

National Assembly for Wales
Communications

Social Media Communications Policy

July 2015

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



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01.Introduction

This policy sets out guidelines for the use of social media by the National Assembly for Wales. It follows and expands on principles set out in the Assembly's 2010 e-democracy strategy, which set out the Commission's direction for digital engagement with the people of Wales¹.

This policy is aimed at all staff employed by the National Assembly for Wales and is relevant to all activities involving social media.

The policy details principles, behaviour and standards required and expected of staff when using social media on behalf of the Assembly. This will be monitored and any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

02.Background

What is social media?

'Social media' refers to a range of communication technologies used for sharing information and opinions, often through explicit connections with other people or organisations. The term includes platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and LinkedIn.

Most social media platforms and services have been in existence for fewer than ten years but they are increasingly popular, particularly as the use of mobile devices such as tablets and smart phones increases connectivity.

For parliaments and other public sector organisations, social media is often used to inform citizens about specific issues. More often than not, these institutions use social media platforms as broadcast channels rather than for encouraging dialogue or discussion. It has been suggested that as little as seven per cent of UK politicians actually engage in conversations on social media as there is a fear of risk. There are also resource implications for keeping up the interaction.

However, social media can and arguably should also be used to broaden political participation by helping the public communicate with their representatives and ask questions directly through an inquiry process.

Social media channels are also uniquely able to connect people and organisations immediately and allow them to network on an ongoing basis.

Why use social media?

Social media has evolved considerably since 2010, and now requires special attention and consideration to ensure it is being used appropriately and effectively as part of the Assembly's engagement strategy.

¹ National Assembly for Wales e-democracy strategy http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/about_us-commission_assembly_administration/about_us-commission_publications/abt-commission-agendas.htm?act=dis&id=198788&ds=9/2010

Social media offers the Assembly the opportunity to increase participation in committee work and raise the profile of individual Assembly Members at considerably lower cost than traditional marketing approaches.

Using social media can improve scrutiny and law-making by widening the consultation process and general engagement and also increasing the reach of corporate messages. Social media can be used to encourage participation by those who do not normally interact with the Assembly, and allow for multiple conversations to take place online.

Social media provides an exciting, powerful and interactive addition to our online activities and if we do not engage with its users we risk not playing an active role in important conversations that could shape the organisation's reputation.

Currently, social media channels are used by the Assembly for announcements; links to news items; consultations; inquiries; promotion of multimedia content; information about the Presiding Officer, and general news about the organisation. For a list of current Assembly social media channels please refer to this page: <http://www.assembly.wales/en/help/Pages/Social-media.aspx>

Communication on social media is intended to complement other engagement activity, and is equally accountable to relevant laws such as the Freedom of Information Act.

The benefits of using social media for the Assembly

- Engaging with an audience on platforms they already use;
- Attaining further 'reach' and penetration;
- Meeting our audience's expectations of a modern organisation;
- Enabling the Assembly to maintain flexible communications;
- Monitoring conversations and engaging in online debate;
- Promoting the work of the Assembly;
- Driving traffic to the main website and to other Assembly platforms;
- Increasing participation in Assembly business (committee inquiries, for example);
- Increasing the speed at which information can be sent to the public and reducing reliance on the democratic deficit in traditional media;
- Improving targeted communications for increased engagement; and
- Improving long-term cost-effectiveness of communication

03.Implementation

Aims and objectives

In line with the commitments made in the Assembly Commission Strategy 2011 – 2016, the National Assembly for Wales uses social media to complement and augment its efforts to engage with the people of Wales.

The purpose of this engagement work is to:

- promote the work of the Assembly;
- encourage greater participation in the work of the Assembly, and
- raise the profile of Assembly Members.

In its use of social media, the Assembly will:

- Develop social media channels to promote the Assembly as a distinct and confident voice online;
- Provide up-to-the-minute access to the Assembly’s work;
- Use tools that encourage greater engagement and find new voices to contribute to Assembly business;
- Deliver innovation that is internationally recognized and inspirational, but evidence-based and linked to the Assembly Commission’s strategic goals;
- Provide Assembly Members, Assembly Member Support Staff and Assembly Commission staff with a centre of excellence which supports and develops the Assembly’s use and governance of social media.

To achieve its goals, the Assembly recognises the need to:

- Listen to conversations – who is talking about the Assembly and what are they saying?
- Create and publish engaging content;
- Engage in and facilitate conversations;
- Analyse the effectiveness of content and content strategies;
- Set engagement goals with defined metrics and benchmarks;
- Monitor and measure results to regularly evaluate channels as a whole;
- Develop channel strategies that set out what information (and in what style) should be posted to particular platforms;
- Create a tactical plan for implementation of new social media platforms.

Risks

In order to deliver the objectives described above, the Assembly will implement robust measures to avoid reputational risks when using social media platforms.

While the Communications team operates the main corporate accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and LinkedIn, different members of staff throughout the organisation may operate channels at different times.

The main risk the Assembly faces in its use of social media is the risk of inappropriate or ill-judged content being posted. Although content can be deleted once it has been posted, it is possible and likely that thousands of social media users will have seen that content in the period between it being posted and deleted. Another risk is that of staff posting poorly written content that reflects badly on the organisation.

To mitigate these risks, a Digital Media Manager will be responsible for overseeing our online presence and providing advice, support and training to colleagues. This staff member will be responsible for maintaining the Assembly's social media policy and supporting documents, as well as developing strategies as new platforms, technology and trends emerge.

The Digital Media Manager will be the guardian of innovation and ensure that we evaluate each new platform and project carefully. The task of posting content should be devolved to subject experts in different departments. The Digital Media Manager will provide advice, support and training for Assembly staff and Assembly Members and their staff.

Adherence to other policies

Use of social media channels must be in line with current professional standards, departmental guidance, codes of conduct and legal obligations that apply to the National Assembly for Wales Staff Code of Conduct. It must also contribute to the delivery of the Assembly Commission's strategic priorities.

Social media activity should also ensure the Assembly's inclusiveness and diversity agenda is adhered to. Staff should be encouraged to ensure that social media are used in ways that maximise inclusion, and allow new voices to contribute to the work of the Assembly.

- **Assembly Commission Strategy 2011-16**
- **Staff Code of Conduct**
- **Code of Practice on Public Access to Information**
- **Official Languages Scheme**
- **Equality Plan 2012-16**

Bilingualism

The Assembly's Official Languages Scheme places a responsibility on staff to communicate bilingually with external audiences. Welsh and English versions of channels and content within those channels should co-exist equally, although members of staff are encouraged to post content that might be more appropriate to audiences in the different languages. For example, it may not be appropriate to post a link on an English channel to footage of an Assembly Member's appearance on a Welsh language television programme.

Original content that is posted/tweeted and produced in English and Welsh should be released on to the social media channels at the same time. This can be achieved by scheduling the content on the platform that is advised by the Digital Media Manager.

Responses should be provided in the same language as the original comment. Speed of response should not differ according to language.

Access to social media channels

In order to publish content to social media, staff will need administrative access to the Assembly's social media channels. Access is only allocated to specific staff based on job role and business need.

Principles for participation

There are some common principles shared across all forms of social media. Staff members must operate within the Assembly's Staff Code of Conduct when using social media. The information posted by the Assembly must:

- Be credible, accurate, fair, thorough and transparent;
- Be consistent - encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Be cordial, honest and professional at all times;
- Be responsive - when insight is gained, share it where appropriate; and
- Be integrated - wherever possible, align online participation with other offline communications.

Creating a social media channel

Where a team/committee/department feels they have a case for a dedicated social media channel to promote their content, a request should be sent to the Digital Media Manager. Once the request has been approved, the team will be required to sign a Service Level Agreement (SLA), outlining what is expected of them in running the account.

The initial request should:

- Illustrate the strategic context and aims of the intended communications activity;
- Determine critical success factors (identifying what is going to change or be achieved) and the benefits of using social media;
- Identify the audience(s) for intended activity;
- Have considered other options, and show that value for money has been considered;
- Outline other complementary activities to be deployed around social media usage (such as email, face to face interaction or other outreach activity);
- Outline how resource requirements will be fulfilled; and

- Outline evaluation measures that will be put in place to measure social media activity and success (these may change over time and will be regularly reviewed by the Digital Media Manager).

Service Level Agreement (SLA) for creation of channels

The Service Level Agreement outlines that teams managing social media accounts are responsible for:

- Ensuring that social media accounts adhere to the SLA;
- Attending training and reading guidance as required by the Digital Media Manager.

The SLA also states that the Digital Media Manager is responsible for:

- Approving the set-up of channels, authorising and implementing design of channels, logos and ultimately retaining ownership of all accounts (as detailed in the SLA);
- Managing the allocation and set-up of accounts for staff to contribute to social media on behalf of the Assembly; and
- Monitoring the accounts to ensure quality control, and advising departments about this or suggesting training as appropriate.

What audiences should expect from Assembly social media

The Assembly has published a Social Media Acceptable Use Policy³ which outlines terms and conditions of use, including the following:

- ‘Following’ or ‘liking’: when a member of the public, organisation, political body or media outlet follows any of the Assembly’s channels, we may follow them back, ‘retweet’ or ‘favourite’ one of their messages. However, this does not imply endorsement or agreement;
- Availability: social media should be monitored and updated between the office hours of 09.00 and 17.00, Monday to Friday. Messages may not receive an acknowledgement until normal office hours;
- Replies: it is not possible or appropriate to reply individually to all the messages received on social media;
- Sharing intelligence: all social media messages should be read and emerging themes or helpful suggestions passed to relevant colleagues. If staff are unsure about replying to messages, they should check with the Digital Media Manager; and
- Impartiality: the Assembly cannot and must not engage on issues of party politics or answer questions that break the rules of the Civil Service Code⁴.

Live tweeting

Live tweeting is defined as posting content on Twitter at regular intervals during an event. This enables the Assembly to engage with audiences on Twitter for a continuous period of time, as a series of focused tweets give context to an event, committee meeting or other controlled experience as it unfolds.

³ http://www.assemblywales.org/help/social_media_policy.htm

⁴ <http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/about/values>

Live tweeting from committee meetings is currently **not** a practice that has been evaluated enough to be recommended for general use. Therefore, any committees that want to use live tweeting must note that it is **only** permitted after approval from the Clerk, the Committee Chair, the Digital Media Manager and the Head of Communications.

Guidelines for live tweeting

- Prior to starting live tweeting from a committee meeting, the Clerk should confirm with the Digital Media Manager that the Chair and all members of the committee have been made aware and are in agreement with the practice;
- Likewise, while permission is not required from witnesses giving evidence, the Clerk should ensure they are briefed about any social media activity;
- Adequate numbers of staff should be present during the meeting to ensure that the committee is provided with requisite clerking support. For example, the Clerk should clerk the meeting and the deputy should compose tweets. If this arrangement is not possible, extra resource should be sought.
- Live tweeting must take place from a laptop or tablet, with appropriate software installed. The proposed set-up should be checked with the Communications team ahead of the meeting.
- Questions should be tweeted with responses and clerks should be mindful that partial quotes can be misleading.
- It is recommended that, where possible, clerks should tweet the whole answer a witness has given. If this is not possible, it is preferable to tweet the question but no answer, rather than risk editing or misinterpreting a witness's response;
- Action points can be tweeted;
- All updates should be completely impartial with regard to party politics and consider Section 5 of the Staff Code of Conduct (concerning bringing the Assembly into disrepute);
- No observations or reactions should be tweeted;
- Every session should be evaluated. Could some tweets have been improved, were there spelling errors, was a compelling narrative evident? If so, make notes and include these as areas for future development and improvement.

Freedom of Information

Requests for information made under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act can be made via social media. However, the character limitations of some platforms may impact on the ability of the Assembly to fully respond to a request. A request for information does not specifically have to mention 'freedom of information' which is why general questions should not be answered immediately without first considering the potential of disclosing certain information.

If the information is already published, a link to the Assembly website will be provided. If the response is a lengthy one, a link to the Assembly disclosure log can be provided instead.

For the Assembly to consider a request, the individual will need to provide their real name and an address for correspondence (this includes an email address). If the request has been posted on a social media platform such as Twitter, then as long as that site offers a means for the authority to

respond, such as a hyperlink to the requester's email address or a 'reply' button, that request will fulfil the requirement to provide a valid address.

If a request is made via Twitter, the Assembly can only consider requests made directly to the Assembly via a '@mention' or direct message.

Personal use of social media

When members of staff use social media on their own personal accounts outside of work, they should be reminded that where breaches of this policy or the Assembly Staff Code of Conduct are found, action may be taken in accordance with Assembly disciplinary procedures.

The Assembly reserves the right to restrict or prevent access to social media sites on Assembly premises if personal use is considered to be excessive.

Misuse of social media can, in certain circumstances, be constituted as a legal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against the individual or the organisation.

In particular, posting or forwarding a link to any of the following types of material will amount to gross misconduct:

- Pornographic material
- A false or defamatory statement about any person or organisation
- Material which is offensive, obscene, derogatory, or may cause embarrassment to the Assembly
- Confidential information about the Assembly or any of its staff or Assembly Members
- Any other statement that which is likely to create liability
- Material which is in breach of copyright or intellectual property rights or which invades the privacy of any person.

Where evidence of misuse is found, the Assembly may undertake a more detailed investigation involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to be nominated to undertake investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the Police in connection with a criminal investigation.

If a member of staff notices a breach of this policy, they should report it the Communications team.

Contact details

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