Social Media Guidelines

Tendring **District Council**

Updated - May 2018

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE | Gold

Contents

Introduction

Social media is the term commonly given to websites and online tools (such as Facebook and Twitter) which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks, encouraging participation and engagement.

The use of social media presents exciting opportunities for the Council to have conversations with the wider community in order to share news, provide information on services, and seek opinions from our residents and service users. Alongside these opportunities it must be recognised that there are risks attached to the use of social media. Distribution of material cannot be controlled. Once posted to an initial target audience, material can be posted anywhere through the networks of each individual in that audience and beyond. It is therefore important that users of social media understand the pitfalls as well as the benefits of the technology.

Tendring District Council (TDC) has a corporate Twitter account with over 5,800 followers, enabling immediate responses to enquiries received in this way and providing two-way communication. Recent tweets are featured on the home pages of Ping! and the TDC website.

Introduction (continued)

There are a number of Facebook pages for various Council services in operation, to give up to date information on events and services we provide. For example, the Leisure Centre Facebook Pages are used to inform customers of class and timetable changes and receive feedback from them. The Princes Theatre Facebook group has over 5,600 likes and has become an invaluable tool for raising awareness of various events and shows the theatre hosts to large numbers instantaneously. This provides an excellent communication portal for customers to express opinions as well as ask questions.

TDC is committed to improving the quality and interest of the posts and timeliness of updating through these channels of communication, which will in turn lead to messages being spread by word of mouth and to get a two-way dialogue developing. This will help us to understand who is interacting with us and what they are interested in. This knowledge can then help us to develop and market our products such as leisure facilities, theatre productions and business help, and to engage with a wider customer base.

Social media channels are an important vehicle for the Council to connect with a wider range of groups such as young people or those who may be dissatisfied with the Council. It forms part of the Channel Shift agenda, encouraging people to interact with the Council using online means—which can deliver financial savings in interaction costs, or drive customers to use income-generating services.

There are specific safeguarding issues that employees who work closely with children or vulnerable adults need to be aware of. Any employee with concerns regarding these service users should seek further advice from their line manager, both for the protection of their service users and themselves.

These guidelines have been introduced to ensure appropriate, legal and effective use of Facebook and Twitter as communication channels for Tendring District Council.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Council's Social Media Policy, IT monitoring, IT security, Internet and e-mail policies and the Corporate Communications Strategy.

Aims

- To provide guidance to our staff on the use of social media in relation to the Council.

- To ensure that any Council communication through social media meets legal requirements and is consistent with other communication activities.

- To ensure that all the Council's social media sites are easily identifiable as originating from the Council and correctly apply the Council's logo and brand guidelines.

- To protect the reputation of the Council while embracing the possibilities of social media as a communication channel.

Principles

These principles apply to your online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as an employee of the Council. Remember - you should participate in the same way as you would with other media or public forums.

- ✓ **Be professional -** remember that you are an ambassador for the Council.
- ✓ **Be responsible -** be honest at all times and when you gain insight; share it with others where appropriate.
- ✓ **Be credible -** be accurate, fair, and thorough and make sure you are doing the right thing.

Always remember that participation online results in your comments being permanently available and open to being republished in other media. Never give out personal details like home address and phone numbers. Also be aware that you may attract media interest, so proceed with care whether you are participating in a business or a personal capacity. If you have any doubts, take advice from your line manager or Communications representative. Stay within the legal framework and be aware that libel, defamation, copyright and data protection laws apply.

Guidelines - Council-run Channels

Staff wishing to use social media as a channel for a project or campaign must first discuss and agree this with their Corporate Director to ensure that there is a clear purpose and content is suitable for the target audience.

- Social media channels featuring the Council's logo or branding must comply with branding guidelines.

- The use of the Council logo or branding on social media channels must be authorised prior to publication by the Communications Manager.

- If you come across a group using the Tendring brand and/or Logo which you know not to be run by the Council, please contact the Communications & Public Relations Manager.

- Contact details or photos of service users or staff should not be included without first obtaining their permission.

Please ensure that you comply fully with this Guidance at all times whilst using any forms of Social Media whilst carrying out your work.

If you have any queries please contact your line manager, departmental Communications Representative, Corporate Director, or the Communications Manager.

Failure to maintain high standards could result in the channel being removed.

Officer Authorisation

Function-specific Social Media accounts and profiles must be agreed by the relevant Corporate Director in consultation with the Communications Manager prior to being set up to ensure that they can be properly resourced and managed. A Senior Manager appropriate to the function will act as "responsible officer" for each account and will be required to monitor content and use of the account, and to identify the officers to be authorised to post/tweet.

Current social media accounts in use within Tendring District Council are:

Accounts	Twitter/Facebook	Responsible Officer	Admins
Corporate	@Tendring_DC	Will Lodge	Matt Cattermole James Mealing
Princes Theatre	@PrincesTheatre Princes Theatre	Kai Aberdeen Wendy Bilsby	Melissa Leek Billy Harvey
TDC Leisure Centres	@CentresTDC Tendring Leisure Centres	Mike Carran	Jeanette Thomasson
Clacton Air Show	@ClactonAirShow	Sarah Daniells	Jo Needham Emma Woods
Essex Sunshine Coast	Essex Sunshine Coast	Mike Carran	Emma Woods
Recycling	@TendringRecycle	Jonathan Hamlet	Shelley Correia-Bird
Careline	@Tend_Careline	Mark Westall	Claire Ellington
Beside the Seaside	Clacton Sea and Beach Festival		
Jobs and Careers Fair	Tendring Jobs & Careers Fair	Christian Bone	Nancy Sword

Authorised staff are provided with this guidance document to ensure the integrity of the Council is upheld at all times. They are required to sign to confirm that they adhere to this Guidance.

Roles & Responsibilities

Corporate Directors are responsible for ensuring that employees are aware of their work related and personal responsibilities.

All managers are responsible for ensuring that their staff understand the Social Media Policy and these guidelines, and for giving advice where employees are unsure of appropriate content.

The Communications Group is responsible for reviewing these guidelines on a regular basis to ensure it remains fit for purpose, and for promoting them with their individual service.

Monitoring

Employees' use of social networking sites may be monitored in accordance with the Council's IT Monitoring Policy.

Inappropriate posting / tweeting on behalf of the Council, or excessive non-Council related use may result in disciplinary action and/or the removal of access to these facilities. Any inappropriate posts / tweets will be removed without prior notice.

Responding

Employees are only expected to monitor and respond to social media enquiries during working hours. Responding ad hoc outside of these times risks weakening the public's expectation of response times.

All enquiries should be responded to promptly. This may involve a holding response until more detailed information can be obtained and shared.

Social media - the basics

Here are some handy tips which work across all social media:

- Content is king, and therefore must be quality. Engaging posts ALWAYS have an image, and video is strongly encouraged. Keep your text concise—if you want people to read more, include a link to a website so they have the option of wading through text

- Good content is tailored to your channel—a good Twitter post is not the same as a good Facebook post, do not be tempted to copy and paste your message between social media channels. Don't post on one just because you did the other, think about what you hope to benefit.

- If you're unsure, don't post it. Err on the side of caution.

- Be thoughtful and polite. You are the face of the Council.

- But, you can also have fun. If the person messaging/posting to you uses emojis, and there is an appropriate one to respond with, go for it. Likewise share a joke—just always be mindful of other ways of interpreting what you are saying.

- Look out for security threats. Phishing attempts, dodgy links, are all present on social media.

- Don't make promises without checking. Unless you've got the specific go-ahead, the most you should promise is to look into something.

- Handle complex queries using other channels. If an enquiry is complicated, steer the discussion onto phone or email.

- Don't escalate things—it can easily spiral out of control

- Don't just wade in—it is often tempting, especially when people are being negative, to jump in on the defensive. Often it is best to sit back, and others will defend the Council for you. However, correcting inaccuracies can sometimes be helpful.

- Do share posts from partner organisations—they support us, and we should support them, for example Essex Police, ECFRS, Essex Highways. But only do so if their post meets our guidelines.

- Likewise, do tag in other organisations if they are better placed to answer an enquiry.

Getting Started with Facebook

Before you create a Facebook Account there are a few things to think about and take note of:

- In most cases the corporate Facebook page should be utilised, rather than a new one created. Consider if an event may be more appropriate than a page.

- What you would like the page to be called, and what information will you want to include? Think about what you would like the end part of your web address to be after **http//** - for example http://www.facebook.com/<whatyouwanthere>.

- Ensure the page is set up correctly. Consider auto-replies for messages, disabling external comments and posts. Make sure you have a plan to keep the page populated—think about scheduling posts and a forward plan for content.

- You can post links, photographs and videos to your page, the same as on your personal wall. This is not your personal wall. Do ensure that everything you post is appropriate.

- You can, for example, delete a photograph you've posted in the wrong place. However, the way Facebook works means that your photograph will already have been posted into the Facebook news feed of everyone following your page. They may have already seen it before you delete it. Assume, therefore, that nothing can be deleted.

- You are still a representative of the Council when posting information, photographs etc. on our Facebook pages. Spellcheck your posts and check them for grammar. Never use text speak. Do not replace letters with numbers. Do not drop random E's or O's.

- If you wish to promote your new page by linking to it on other Council pages please contact your departmental or the corporate Website editors who will assist you with this. It is not appropriate to do this more than once a week, nor if your last link is still the last thing on the wall. You will annoy people and destroy any goodwill built up.

- Remember your audience. The tone of your words will help specific people understand your point. Use short, engaging posts, and consider use of images and video too.

- Never write anything on Facebook which you would not say to someone's face.

- Do not get into an argument on Facebook. If you feel a situation is descending into confrontation, ask the poster to use more private means of communicating with your departmental area such as telephone or email.

Getting Started with Facebook (continued)

- If someone is abusive, racist, sexist or in any other way inappropriate, please contact your line manager or a member of the Communications Group for advice. If necessary, we will report the person for inappropriate behaviour for you. If you are ever unsure of how to deal with a situation on Facebook, please contact your line manager, a member of the Communications Group, or the Communications Manager.

- Be aware that the people you are communicating with might have literacy issues, be dyslexic or not have English as their first language. Do always be patient.

- Do not outreach beyond Council pages unless explicitly authorised to do so.

Getting Started with Twitter

Before you create a Twitter Account there are a few things to think about and take note of:

- When setting up a Twitter account for the first time, you will be asked to choose a username. Choose wisely, you cannot change your mind. The longer the username, the fewer letters you can type into the Twitter update box, which means less space to tell people about your event.

- You can delete a tweet but there is no guarantee no one will have seen it in the time it takes you to delete it. Just because it doesn't exist any more doesn't mean there might not be a PR fallout because of it.

- It is unlikely that you will be able to monitor your Twitter account 24/7 – please ensure you say so in your bio.

- If someone asks you to comment on any news stories, please refer them to the Communications and PR Manager.

- Never use text speak. Do not replace words with numbers and do not randomly drop an E or an O. Even on Twitter we are communicating on behalf of Tendring District Council and will be judged as such.

- If you pass details of your account to someone else if you are on leave, ensure that person has used Twitter before, that they have understood these guidelines and that their written communication skills are up to it. It is better to have no updates than ones which misrepresent the Council. A better alternative, though, is to schedule posts for during your absence.

Getting Started with Twitter (continued)

- Don't get into a fight on Twitter. If the tone of a discussion is going downwards, take it off Twitter and onto a more appropriate communication channel such as email or telephone.

- Be aware of other people wanting to re-tweet (pass on) your tweets. If you're posting about an event, keep it concise. You have 280 characters to play with—consider therefore use of images, e.g. photos of a full statement, or the use of a thread.

- If re-tweeting (RT) a partner organisation, that is fine. Consider whether it may be more appropriate to RT with a comment to add a TDC communication.

- If someone is asking for information, pointing them to a link which explains in detail is fine. Not everything can be answered in 280 characters. Likewise, re-direct them to a relevant organisation if TDC is not responsible.

- If you are tweeting from a public meeting, always be impartial. You are an observer when tweeting information on, not a participant.

- If you have committed to tweeting from a public meeting and are unable to due to reception issues, contact someone outside the meeting to post your apologies for you.

- Don't 'spam' people. In other words, don't send 6 updates in quick succession when you can fit your message into 1. The 6 updates won't appear in other people's streams in succession, instead they'll make no sense as other peoples updates appear in between yours. Alternatively, consider a thread or using a #hashtag

- Don't butt into other people's conversations unless you've spoken to at least one of the participants before. If you have something really important to say, send a Direct Message.

- Don't post too many updates per day. If you have a lot to say, consider whether Twitter is the best communication channel to say it with.

Getting Started with Twitter (continued)

- Don't send a batch of updates every morning and then say nothing again all day. People are likely to ignore 6 tweets from the same account all at once, assuming it's just 'spam'. If you have a lot of short messages regarding different events, for example, consider using *Tweetdeck* [a] or something similar to send pre-typed updates at certain times of day.

- Never ever write anything in reply to someone you wouldn't say to their face.

- Engaging with people is encouraged. Spending hours trying to placate the same person is not. If someone is persistently either complaining or asking questions, Twitter is not the best communication channel to use. Ask them to either telephone or email the relevant point of contact in your service area.

- People will talk back to you. If you are comfortable answering their questions or dealing with their complaints, then it is fine for you to do so. If you are not, refer them to the usual point of contact for complaints in your service area.

- Be aware that the people you are communicating with might have literacy issues, be dyslexic or not have English as their first language. Try to be patient.

- People will sometimes be rude. You do not have to interact with anyone making racist or sexist remarks or those being abusive. There is a *Block* [b] function on Twitter, use it, and make a quick record of the date and circumstances, just in case.

- Do not respond to political tweets. This is a corporate, non-political account.

- If you are ever unsure of how to respond to a tweet, contact the Communications team who will be happy to advise you.

[a] *Tweetdeck is an application which runs from your PC which allows you to read your tweets, instead of using http://www.twitter.com – for more information see http://www.tweetdeck.com or contact the Communications Team.*

[b] *The Block feature is built in to Tweetdeck – hover over the user's icon, left click the icon in the bottom right hand corner (a cog), select User and then click on Block in the menu which appears. At http://www.twitter.com enter the users name as http://www.twitter.com/<user> and select Block from there.*

Contacts

We're here to help!

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