Laleston Community Council

Social Media Policy

(This policy has been created in accordance with One Voice Wales guidance)

1. Introduction

Social media offers new opportunities for Community and Town Councils to engage with their communities, including extended reach, improved communication, and enhanced transparency. This document examines strategies, platforms, and examples that can help councils use social media effectively to build stronger relationships with their communities.

Before the internet, community engagement was primarily dependent on methods such as in-person meetings and mailed surveys. These traditional approaches allowed for a direct connection but were often limited by geography and had lower participation rates.

In comparison, digital methods, particularly social media, have transformed community engagement by offering greater reach, immediate communication, and enhanced transparency. Platforms like Facebook enable councils to share updates, collect feedback, and interact with residents in real-time, encouraging a more inclusive and dynamic dialogue. These digital tools facilitate engagement with a larger and more varied population, addressing the limitations of traditional methods.

2. Digital Methods for Community Engagement in Wales

Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms, most notably Facebook, are widely used in Wales to engage with communities. These platforms allow councils and other organisations to share updates, gather feedback, and interact with residents in real-time. By posting regular updates, creating dedicated community pages or even hosting live Q&A sessions, councils can foster a sense of community and keep residents informed about local issues and events.

Online Surveys and Polls

Online surveys and polls are effective tools for gauging public opinion and collecting valuable feedback. By utilizing platforms such as SurveyMonkey or Google Forms, councils can easily reach a broad audience and gather insights on various topics. This data can then be used to make informed decisions that reflect the needs and preferences of the community.

Virtual Town Halls and Webinars

Virtual meetings, Community meetings and webinars offer a convenient way for residents to participate in community discussions and decision-making processes without having to attend in person meetings. Platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams enable councils to host interactive sessions where residents can ask questions, voice concerns, and provide input on important issues. This approach not only increases accessibility but also allows for greater flexibility in scheduling and participation.

Email Newsletters

Email newsletters are a straightforward yet effective way to keep the community informed about council activities, upcoming events, and important announcements. By maintaining a regular newsletter schedule, councils can ensure that residents receive timely updates and feel more connected to their local government. Councils need to manage any mailing lists according to their data protection policy having regard bearing in mind the requirements of relevant legislation. (Data Protection Act 2018).

Digital Noticeboards

Digital noticeboards can be physical boards at prominent locations within a town or Community or on a council website. They can provide a centralized location for important community information.

These noticeboards can include updates on council meetings, public consultations, local events, and other key announcements. By making this information easily accessible, councils can ensure that residents are always up to date on the latest developments.

Community Apps

Community apps designed specifically for local engagement, provide a platform for residents to connect with their neighbours, report issues, and stay informed about local events and initiatives.

These apps can help build a stronger sense of community by facilitating communication and collaboration among residents and local authorities.

By leveraging these digital methods, councils in Wales can enhance their community engagement efforts, build stronger relationships with residents, and create more responsive and effective local governance.

3. Overview of Social Media

Definition of Social Media

Social media refers to online platforms that allow users to share, create, and exchange information through text, images, and video. Prominent examples include Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

Types of Social Media Platforms

Social Networks: Platforms designed for social interaction and building relationships (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn). These are ideal for community engagement, building connections, and sharing content.

Microblogs: Platforms designed for short-form content, typically between 280 and 500 characters, perhaps accompanied by a single item of media such as a photo or short video clip. These are useful for sharing real-time updates, news, and information. The most prominent platform for microblogging is X but during 2024 a number of alternative platforms such as Threads, Blue Sky and Mastodon have come to prominence.

Media Sharing Sites: Platforms designed for sharing multimedia content, such as images, videos, and audio recordings (e.g., YouTube, Instagram). These are perfect for visual storytelling, brand building, and engagement.

Messaging Apps: Platforms designed for private communication between individuals or groups (e.g., WhatsApp). These offer personalized engagement, customer service, and community building.

4. Role of Social Media in Modern Communication

Opportunities for Engagement: Social media offers new opportunities for engagement, giving organizations and individuals a platform to interact regularly with their followers.

Building Brand Awareness: Social media can be a powerful tool for building brand awareness, allowing organizations to reach a wider audience and promote their products and services.

Improving Customer Relations: Social media can be used to improve customer relations by allowing organizations to quickly and effectively respond to customer inquiries and complaints.

5. Key Social Media Platforms – 2024

Facebook: History, Cost, and User Demographics History: Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and has grown to become one of the most popular social media platforms, with over 2.8 billion monthly active users.

Cost: Facebook is free for individuals, but organizations can pay for advertising and other promotional tools to reach a wider audience.

User Demographics: Facebook has a diverse user base, with users from all age groups and demographics. It is a popular platform for businesses to reach their target audience through advertising.

LinkedIn: History, Cost, and User Demographics History: LinkedIn was founded in 2002 and has grown to become a popular professional networking platform used by millions worldwide. Cost: LinkedIn is free for basic networking and job search, but organizations can pay for advertising and other promotional tools.

User Demographics: LinkedIn has a diverse user base, with a higher concentration of professionals and business users.

Instagram: History, Cost, and User Demographics

History: Instagram was founded in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and was later acquired by Facebook in 2012. It started as a photo-sharing app but has evolved into a multimedia platform.

Cost: Instagram is free for individuals and businesses, but organizations can pay for advertising and other promotional tools.

User Demographics: Instagram has a younger user base, with a higher concentration of female users and urban users.

YouTube: History, Cost, and User Demographics

History: YouTube was founded in 2005 and has become the world's largest video-sharing platform, with billions of users and millions of hours of video content uploaded daily.

Cost: YouTube is free to use, but organizations can pay for advertising and other promotional tools to increase their reach.

User Demographics: YouTube has a diverse user base, with users from all age groups and demographics.

TikTok: History, Cost, and User Demographics

History: TikTok, a short-form video platform, was launched in 2016 by the Chinese company ByteDance. It gained popularity rapidly and has become one of the most downloaded apps worldwide.

Cost: TikTok is free for users, but businesses can invest in advertising options to enhance their reach and engagement.

User Demographics: TikTok has a predominantly young user base, with a significant proportion of users being teenagers and young adults. Its content is often driven by trends, challenges, and creative short videos.

X (Twitter): History, Cost, and User Demographics

History: X is a microblogging platform founded in 2006, popular for news, entertainment, and public discourse. X was acquired in 2022 by Elon Musk and taken private as part of X Holding Corp.

Cost: Twitter is free for individuals with a paid tier giving verification by means of display of a blue “tick” mark. Organizations can pay for advertising and other promotional tools.

User Demographics: X has a diverse user base with a higher concentration of young adults and urban users.

Competing Alternatives to X

Late 2024 saw several competing platforms to X gain prominence. This was in part due to concerns about the direction which X was seen to be taking under the ownership of Elon Musk. It remains unclear if any of these competing platforms such as Threads, Blue Sky or Mastodon will establish themselves as realistic alternatives to Twitter for public communication and engagement. Councils might wish to review the current situation before investing resources in the use of X or a competing platform.

6. Supporting Community Engagement with Social Media

Strategies for Effective Engagement on Social Media

Define your Goals: Clearly define goals and objectives for social media engagement, such as increasing awareness or boosting community engagement.

Target Your Audience: Identify the target audience and tailor social media content to their interests, needs, and preferences.

Choose the Right Platforms: Select the social media platforms most relevant to the target audience and align them with organizational goals.

Create a Content Strategy: Develop a content strategy with a mix of promotional, informative, and engaging content.

Establish Guidelines for Interaction and Response: Set guidelines for interaction and response, including response time, tone, and approach to customer feedback.

Support staff if problems arise: Social media can be prone to antisocial and abusive behaviour by users. This could be upsetting for staff engaged in managing social media platforms for a council. Staff should be given appropriate support and guidance in how to manage any issues that arise.

7. **Practical Tips for Content Creation and Interaction**

Tone, Format, and Timing: Councils should consider what tone they want to adopt on social media as part of overall “branding”. Councils are public bodies and need to ensure their social media output is factually accurate and professional in tone but engagement will be helped by keeping output simple and friendly to the reader. The format should be optimized for the platform and audience. Timing should be scheduled for when the audience is most active.

Multimedia and Hashtags: Adding multimedia like images, videos, and infographics can increase engagement rates. Hashtags can help posts reach new audiences.

Audience Interaction: Interacting with the audience by responding to comments and questions can increase engagement rates and help build relationships.

8. **Measuring Engagement and Success Metrics**

Key Performance Indicators: Track followers, likes, shares, comments, and other key performance indicators to measure engagement and success.

Analytics Tools: Use analytics tools to monitor performance on social media and adjust strategies accordingly.

9. **Risks and challenges when using Social Media for Community Engagement**

<u>Privacy and Data Security Concerns</u>

Privacy Risks: Social media can pose privacy risks, including the unauthorized use of personal information. Councils should have a data protection policy in place and ensure that social media use complies with this policy.

Data Security Risks: In some circumstances Social media could pose data security risks, such as exposure of sensitive data. Consider carefully before posting data to social media which may not be in the public domain. Monitor social media accounts for suspicious activity and take appropriate action to protect data.

<u>Managing Misinformation and Negative Feedback</u>

Significance of Addressing Negative Feedback: Community and Town councils are usually very small organisations with limited staff resources serving close local communities. Negative comments or feedback left unaddressed can quickly have a pronounced impact. It is crucial to establish clear protocols for managing such feedback and any misinformation. Being a small entity means that every piece of feedback can significantly affect community perceptions.

Prompt and Transparent Responses: In a small organisation, it is essential to ensure that responses to negative feedback and misinformation are prompt and transparent

to maintain trust. With limited resources, this might mean prioritising communication and setting aside specific time each day to address concerns and correct any false information. Transparency in your responses involves being honest about mistakes and showing your commitment to rectifying issues, which can foster stronger relationships with your local residents.

Balancing Engagement with Resource Allocation

For a very small organisation, it's crucial to recognize that time and resources are limited. Prioritize social media platforms that offer the most engagement and potential reach specifically for your local audience. Focus your efforts on creating quality content rather than spreading yourself too thin across multiple channels. Streamline processes by using scheduling tools and templates to save time and maintain consistency.

Regularly review metrics such as engagement rates, follower growth, and website traffic generated from social media. Use these insights to refine your strategies and identify what works best for your audience. Be flexible and willing to adapt your approach based on performance data. Regularly revisiting and tweaking your plans will help you stay relevant and effective despite limited resources.

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