



PROTOCOL FOR THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Social media is the term given to online media/websites that are based on user-generated content and participation. Social media can fall under the following categories: blogs, forums, podcasts, wikis, networks and other online communities.
- 1.2 As part of our communications and engagement strategy, the school is committed to engaging with citizens and other interested parties in an effective and transparent way. Social media allows the council to develop two-way, real-time communications with its various stakeholders. If managed appropriately the use of social media as a communications tool for the school can be very helpful.
- 1.3 Other service areas across the authority have a presence on different platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Linked-In and YouTube. These accounts are managed by the Headteacher.
- 1.4 Social media is also a key part of the council's ICT strategy. This social media protocol has been developed in line with the council's ICT protocols and the ICT Code of Practise which is applicable to all council staff.
- 1.5 Corporately the council has developed a 'Bridgend County Borough Council, social media and you' protocol which is available on the BCBC website. The aim of this is to be clear about how the council will engage with users and to manage expectations.
- 1.6 While the school respects the privacy and legal rights of employees, actions in or outside work that affect performance, the work of others, or the school/council's interests or reputation need to be considered as part of this social media protocol. Therefore this protocol covers employee responsibilities when using social media either for personal or professional use.

2. Using social media for personal use (during and outside of working hours)

- 2.1 When creating your own profile on a social media platform, it is important to remember that if you state you are an employee of the school, you are declaring yourself a representative of the school and must therefore act appropriately to avoid having a negative impact on yourself, the school and its reputation.
- 2.2 To avoid this, it is advisable for employees to either not state that they work for the school or to be non-specific (e.g. by stating that you work in 'local government' instead). You should also ensure that you always include a disclaimer, e.g. 'Views expressed here are my own and not that of my employer'. This must be displayed clearly on your profile.

- 2.3 When using a personal account you should not use the school logo, school email address or any other form of school identification.
- 2.4 Use discretion at all times. Ask your line manager if you are unsure as to whether your content may compromise the school in any way.
- 2.5 Through social media you are potentially connected to other school staff, councillors and residents, as well as the rest of the world. Make sure the image you project is consistent with your position in the school.
- 2.6 You need to ensure you are aware of your obligations to other school policies such as data protection i.e don't reveal or discuss confidential information or anything that could be damaging to the school or children.
- 2.7 The council has an agreed media protocol in place. Just as if officers were contacted by the media via email or over the phone, and requested to give a statement, comment or interview on behalf of the school this must be raised with the headteacher and with the Corporate Communications and Marketing team.
- 2.8 If you find yourself in any doubt, check with the headteacher, the Corporate Communications and Marketing team and/or ICT.

3. Using social media professionally on behalf of the school (during and outside of working hours)

- 3.1 If managed properly, social media can provide a highly effective opportunity for the school to engage in conversations, share information and promote its services on a local, national and global scale.
- 3.2 In line with the communications, ICT and customer service strategies the school encourages two-way conversation with others, including citizens, partners, organisations, businesses and other parties, where relevant and appropriate.
- 3.3 If managed appropriately, the council supports the use of social media to highlight and promote the work of service areas. In the first instance this should be done through the approved channels which are managed by the Headteacher.

4. Guidance for employees using social media on behalf of the school (once your business case has been approved by the head)

- 4.1 Ensure you receive appropriate training and that you are listed as an official authorised user with the Corporate Communications and Marketing team and ICT.

- 4.2 If you have been granted permission to use social media for work purposes, this cannot be used for personal reasons. The ICT department can and will check the use of social media as set out in the ICT Code of Practise.
- 4.3 Be careful when choosing to share information posted by other users including individuals and organisations. Be mindful of endorsing someone else's activity as it could contradict council policy.
- 4.4 As with normal business, employees should remain politically impartial when representing the school via social media. This would mean school accounts should not engage in political debate, follow individual political parties or politicians, endorse electioneering campaigns for specific parties etc. This is not applicable for officers who are also trade union representatives when acting in their capacity as a union representative.
- 4.5 Social media should not be used in isolation to other forms of communication and marketing. Instead it should form a part of your service area's communication plans.
- 4.6 Social media lends itself to a less formal communication style. Ensure you are clear, professional yet informal in your tone. Avoid being flippant or sarcastic. Similarly you need to ensure you do not start using 'text speak' or abbreviations such as 'lol'.
- 4.7 Conversations on social media should add value and fit with the council's aims and objectives. Adding value means:
- Helping you, your fellow employees, our citizens, our customers and partners perform well and solve problems;
 - Enhancing the school's services, processes and policies;
 - Creating a sense of community;
 - Helping to promote the school's aims and values;
 - Providing 'news you can use'.
- 4.8 The same codes apply to online activity as do in your day to day working life. Users must be aware of, and abide by the ICT Code of Practise.
- 4.9 If you suspect that your social media account has been hacked, please report this to ICT for advice on how to manage this.
- 4.10 Laws such as libel, defamation, copyright and data protection all apply online. For the council's protection, as well as your own, it's imperative that you conduct your behaviour appropriately:
- If writing on internal/sensitive school matters, seek permission before making public;
 - If you share content created by others, for example photographs or videos, always get written permission. If you don't know who created the media then you must not use it as it might be liable to copyright;

- It's vital that officers understand data protection and the importance of not revealing personal data. The definition of 'personal data' is a wide field, but in the main part consists of information that can lead to the identification of others – directly, or if linked with other information. You should never post information that could potentially identify others. If you were found guilty of breaching the data protection act you, and the council, could face a hefty fine.

- 4.11 Be aware that all information that you publish on the Internet is viewable to a global audience and has the potential to always be viewable/searchable online. Content on social media sites may also be subject to Freedom of Information requests.
- 4.12 Ensure you put sufficient measures in place in line with the school's Customer Service Charter to respond to queries in a timely and accurate manner. Remember even though you might only use social media during office hours other users will access and generate content 24 hours a day.
- 4.13 Exercise caution when using social media applications (such as widgets) as some require you to allow access to your account. These applications often have a disclaimer that states they can access your account and post on your behalf – this often manifests in auto-updates when using the applications and can often be misconstrued as advertising. It is advised you refrain from using these.
- 4.14 If you are adding content onto social media platforms on behalf of the council then you're encouraged to be clear about who you are, use your real name, and identify that you work for the council. However, be careful not to reveal too much information when building a relationship with fellow users, as this could put you at risk of identity theft. It might seem obvious, but never give out personal details.
- 4.15 Deal with offensive comments quickly and sensitively. If an offensive, threatening or libellous comment is posted then you have the right to remove it (if possible) or ask for it to be removed by the person who posted it, however do give an explanation as to why you have taken this action.
- 4.16 Do not ignore difficult queries; instead deal with these publicly in a professional and transparent manner. The purpose of social media is to encourage two-way conversations, part of this will include responding to difficult queries. Remember people are entitled to their own views. You may encounter persistent complainants who use social media to highlight what they feel is a personal issue or injustice. Always speak with your line manager or the Corporate Communications and Marketing team before responding. Sometimes a response is not always required. As a general rule:

- Make the effort to respond publically to the query so other users can see you are willing to help/solve the problem;
- If you are unable to answer the query utilise a holding response such as 'Sorry to hear this. We will find out some more information and get back to you asap.' Or 'Thanks for letting us know. We will get back to you shortly';
- Make sure you follow up on your promises and get back to people. If the situation doesn't improve please speak with your line manager or the Corporate Communications and Marketing team for further advice;
- There might be occasions when you may not be able to respond to a query via social media e.g. Twitter has limited character spacing. In these instances it is appropriate to say something along the lines of 'Sorry to hear this. This requires a response too detailed for here. Please message us your contact details so we can get back to you';
- The council has an agreed media protocol in place. If you are asked by the media to give a statement, comment or interview on behalf of the council this must be raised with your manager and with the Corporate Communications and Marketing team.
- Always be courteous in everything you write in any social media forum;
- If someone is not asking you a question, consider whether a response is actually required;
- If someone contacts you in Welsh in line with the council's Welsh Language Scheme and Customer Service Charter you need to ensure you respond to that person through the medium of Welsh using the council's approved translators.

4.17 Social media presents a great opportunity for us to develop close relationships with the public; however it is always an addition to your current role. You must manage it carefully so it doesn't impact on the requirements of your daily work. Please remember that internet activity is logged and can be monitored.

4.18 It is not enough to simply set up an account as it will not manage itself. People will expect two way communications and you need to be prepared for that. You need to pro-actively ensure the account is monitored regularly and that you are generating timely content otherwise it becomes a meaningless channel of communication and your followers will recognise and react to this. For tips on how to grow and develop your social media presence please contact the Corporate Communications and Marketing team.

4.19 Before posting content, make sure that it's factual, correct, timely and honest. If you post something in error and choose to delete it, consider whether you may need to clarify this and why you've done so. Remember, you ultimately have responsibility over what you've published so make sure you get it right. If you have any

concerns then speak with the headteacher or the Corporate Communications and Marketing team.

- 4.20 You may come across inaccurate or incorrect content other people have generated about the school or your service area. Don't be defensive in reacting to this. If information is inaccurate or incorrect you may politely and sensitively clarify the situation. You must however inform the Corporate Communications and Marketing team of information posted that could damage the reputation of the council.
- 4.21 If in doubt with any points check with the headteacher or the Corporate Communications and Marketing team.

5. Sanctions

- 5.1 Where it is believed that an employee has failed to comply with this protocol action, the matter may be referred for consideration under the school's Disciplinary Policy.

6. Agreement

- 6.1 All school employees, contractors and agency workers who have been granted the right to use the school's internet access are required to accept this protocol.

Appendix 1
Example letter if required

School Logo

Dear Parent / Guardian

RE: Inappropriate Comments made on Social Networking Site Facebook

Regrettably it has come to my attention that recently parents of a pupil made disparaging comments about the school and its staff on the Social Networking Site – Facebook/Twitter.

I together with the Governing Body and the Local Authority consider such behaviour to be unacceptable and unfairly damaging to the reputation of the school and its staff. Therefore I am respectfully requesting that such inappropriate comments on any networking site are taken off the site and not made in future. Such conduct will not be tolerated by the Local Authority or the school and should such behaviour persist then the Local Authority will consider taking appropriate legal action.

I understand that parents may wish to discuss issues arising from their child's attendance at the school, but would ask that any complaint or issue is addressed through the appropriate channels.

A copy of the school's complaints procedure is also available on request.