter, Instagram), it is recognised that for both practical and continuity purposes, the sharing of a single credential may be necessary. In such a case, only the Account Administrator is permitted to

share the credentials, and to make a record of who those credentials are shared with. It is their responsibility to ensure that the credentials are still suitably protected and shared only when necessary. Under no circumstances should this be confused with the sharing of credentials for any other corporate system, which is still strictly prohibited.

7.2.4 Where a corporate social media account may require multiple login identities (i.e., Facebook), staff must take responsibility for their own credentials and ensure that these are not shared and remain suitably protected.

7.2.5 Whenever an employee, who has been given access to a corporate social media account, leaves the organisation or moves to a new role and no longer requires access to that account, their access must be removed, and the password or other credentials must be changed immediately. Overall responsibility for this process rests with the nominated Account Administrator.

7.2.6 Whenever a nominated Account Administrator leaves the organisation or moves to a new role which no longer requires access to a corporate social media account, it is the responsibility of the outgoing Account Administrator to make arrangements for a replacement and to inform the Communication Team of this change as soon as possible.

7.2.7 It will be the replacement Account Administrator's responsibility to remove the former Account Administrator's access and to maintain the account going forward.

7.2.8 At the time of setting up a social media account the Account Administrator must refer and adhere to the appropriate protocols depending on the social media platform being used.

7.2.9 Social media presents unique opportunities for sharing information and communicating with the public in 'real time'. Services that wish to utilise social media for these purposes are encouraged to do so but thought must be given to resourcing the facility and in ensuring that the service adds value.

7.2.10 Many of the Council's customers and members of the public do not use social media. It's therefore essential to ensure that everything communicated on social media is also communicated using other methods. There are times when social media alone can be used to push out last-minute information, but planned, controllable events must always be communicated using a variety of digital and traditional media.

7.2.11 Social media is fast moving, and service areas need to ensure that the content remains current, and the account is frequently checked. As a general rule, services should post bilingually to their social media accounts at least twice a week.

7.2.12 Care must be taken to never breach copyright on any files uploaded on social media. All content, including text, images, videos or gifs, must be free from

copyright or royalty restrictions. Failure to carry out necessary checks may result in a third party initiating legal proceedings against the Council.

7.2.13 All graphics designed for corporate use must adhere to the guidelines laid out in the [Corporate Style Guide](#).

8. The Welsh Language

8.1 Staff who administer social media accounts under the name of the Council must ensure all content is issued bilingually (Welsh and English) in order to comply with Welsh Language Standards. Two of the Standards under Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 refer specifically to social media use, as follows:

- *Standard 58* - When you use social media you must not treat the Welsh language less favourably than the English language.
- *Standard 59* - If a person contacts you by social media in Welsh, you must reply in Welsh (if an answer is required)

8.2 The Standards listed above require that all posts must be bilingual or alternatively, separate Welsh and English posts can be created. This principle also applies to all text in within images/graphics.

8.3 Staff should plan and prepare any social media posts before-hand, wherever possible, and send these to the Welsh Unit for translation, either via [email](#) or using the [Translation Request Form](#). In instances where there is a Welsh speaker available in your team to translate a post, they are free to do so.

8.4 Where a service needs to get a message out urgently and this is outside of working hours when the Translation Team are not available, a Welsh equivalent post may be published alongside the English post. This may be a shortened or summarised version of the English post. It is recommended that services create their own Welsh language word bank using frequently used words or phrases that they can refer to should they need to issue an urgent post. Consideration should be given as to whether there is a member of your team who is a Welsh speaker and able to translate the post.

8.5 In exceptional circumstances, if none of the above options are available and there is immediate danger to public safety, Microsoft 365 translator can be used to enable the social media post to be issued. The post must be checked however, by the Translation Team as soon as possible, to ensure the information is accurate and appropriate. Do not use Google Translate – this is not a reliable or accurate translation tool.

8.6 Services are advised to plan their social media content in advance and send to the Translation Team during working hours to be prepared. The steps outlined in points 8.4 and 8.5 must be the exception, rather than the rule. The public and the Welsh Language Commissioner monitor the Council's use of Welsh on social media, so staff must abide by the Standards.

9. Retaining Professional Integrity

- 9.1 Employees should try to avoid using their personal account as a Council communications channel. Instead, they should use the appropriate corporate, professional profile or service area account. However, for staff who feel comfortable doing so, it is acceptable to take part in conversations on their personal accounts regarding Council matters as long as staff stay within the above policy points.
- 9.2 For the Council's protection as well as the employee's own, it is important that staff stay within the legal framework and be aware that libel, defamation, copyright, and data protection laws apply. Employees must not publish or report on conversations that were private or internal to the Council.
- 9.3 Privacy settings are frequently changed by social media providers, and they all differ. With that in mind, employees should not assume that their information will be kept private. Employees should not forget that social media tools are owned by external companies and that data breaches are possible. Content should be carefully considered, and employees should be sensible about disclosing any personal details.
- 9.4 When using social media to interact with colleagues in a professional capacity – for example Facebook – care should be taken to not treat the tool as a confidential space for confidential or personal conversations. Always assume that anything employees share on such tools are in the public domain.
- 9.5 If an employee is using a Council e-mail address (@powys.gov.uk) as a login for a social media account, they should never use their current network password along with it as this creates significant security risks.
- 9.6 Social media accounts should make it clear in their description that they are a Powys County Council service. Staff should consider using a statement such as 'Service provided by @PowysCC (Powys County Council)' in their account description/ bio.
- 9.7 In terms of respecting the privacy of others, care should be taken to never publish images of people unless consent has been given in writing through an official photograph consent form. These can be found [HERE](#). People should not be quoted unless they are aware and give their express consent and equally, individual staff should not be named on social media without their consent.
- 9.8 Employees must ensure that their online activities do not interfere with their job, their colleagues or commitments to customers and the public. Employees' online activities must always adhere to the staff Code of Conduct for Employees.
- 9.9 Relationships with service users, clients, pupils, etc. should always be kept professional and respectful. The Council acknowledges that in smaller

communities, the lines can become blurred particularly where the service user is also a friend or acquaintance – in such cases, employees should disclose an interest to their line manager - common sense and discretion should be applied.

9.10 Social media is increasingly used as a combined professional and personal space, where they might share personal anecdotes and professional views. The Council is supportive of this approach in principle, but staff must be vigilant to ensure that where they identify themselves as an employee of the Council, content remains non-political (in relation to the Council) and free of any comment that may bring the Council into disrepute. Where staff are candidates in a public office election, they must inform the solicitor to the Council so that an exemption for political content can be made. In such circumstances, candidates must not seek to use their status as a Council employee as an endorsement of their character or politics.

9.11 The Council understands that social media is fast-moving and methods of communication with services users will continuously evolve. The Council is supportive of staff using new methods and technologies for engaging with service users and residents, but this must be done carefully and in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Employees. It is advised that a risk assessment be carried out where new and innovative methods are used to ensure all risks have been identified and documented. For further advice on this please contact the Communications Team.

10. Safeguarding

Current corporate safeguarding policies apply to any activity on social media and should be adhered to at all times. However, if employees will be using social media in a way that will potentially give them access to the personal information of under 18s or vulnerable adults, they must be DBS checked. They must not access any information pertaining to a vulnerable adult or to a minor under the age of 18, unless expressly required to do so as part of their role. If employees are in any doubt, they should discuss any concerns or queries with their line manager.

11. Monitoring and Responding to Feedback

11.1 Social media is about two-way communication. Whilst it can serve as a broadcast tool when needed, it is important to be open to conversations with followers. The nature of social media carries with it the inherent risk of negative feedback / criticism in the public arena, but never ignore a sincere question from a member of the public as this could damage the Council's reputation.

11.2 It is the respective service area's responsibility to manage their own social media accounts. All feedback to the Council through social media should be monitored by the respective service on a regular basis. Feedback that requires a response must be acknowledged promptly and answered within a maximum of five working days. Where action is required, bear in mind that excessive delay will have a negative impact on the Council's reputation. If the answer is not immediately

available put a holding statement in place (acknowledgement), such as “thank you for your comments, I’ll find out and get back to you as soon as possible”. Service areas should comment on their own service area only. If somebody makes a comment off-subject give them contact details for the appropriate service area.

- 11.3 Whilst there is a need to remain professional at all times, an informal, conversational tone is the most appropriate for social media channels. When responding to criticism online, ensure you are calm and courteous. Always be open to two-way conversations and be aware that people are entitled to their views and freedom of speech. Employees must make sure that what they say is factual and avoid unnecessary or unproductive arguments. If the situation begins to become unmanageable or it is felt that the comments are becoming vexatious, please refer the discussion to the Communications Team who will be able to advise.

12. Handling Offensive Comments

It is the service area’s responsibility to manage their own social media accounts and to monitor offensive content. If it becomes necessary to remove offensive, defamatory or libellous comments from other users, inform the Communications Team. Depending on the severity of the comment, employees may be advised to remove the comment or to inform followers via a statement such as: “*This comment was removed because we found the content to be offensive. We will respond to your comments but please refrain from using offensive language and respect the views of others.*” Be sure to handle these comments swiftly to stop the issue escalating further.

13. Why this Policy is Important

This policy has been developed to protect the Council’s reputation by providing employees with a clear framework to work within to ensure effective, safe and legal use of social media and to avoid potential problems, including the risk of disciplinary action, damage to the Council’s reputation and/or legal action being taken against the Council.

It is important that any online activities are performed in line with the Council’s vision and values:

- Positive
- Progressive
- Professional
- Open
- Collaborative

14. Abuse of this Policy

Failure to abide by the provisions of this policy will be taken seriously by the Council. Any complaints raised under this policy will be considered in line with the Council's Disciplinary and Grievance policies, whichever is applicable.

The Communications Team monitors accounts to ensure compliance with the principles outlined in this policy.

Employees and/or Services that fail to comply with this policy will be referred to their Head of Service for them to take appropriate action.

15. Definitions

Excessive use – more or higher than is necessary or reasonable. Excessive use would be judged by managers based on the impact it has on the quality and quantity of work produced and the impact on colleagues.

Exceptional circumstances – exceptional situations and incidents are unusual and only likely to happen very infrequently. With regard to this policy “exceptional circumstances” would be considered by line managers based on this definition.

16. Policy History

Policy Date	Summary of change	Contact	Version/ Implementation Date	Review Date
26/03/18	Policy revised to reflect the changing landscape of social media and to include the requirements of the Welsh Language Standard	S Holcroft J Davies E Lovell	Version 2	March 2020
01/10/2021	Policy revised to strengthen the Welsh language section and to reflect the new process for staff to request access to social media.	H Sissons D Evans E Lovell	Version 3	October 2023

Head Teacher: Tracey Havard  _____

Chair of Governors: Huw Williams  _____

Date: November 2025