Training Course Handout: Social Media for Local Councillors

This handout is a summary of the learning points covered in the training session delivered by Breakthrough Communications. You can find out more about how we empower town and parish councils to communicate with their communities at www.breakthroughcomms.co.uk. You can also contact us by email at hello@breakthroughcomms.co.uk.

How councillors can benefit from social media

- Reach out and engage with residents across many different age groups, especially 'harder to reach' residents who may not otherwise engage with the council or councillors
- Opportunity to be a 'listening ear' to your community, listening to local concerns, issues and what's being talked about on social media
- Report back to residents about issues, the work of the council and what you're doing as a councillor
- Keep in touch with local groups, organisations and businesses within your community
- Disseminate information from your council and feedback any questions
- Bear in mind: you're usually acting in your own capacity as an individual councillor and are not formally representing the council

Using Facebook to communicate and engage with your residents and wider community

- Facebook remains the most widely used social media platform in the UK by a very long way, across most age groups and demographics
- You can use your personal account, set up your own Councillor page, or use an official council account (if you hold a certain civic role) to get out your message
- Very important to understand how Facebook works, which will shape how you use it and get the most from it as a councillor

Instagram

- Very effective for engaging with younger residents in particular
- Highly visual platform, with an increasing focus on video as well as image-based content
- Great for engaging with specific issues or places through the power of #hashtags
- Most features can only be controlled on the app - rather than on a web browser

Twitter

- Great for engaging with specific issues or places through the power of #hashtags
- Easy to start 1-2-1 conversations with key community stakeholders (police, other authorities, other Cllrs, local and national organisations, etc)
- Fantastic tool for researching what people think about issues

Personal 'Profiles' vs Facebook 'Pages'

- We recommend creating and using a [Facebook Page](#) as a councillor, rather than using your Facebook personal profile.
- Using a Facebook Page for your councillor presence, and keeping your Facebook profile for personal use, enables you to separate your personal life from your councillor work and role

Tips to enhance your Councillor Facebook page:

- Set up your page's unique www.facebook.com 'address'
- Set up a 'Call to Action' button
- Use your Facebook page's 'Inbox', auto-responder and FAQ functionality
- Review your page settings regularly

What sort of content should I post?

- Provide news and information pieces from your council or local groups, keeping people informed and updated
- Signpost to your council's services and to services provided by other organisations
- Ask questions to find out what people think about different issues
- Share content from elsewhere - local councils, other councillors, local community groups, etc

What makes for engaging social media content?

- Engaging content is:
- Relevant
- Interesting
- Informative
- Tells a story
- Seeks feedback
- Asks questions

Bring your social media content to life

- Be authentic - do what you feel most comfortable with and act in the same way you would in day to day life
- Build up a conversation - you are likely to get comments to respond to and people will appreciate you engaging with them
- Use images (or better, a video!) to tell a story - even if you just use a generic photo, images are always better than just text
- Use emojis (yes, really!) in your content
- They can effectively convey tone and make it clearer what you're trying to say. Find appropriate emojis for your content at: www.emojipedia.org
- On Facebook, make use of coloured and image backgrounds to really stand out from the crowd

Top tips for finding 'generic' photographs

- Generic ('stock') photos are images that can be used to illustrate a story when you don't have a photo yourself
- There are several free websites where you can get high quality, free stock photos:
    - www.pexels.com
    - www.unsplash.com
    - www.pixabay.com

Consider your choice of language and engagement style

- Social media is very 'chatty' and usually personal in style
- Avoid 'council speak' and acronyms that might make your content inaccessible or irrelevant
- Don't assume that people have a prior knowledge of the subject you're talking about

What does your digital tone of voice sound like?

- Your tone of voice is as important on social media as face-to-face conversation
- Ask yourself: how do you want people to perceive you?
    - Authoritative and informed - the 'go to' person
    - Friendly and supportive - the 'friendly face'
    - Principled and forceful - the 'community champion'
    - Something else?

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A few things to be aware of on social media

- Humour DOES have its place, but be careful and avoid innuendo, libellous comments and arguments
- Don't reply in anger - walk away and come back later, and consider how to proceed
- "Don't feed the trolls" - this is increasingly a challenge and an issue for councillors at all tiers of local government

Share, share and share some more..

- A great way to promote your message is through sharing content to and from:
- Local 'Notice Board' pages and community Facebook groups
- Pages and profiles of other well known people locally - councils, Cllrs, MPs, etc
- Pages of local charities, services and organisations

Sharing and engaging in local Facebook 'groups'

- Most content should be posted on your own account or Councillor Facebook page
- Also share relevant content in local Facebook groups to increase engagement, but:
- Avoid 'spamming' or political comments - these may get your page removed from the group!
- Ensure you are adding value to the group, and keep it on-topic

Five things to go and try today:

1. If you don't already have one, set up your councillor Facebook page
2. 'Like' or join local Facebook pages and groups - and where possible do so join the group with your new page
3. Try writing a post on your page and sharing it to relevant groups in your community and see how people engage
4. Share a piece of relevant content on to your page from another source (other councillors, councils, MPs, local media, services, organisations etc.)
5. Create a video and share it to your Facebook page