#FollowMe

A guide to social media for elected members in Scotland
This Guide has been produced by The National Communications Advisory Group (Scotland) and the Improvement Service in collaboration with creative communications specialists comms2point0.

The National Communications Advisory Group (Scotland) is a collective voice for the communications industry in local government. Members, drawn from councils across Scotland, promote best practice, support and challenge, provide training and deliver specific communications advice to national bodies on request.

The Improvement Service works with councils and their partners to help improve the efficiency, quality and accountability of local public services in Scotland by providing advice, consultancy and support. A key aspect of the Improvement Service’s work is to support elected member development.

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Introduction

One summer’s day in 2015 a landmark was reached. More than a billion people across the world went onto the internet using a phone, a laptop or a PC to sign in to use Facebook in one day. Even more than that have an account. If Facebook were a country it would be the third largest in the world.\

In Scotland, the number of people with social media accounts tops 3.1 million. That’s more than twice the number of people who live in the Greater Glasgow area.

But what are they doing with social media? Critics may dismiss it. But it’s also a place where opinions are formed. But isn’t social media just full of cat pictures? Almost seven in 10 people in Scotland see it as an invaluable way of keeping up with current affairs. And more people made up their mind on how to vote in the Independence Referendum of 2014 from something they read on social media than from something they read in the local paper. Times have changed.

Newspaper sales continue to shrink and dropped more than eight per cent in Scotland last year. Newsrooms have shed staff and there are fewer traditional reporters covering council meetings. But anyone who has a smartphone in their pocket can use new and faster channels to share their take on the news with their friends and wider. The question is not ‘if’ councillors and councillors should use social media but ‘how.’

Many councils and councillors are rising to the challenge and this guide aims to walk you through some of the basic steps. The role that social media will play for councillors is likely to change from ward to ward. In some wards it will be a fringe consideration just now. In others it will be more central. This will not replace entirely traditional canvassing tactics of councillors. But as Barack Obama’s Presidential campaigns showed, this will only increase in importance. During the campaigns social media such as Facebook and Twitter were utilised, along with email and data, to motivate and connect supporters as well as reach out to floating voters.

In this guidance we’ll offer advice on good practice. This is a starting point and not a definitive guide you must observe. Social media is developing quickly. Its platforms are changing in popularity but we hope some of the basic principles will help you in your job of representing your constituents whatever the future holds. We will also point you towards places to find more extensive online step-by-step guidance for some of the larger social media platforms.

1. Mark Zuckerberg Facebook update, August 2015. Available at: www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10102329188394581

More people made up their mind on how to vote in the Independence Referendum of 2014 from something they read on social media than from something they read in the local paper

Source: News UK Survey, The Drum, October 2014
Councils across Scotland have been developing their use of social media. It is now a mainstream way that councils and residents talk to each other. Here are some examples:

**@orkneylibrary**
Orkney Library’s Twitter is fun and engaging and has more than 20,000 followers. It shows how service areas can use social media effectively.
https://twitter.com/OrkneyLibrary

**West Lothian Council’s Flickr page**
Flickr is a social website for photographers – from organisations to amateur to professional photographers.
www.flickr.com/photos/westlothiancouncil/

**@CityCentreLeith**
One of the City of Edinburgh Council’s neighbourhood teams on Twitter.
https://twitter.com/CityCentreLeith

**Travel Scotland Twitter**
Traffic updates as they happen, sent to 100,000 people.
https://twitter.com/trafficscotland

**Fife Council Facebook page**
A corporate page which has 20,000 people liking it.
www.facebook.com/FifeCouncil?fref=ts

**Good use of social media by councils and the public sector**

What social media is

Here’s an explanation. Imagine a crowded cafe, workplace, bus or pub where there are people of all ages. As you move around you may get snippets of chat. What was on TV last night, who is going out with whom, what a celebrity may have said. Or it might be chat about the new council plans for a development, or how it is dealing with a service or issue as it is happening. All of those people are having conversations. Some you’ll be interested in. Some you won’t be.

Social media is no different.

Right now, there are hundreds of thousands of conversations going on across Scotland. Some of them are face-to-face or over the phone. Many of them are online on social media.

Some of those conversations are about life in your community. Some of them are talking about things your council is doing. Some may be even talking about you.

If you were in that cafe, office, bus or pub and you heard a subject you were interested in you may want to chip in. If you’re not using social media you’ve shut yourself off from the online conversations and you’ve no way of listening, let alone influencing.

You have probably heard of Twitter or Facebook, but there are many other social media platforms, and it can be difficult to know where to start when you are faced with so many. You may wonder why there are so many different types of social media. Similarly, you may have stood in a newsagent’s shop and looked at the shelves and wondered why there are so many different
types of newspaper and magazine. The answer is the same, that different people like different things.

But what makes social media particularly powerful is how fast a single voice can spread. The ice bucket challenge saw the MND Association turn weekly fundraising of £200,000 a week to £2.7 million in just seven days. Pakistani Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousafzai used social media as part of her global campaign to give girls education. When landslides or flooding close roads, Scottish Borders Council uses its Twitter and Facebook to get the message out so drivers can get home safely. In all cases the original message reached a far greater audience when it was shared by people who had seen it. This is where the phrase ‘viral’ comes from. It’s something that can spread quickly among large numbers of people.

When Glasgow hosted the Commonwealth Games the city was named on social media more than a million times. People in Scotland, just as across the rest of the UK and the world, are not waiting for permission to use social media. They are just doing it.

But remember, social media isn’t about technology. It’s about conversation.

### Why social media is important in Scotland

Increasing numbers of people in Scotland are using it to get their news, talk to their friends and join in conversations. They are also using social media to voice their opinions, share positive and negative experiences, laud their heroes and criticise what they don’t like. Nobody has to wait until the local paper is published before finding out breaking news when it is on social media.

And this is what can help you as an elected member. It can help you listen to what people are saying in your village, town, city, island or county. It can help you mobilise support for a campaign, can help with casework and keep you connected with like-minded people from across Scotland, the UK and the world. We’ll talk more about this in a following chapter. First, you need to know the numbers because they’re just too big for you to ignore.

Of Scotland’s 5.3 million population, 60 per cent now have a social media profile. That works out to be more than 3.1 million. This compares with circulation figures of leading newspapers such as the Sunday Herald, The Scotsman and Scotland on Sunday all individually below 25,000.

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10. ‘Fall in Scottish Newspapers Circulation’, BBC website August 2015
How digitally connected is Scotland?

People are finding it easier to connect to the internet and by doing so use social media.

People in Scotland are using the internet more because there are better connections with 4G and broadband. Even in areas of low internet take-up the figure is climbing.

The knock-out figure is the amount of time adults spend on average online. That works out at 19.9 hours every week in Scotland.

19.9 hours spent online per week by Scottish adults

63% of Scots have a smartphone

78% Scottish households with a broadband connection

19.7% of Scottish households covered by outdoor 4G

What do adults in Scotland use the internet for?

It’s clear that the internet has changed how people communicate with each other. People still talk in the pub and over the kitchen table. It’s just that they do it on social media too and they can now easily connect to people all over the UK and across borders.

Importantly, it’s also a place where Scottish people will find out about current affairs. Social media is part of that change. In the Scottish Independence Referendum more people used social media than the mainstream media to make up their mind on how to vote.

69% of adults agree that technology has changed the way they communicate

66% say being online keeps them informed about current affairs and social issues

49% agree that being online helps them keep in touch with family & friends

39% adults who say social media influenced their vote in the Scottish independence referendum

34% adults who say newspapers influenced their vote in the Scottish independence referendum

One in five of Scottish online adults say they are ‘hooked’ on social media

8 out of 10 adults in the UK who have a social media account visit it every day.


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The age range of social media users
You may wonder who uses social media. It’s clear that the age of social media users is across the board.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>2014 % using social media</th>
<th>2015 % using social media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-24 years</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34 years</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>90</td>
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<td>35-44 years</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>45-54 years</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64 years</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>65+ years</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How elected members are using social media in Scotland
Social media is being used by elected members in Scotland in increasing numbers. In a survey conducted by the Improvement Service and answered by more than 100 elected members, engaging with the public was the overwhelming reason for using it – 97 per cent said they used it for this reason.

Knowledge gathering and local campaigning were the next most popular reasons, followed by political canvassing in fourth place.

Facebook has emerged as the most popular platform being used by elected members with almost 90 per cent. This is to be expected as Facebook is Scotland’s favourite social media channel.

Social media channels used by councillors in Scotland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a councillor in Scotland, what do you use social media for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaging with the public</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge gathering</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political canvassing</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party political purposes</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local campaigns</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other purposes</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Improvement Service, August 2015, with more than 100 respondents
How to get started with social media

Firstly, it’s always good if you can to sit down with someone who has used it for a while just to get a bit of an understanding of how things work with social media. Start with non-political conversation. It’s easier. Sit down with friends, family, other councillors or perhaps your council comms team if appropriate. Maybe it’s your football team or a hobby or interest. Make that a place to start.

We’ll talk you through the basics of using the main social media websites - or platforms as they’re also known - to give you a start. Before you do, here are a few things you’ll need to know and do.

A quick glossary of a few social media phrases that you may find strange

These are some terms and phrases you’ll come across if you use social media.

Platform – this is another name for a social media site.

Content, post or update – this is something you’ve written or a picture or video that you’ve added to your platform, page, profile or account.

Follower – this is someone who has opted to get updates from you on Twitter and some other social media sites.

Follow – this is when you choose to get updates from somebody else’s social media activities.

Like on Facebook – this is done by clicking a ‘like’ button on Facebook which is the thumbs up image usually found under a post, a picture or a video. You are telling people that you like or agree with what you’ve read, seen or watched.

Like on Twitter – this is the action when you click the ‘heart’ button on Twitter. It allows you to refer back to a particular tweet later. Other people can see what you’ve ‘liked’ too.

Share – by sharing, you allow your followers to see something you’ve seen and think is worth them seeing too.

Retweet or RT – this is the act of sharing something you’ve seen to your Twitter followers.

Stream or timeline – this is the list of updates that that you receive from people you follow.

Selfie – a picture of yourself taken by yourself or one of the subjects in the picture, usually with a smartphone

Hashtag – this is a way of connecting your content to a topic and make it easy for people to find it even if they don’t follow you. For example, #lovefife, #aberdeenshire or #gailidh. It can also be a useful way to quickly see what people are saying about that topic.

It won’t reach all, but social media will give you access to far more conversations and a far larger audience than ever possible before.
NINE things to remember

What goes online tends to stay online
An angry exchange or choice words in the pub can be overlooked and forgotten about. What you post online will stay there and may get shared with lots of other people, for both good and bad reasons.

Be yourself
That is: be honest about who you are and stand by what you post. Your profile is a representation of you and you should not put anything online that you do not want to represent you. Remember, standards of decency and the law applies. Your profile should have a picture of you on it.

Professional and council standards apply online too
If you behave inappropriately at a public meeting or a surgery there may be consequences. The same applies online. In addition, there may be occasions when you want to inform people of a planning application. You can do so, but don’t be drawn into expressing an opinion that you wouldn’t make to the Press.

Defamation can apply online too
There have been some high-profile examples of politicians defaming rivals online and being successfully sued. A councillor in Wales was forced to pay out £3,000 in damages, for example.14 Be careful. If in doubt don’t post.


Don’t forget to take a look at the Councillors Code of Conduct

The Standards Commission has guidance13 to help you understand and comply with the code.

It’s very important to note that the rules of good conduct set out in the code must be observed in all situations where you are acting as a councillor, including representing the council on official business. You should be mindful that your perception of when you are carrying out official business and when you are acting privately may be different to the view of the public.

Some questions to ask yourself:

- Are you clear about the capacity in which you are acting?
- Are you identifiable as a councillor?
- Are you using social media where you are identified as a councillor?
- Would your conduct bring your position or the council into disrepute?

If in doubt, speak to your Monitoring Officer so that advice can be sought and action taken to prevent a situation where a complaint could be made against you.

Don’t forget to look at your council’s Social Media and IT policies

Check what your council’s policy is on IT and social media. If you disagree, as an elected member you should feel able to challenge it through the appropriate channels. But remember, council officers are not allowed to support members on party political matters.

**You can’t control the internet**
Some politicians across the world have tried but none have really succeeded. It may be tempting, but don’t think you can control what others are saying. It’s a conversation that you can take part in.

**Sometimes people will say nasty things**
Sometimes people in public life can be singled out for abuse. There’s no getting away from this but this is the exception rather than the rule. If people criticising you have the wrong information, by all means talk to them. But if they are being sarcastic or downright abusive there’s little point in engaging. On most platforms you can choose to completely block these voices from your account. But use this function with great caution as social media communities normally don’t like what they can often see as unwarranted censorship.

**Beware of just being party political**
There is a school of thought among councillors themselves that overtly party political updates just switch residents off. Some don’t talk about party politics at all. Others do all the time. Others will talk about day-to-day matters 80 per cent of the time leaving the rest to talk a little about politics. Whatever route you take you’ll need to think about the equipment you use if you are using social media. As the Councillors’ Code of Conduct says, elected members are only allowed to use council-provided equipment and facilities for carrying our council duties and not for party political purposes or campaigning.

**Use a smartphone or a tablet**
Having the right tools is important and while you can just use a PC, a smartphone or a tablet is invaluable as you’ll be able to use your social media site on the go and get access to the dedicated and easy-to-use apps that most social media platforms offer. Using an Android smartphone, Windows phone or an iPhone makes using social media much easier. You’ll find this gives you the ability to use social media sites more effectively.

We also strongly recommend that mobile phones and tablets are not disabled to stop them from using the camera or other parts of the equipment.

**Social media is an addition**
Social media is not the only, but another, channel or way to reach your constituents, your colleagues, the media, the experts, the interest groups and pretty much anybody. It won’t reach all, but social media will give you access to far more conversations and a far larger audience than ever possible before.

But isn’t social media just full of cat pictures? Almost seven in 10 people in Scotland see social media as a way of keeping up with current affairs.
General tips for posting on social media

Often elected members will wonder what to post. You probably won’t be short of things, but remember:

Before you post ask yourself: ‘Would I say this to my boss, a reporter or my mum?’ If the answer is yes then you should be fine. If you hesitate then it’s probably best not to post it.

Don’t post after you’ve had a drink… or others could have had a drink. Some elected members make a point of not posting late on a Friday night, for example, because there may be a few people the worse for wear spoiling for a fight.

Never argue with someone who is argumentative. This is good advice for life. If you argue back with someone online who is argumentative, it just looks like two argumentative people having a spat to an onlooker. Besides, people will favour the underdog. But remember that fair critique is worth discussing and listening to.

Pictures and video work well. People like images so if you can, take a picture or some footage. On most smartphones this is really straightforward to do. It’s good practice to ask for permission of the subjects before posting a picture you’ve taken. It’s not a good idea to use official council pictures. This is because public money has been used to commission them and they can’t be used on a party political website. If official pictures have been posted to a council social media site that’s fine to share. Often social media sites will allow sharing on the site under their terms and conditions.

Respect privacy. If someone has approached you with case work you would respect their privacy. Keep this in mind on social media as well. The same applies to not disclosing confidential council information or documents that you only have access to because you are a councillor.

Talk about where you are and what you are doing. Often you’ll be meeting interesting people or talking about things which affect people’s lives. Share the interesting stories on social media if they can be an inspiration to, or help, others. Often what you or the people you meet might think is everyday can be really interesting to others.

Be human. People will warm to you if you are being down-to-earth, you don’t use jargon or council-speak and if you talk about non-council things. It’s fine to talk about how the Scottish national football team did or a TV programme you watched. It makes you more rounded. However, remember that some subjects can be very emotive.

Go to where people are. In the same way that you pay more attention to the place with the largest audience away from the internet, do so online too. So, by all means attend the town meeting or write a letter to the letters page. But if there’s a Facebook group in your community - join it as well.

How often to post. Post regularly. Add things that would benefit your followers or tell people a little about you. Three or four times a week on Facebook is about the limit. Three or four times a day on Twitter. But as with any social media site, have a look at what other people are doing.

You’re not always on call. Your times and dates of your surgery are known in advance. Don’t feel as though you have to be available 24 hours a day. You may like to say in
your profile – that’s the part where you can tell people about yourself - when you’ll look at the account and when you won’t.

Don’t broadcast. It doesn’t work. What works best is two-way discussion. This is a conversation, remember?

Know the policy. Your council may well have an existing IT or social media policy. Remember, that you are likely to be governed by that.

Social media isn’t about technology. It’s about social media

A campaign.
A petition.
A community event.
A sunrise, flowers and other things that make you happy.
Historic old photographs.
Sharing other people’s updates if they are about the area.

How to make the most of social media to connect

So, we now have an understanding of why social media is important. Experience shows that there are a number of ways that it can help you do your job.

Subjects that work well

It can help you signpost to services
By signposting to a council account and online content, you can encourage the use of existing council online services for a positive customer experience. This will also demonstrate the connections between council policies and services to both constituents and staff. Increasing numbers of council officers are working on digital services or using social media in their professional role.

It can help you represent your ward
If you listen, social media can give you real-time information on what is happening in your ward, in the council area, in Scotland, UK and the rest of the world. When added together it can bring an overall benefit to how you represent your ward. It also lets people see the day-to-day work that you are doing.

It can help mobilise support for a campaign
This can work for UK-wide campaigns such as the Motor Neurone Disease Association, which raised £7m from the ice bucket challenge, or for more local ones. For example, the Gallan Head Community Trust is using Facebook and Twitter to rally support for the buyout.
and development of a former MoD base. As a councillor you can plug into existing campaign networks or your own networks of support.

**It can help test the temperature of public opinion**
If anything, social media can make it easier for you to listen. Complaints about an issue can flare up online before they arrive as an issue at a ward surgery. An idea tested in a village Facebook group can gather vital insight before money is committed. However, remember that online communities are seldom representative samples of real-life communities and vice versa.

**It can help you shape or explain your policy**
If you feel a policy decision is being misrepresented then you can use social media to talk to residents directly. This isn’t a magic wand, just as addressing a public meeting isn’t, but it does allow you to join in the conversation.

**It can help with the scrutiny process**
Scrutiny is an important part of the democratic process. Those charged with this can tap into social media to gather insight and campaign, and the council itself can encourage openness to help arrive at better decisions. Use social media to gain knowledge from people who care about or live in the communities your decisions will affect.

**It can help people know about the decision-making process**
Sometimes there’s a difference between what people want and when it can be delivered. Social media can help to set out timelines and explain next steps.

**It can help gather casework**
The elected member who is plugged into the online life of their community can see issues as they arise and be on hand to help. Membership of a Facebook group can allow a councillor to hear and understand the concerns of their communities.

**It can connect you with your political network**
Being a councillor in a multi-party democracy often means being connected to a larger movement which is endlessly debating and refining policies. Social media can plug you into what senior figures are thinking as well as the official take on issues. ‘Where else,’ as one councillor put it, ‘can I find out what my party leader thinks within five minutes of an event happening?’

**It can help give you moral support**
Being a councillor can also feel lonely at times and there’s benefit from being online and connected to a fellow councillor who is also facing those challenges. Party politics is often irrelevant and elected members can often forge connections based on shared frustrations.

**It can supply answers to problems**
Across the 32 councils of Scotland, and wider across the UK, solutions are being worked on to complicated and tough problems. An appeal across Twitter, for example, can yield examples in other parts of the country where potential solutions are being tried. Some of those may work for you. One council officer described this as ‘Encyclopedia Twittanica.’

**It can help in an emergency**
When incidents happen, people want to know there and then. Often, they do this through social media; they don’t want to wait for STV to send a news camera or for the Glenrothes Gazette to be printed. Twitter is often the first port of call for breaking news about emergencies like landslides, flooding or an explosion. As an elected member, being able to find out may prove priceless. But be wary of the validity of the information as disinformation can be common. Look to share emergency services’ own social media accounts and those of your own council.

More than 90 per cent of 16 to 34-year-olds use social media.
How to get on some of the main social media sites

You’ve only got a limited amount of time. It’s best to choose one social media platform to use first. Get to know it and then think about learning another. Most social media platforms are well suited for cross-sharing, so content created for one platform can often be easily distributed on another once you get used to it. This section shows some of the basic things you’ll need to know and some help with getting you started.

There are dozens of social media sites – we’re showing you four of the main sites.

How to get started on Facebook

Platform: Facebook
How many adults in Scotland use it? 80 per cent
What is it best at? Text, pictures, links and video
What are the advantages? The most popular social media site in the world, UK and Scotland. This is where the broad spread of the population is. Links, pictures and video spread fast. Facebook is also a good pace to share content from other internet and social media sites. It can also be an effective way to reach community groups which are often on Facebook.

Councillor Case Study

“I don’t have a fixed schedule for surgeries; I’ll come meet people wherever they are and whenever suits them. And people get in contact with me through Twitter, Facebook, email, text, phone, or letter. I have never once had any complaints that people can’t get in touch with me or find me inaccessible.

“I have used Twitter from before I was a councillor, in part because I was aware that it was a good tool for campaigning and getting my message out – nobody will read my blog or other information if it just sitting by itself on a website. I initially mostly broadcasted but Twitter is a medium that lends itself to informality and there’s nothing more boring than a politician that just broadcasts and uses a statement tone all the time. Over time it became more interactive for me and I moved from broadcasting to dialogue.

“On social media there’s an expectation that you answer straight away. That is both good and bad. Often you will need to reflect on something, pass information on to council officers or you might not be able to help, but I always try and acknowledge a request. I’ve lost count of the number times I’ve received thanks for responding so promptly, even when I didn’t agree or wasn’t able to help. I know that social media doesn’t do exactly the same thing as surgeries but it does expand your accessibility.”
What are the disadvantages? As Facebook is the most popular platform, it’s also the noisiest. Because of the way Facebook works, only a part of your followers will see what you post.

The first steps...

Starting your Facebook account is pretty straightforward. Facebook has its own set of terms and conditions. This is the legal agreement you must agree to when you sign up. This governs what you can do and not do. For elected members, it can seem quite woolly and council legal teams may interpret them differently. You may want to ask their opinion.

How you set up your account may affect how you can use Facebook as a councillor.

There are many different types of Facebook account for different types of user and each does slightly different things. There are two types that you could use as a councillor – a personal profile or a page, but either way you will have to start with a personal profile.

Firstly, sign-up as yourself. You’ll need to have an account in your own name. You’ll be asked a series of questions about yourself, such as your birth date, email address, where you live, what your job is and what interests you may have. Sign-up instructions are easy to follow.

Add a profile picture of yourself. It’s far better to have a picture of yourself than to leave it blank.

Make friends. You can do this by searching for friends on Facebook or by letting Facebook check your email directory. Facebook will also suggest friends based on the information you give about yourself and what you like. If you are using your profile as a councillor your ‘friends’ will be professional and constituents rather than real family and friends.

Find your way around. At the top of the page you’ll see a dark blue line. On the right hand side you’ll see your profile picture and name. The main part of the screen is filled with the stream. That’s where things you’ve posted and what other people you are friends with have posted.

Set your privacy. On the blue border at the top you’ll find a lock symbol. This is where you can restrict who sees what you
You can restrict it to your friends. Often people will keep their profile for friends and family. That’s fine. Just remember, there’s no such thing as entirely private - that whatever you do post can find its way onto the wider internet. Again, your privacy settings will be tighter if you use your profile for personal use and pretty much open if you’re using it as a councillor.

**Post something.** You’ve done the hard work. Now just write something. The more you read of what other people are writing and sharing the better you’ll get. Text is good, but pictures and video get more attention. You can also share links. These are the addresses of webpages you may have seen that you think your followers would be interested in. Remember, you are responsible for what you share so don’t share something inappropriate.

You’ll know if people are liking and engaging with what you’ve posted quite easily. If people ‘like’, comment favourably or share your post you know you are doing the right thing.

**The next steps...**

You’ve got to grips with the basics and you’ve made a few friends. You’ve seen what other people are doing. You can carry on with a Facebook profile. But most people like to have a bit of separation between their private life and their political life. At this point you can set up a Facebook page as a councillor, but bear in mind that there are some things that you can’t do there that you can with a personal profile. You may think some of these things are essential to your work as a councillor.

**Facebook pages**

Groups, politicians or organisations are encouraged to have a page on Facebook. You can ‘like’ these while you are using your personal profile which means you’ll receive some, but not all, news from them in your newsfeed.

If you set up your own page you get lovely statistics about how many people see what you post, how your followers are growing, where your followers are from – you don’t get these with a personal profile.

You can set up your page as an individual councillor or maybe as a group of councillors representing an area.

If you set yourself up with a Facebook page no-one can see or click through to your personal Facebook profile.

**Facebook Groups**

These are just what they say. There are many types of groups on Facebook but the ones you’re likely to want to have a look at are locality groups and campaign groups you may have in your area.

For instance, there are probably Facebook groups for each of the communities in your ward and their members will be residents talking about everything — potholes, bad driving, lost dogs and the school Christmas fayre. This is where you can keep your ear to the ground for public sentiment and also ask questions about what people think about policy. Campaign groups are also worth joining, both to listen in to conversations and possibly to join in where appropriate.

You can only join a group with your personal profile NOT as a Councillor page.
What’s the difference between a Facebook profile, page or group?

**Profile**

**What is it?**
That’s your own profile with your name and details.

**Can anyone see what you post?**
Yes, until you change the privacy settings to make them a bit more restrictive. People ask to be your friend to see your restricted content.

**Page**

**What is it?**
A page is a business, organisation or individual who wants to connect more widely across Facebook.

**Can anyone see what you post?**
Yes. People can ‘like’ and then follow what you post. You don’t have to approve each new person.

**Group**

**What is it?**
A place where like-minded people can meet and chat.

**Can anyone see what you post?**
If you set one up you can make a group open or closed and decide who becomes a member.

How to build your Facebook following

There are a few ways. But the bottom line is that you need to post things that people will find interesting. Take a look at the general advice for posting on social media section on p20.

Other places for information

*The Beginners Guide to Facebook* – a basic guide from social media site Mashable. (http://mashable.com/2012/05/16/facebook-for-beginners/#gqWkYi0faqi)

Councillor Case Study

“I have a personal Facebook profile which I utilise for personal use and have set up a Facebook page for some of my council work. This way I can keep both areas separate from one another.

“I’ve found Facebook to be an excellent tool in advancing my efforts to encourage transparency and local democracy.

“How often I post very much depends on specific events but my posts on Council plans have reached thousands of interested people. I use it to help test public opinion and gauge people’s views. On one issue I’ve had more than 30,000 views and received more than 550 comments. This is hard evidence of what people actually think on council matters.

“Dependant on time constraints, I will respond to some comments but, to be honest, it all depends on how much time I have.”
How to get started on Twitter

This is one of the larger sites with 300 million users worldwide. It restricts you to a limited number of character updates known as ‘tweets.’ It’s useful for a number of things, in particular breaking news.

“Twitter contains information you will find valuable. Messages from users you choose to follow will show up on your home page for you to read. It’s like being delivered a newspaper whose headlines you’ll always find interesting – you can discover news as it’s happening, learn more about topics that are important to you, and get the inside scoop in real time.” – Getting Started With Twitter.15

Platform: Twitter

How many adults in Scotland use it? 32 per cent

What is it best at? Text, pictures, links and video

What are the advantages? Twitter is the go-to channel for breaking news, as information and links are very quickly shared. You don’t have to tell people lots about yourself and you can reach people with an update more easily. It’s also closely monitored by journalists giving you a route into traditional media too. Very good for current event coverage. Easy to make connections that are less personal than for example Facebook.

What are the disadvantages? You are limited in how much you can write. It is very quickly updated and people mostly only read content recently posted.

Councillor Case Study

“Twitter is an instant reaction medium so pictures and graphics usually work well and are shared more widely than text. A visual can positive or negative: an overflowing bin or a blocked drain; but equally a positive picture of how good the local park is looking or of a team of volunteers involved in a community project.

“It also helps me, when people send me pictures with the issues they have and want me to react on. I can’t visit every street of my ward all the time, so when people send me a picture of a full bin or a blocked drain it helps me assess and understand the issue much quicker and I can pass this on to the right services.

“The council neighbourhood team for my local area is quite active on Twitter. When I alert them by including them in a reply they will react quickly and contact the right services and this helps me a lot.”

15. ‘Getting started with Twitter’, Twitter. Available at: https://support.twitter.com/articles/215585?lang=en
The first steps...
The first step is to go to twitter.com on the internet. Add your details. You’ll need to think of a Twitter name or handle. This begins with an “@”. For example @CllrJoeBloggs or @josephbloggs. The handle is your Twitter address. You can decide to change the details displayed to others at any time, but your address will stay the same. You can learn more about creating a Twitter profile on the site.16

When you first sign-up, Twitter will ask you what sort of things you are broadly interested in and give you some options of people or organisations to follow. You can skip past this stage if you prefer. Add a picture of yourself. People respond to people.

“When you follow people, their tweets instantly show up in your timeline. Similarly, your tweets show up in your followers’ timelines. To see interesting tweets, follow interesting people: friends, celebrities, news sources or anyone whose tweets you enjoy.” - The Story of a Tweet, Twitter17

In the top left hand corner there’s your name and a profile picture if you’ve added one, the number of tweets you’ve sent and the number of followers you have. Followers are people who have opted in to get tweets from you. There’s also a number for the people you are following, in other words, Twitter accounts from which you’ve opted to get tweets.

The next steps...
As a councillor you don’t want to be anonymous. Follow people and let them follow you. You can restrict content to those people you have allowed as followers, but this is probably not something you would want to do as an elected member.

Just because you are following a Twitter account doesn’t mean you are telling people you subscribe to those views. For example, the Cabinet Office account in Westminster @cabinetofficeuk follows the left wing newspaper The Morning Star on Twitter @M_Star_Online just to hear what it is saying.

How do you build your followers? There’s a number of ways but don’t fall into the trap of thinking that big numbers is big influence. If all your followers live in the US that may not help you in your job as a Scottish councillor.

• Firstly, run a search on something you are interested in. It may be Munro-bagging, fishing, Falkirk FC or cooking Italian food. Follow some of those people or organisations. It’s fine to have non-political interests. It’ll make you more rounded.

• Follow accounts from relevant professional accounts like @improvserv (Improvement Service) or @scotgov (Scottish Government), but focus on accounts from your area, like the council account, the local newspaper and the paper’s journalists, your community council and other community groups. And then look at who they follow – this might give you inspiration for more accounts to follow.

• Share interesting and relevant tweets you may have seen. For example, a table top sale shared by a local charity account. That has the twin benefit of helping the charity and also making what you post helpful and interesting.

• Add your Twitterhandle – such as @CllrJoeBloggs - to leaflets, your website, email footers and to posters.

16. ‘Signing up with Twitter’, Twitter. Available at: https://support.twitter.com/articles/100990
17. ‘The story of a Tweet’, Twitter. Available at: https://about.twitter.com/what-is-twitter/story-of-a-tweet
• A hashtag is a word or phrase that starts with the # symbol. It can be a way to connect you to a conversation around an issue, place or event being discussed online. When you click on a hashtag it allows you to search all tweets that are contributing to the discussion. You can find like-minded people this way. You can start your own hashtag on an issue but do check to see that it’s not being used for some other purpose first. You can do this by using Twitter’s search box.

• Start a conversation. You can do this by using another person or organisation’s Twitter name or handle – such as @comms2point0 or @danslee. When you tweet, include this to help ensure they see it. You can include the handle anywhere in the tweet. If you start a tweet with the Twitter handle, only the account or accounts you are addressing will normally see the tweet in their timeline, but it will still be public.

Useful places for information

‘Getting Started With Twitter’ – Twitter’s own guide. Available at: https://support.twitter.com/articles/215585

‘Twitter for Beginners’ – A basic Twitter guide from social media site Mashable. Available at: http://mashable.com/2012/06/05/twitter-for-beginners/

‘LGA Digital Council: Case studies: Councillors’ – A list of case studies on how elected members are using Twitter in England & Wales. Available at: www.local.gov.uk/digital-councils/go-further/-/journal_content/S6/10180/6961526/ARTICLE

Councillor Case Study

“I’d been asking folk how they wanted to get in touch with me, and whether or not I needed to expand my availability and accessibility, as it were. I got a clear message that people felt it was more convenient for them to contact me through Facebook and Twitter rather than having to remember my phone number or use email.

“I’ve used Facebook in my personal life since its inception and Twitter since I became a councillor in 2012. I would say between 30% and 40% of my casework comes from social media. I’m aware of confidentiality issues so if someone comes to me on my page, I get them to email my council email or private message me to protect them and then cut and paste the details into a Word file, which I then upload to my caseload tracking system. I’m sitting with 40 or 50 open cases at any one time and this allows me to keep on top of what’s happening.

“I’ve got a good reputation for getting back to people quickly and that’s important to me. I’ve integrated social media as part of the day job, I would be lost without it and it’s a major part of the day job now.”
How to get started with YouTube and video

YouTube is a hugely popular website that hosts videos that have largely been shot by people rather than TV stations or filmmakers. It’s a good way to show some of your own video or for you to dip into a huge library of videos that can then be shared.

People can search YouTube on a keyword or subject. YouTube content is not just current - many of the videos are several years old.

You can shoot video with a smartphone or a digital camera and upload it to YouTube. You can then email a web link to the film to send to as many people or journalists as you like.

We recommend you get permission from those being filmed and not to film on private land without permission. You can also use YouTube links on your Twitter and Facebook accounts.

Platform: YouTube
How many adults in Scotland use it? 70 per cent
What is it best at? Video
What are the advantages? Video is hugely popular and growing in popularity. There are billions of hours of content on YouTube. You can shoot a video with your smartphone and upload and edit it within minutes.

What are the disadvantages? It does take a little time to master shooting video and then posting it to the internet, and creating interesting videos takes practice. YouTube links are easy to share on other social media platforms.

The first steps...
Go to youtube.com. You don’t need a YouTube account to watch videos but you do if you want to upload video.

Sign up to Google. First, you’ll need a Google account. You can do this by following the instructions on www.gcflearnfree.org/googleaccount.

Sign-up to YouTube. Once you have set up your Google account, go to youtube.com and log in to create a “channel” with your profile. Do so in your own name or the name of a political party. Video shot and uploaded can be stored there indefinitely. Some people use the same profile picture and name across all of their social media accounts so that people know they all belong to the same person.

The next steps...
Shoot some video using your smartphone. Download the YouTube app and you’ll be able to upload the video pretty much seamlessly. If you have an iPhone, the iMovie application works well and can be used with a bit of practice. If you have an Android phone, the KineMaster application does a similar job.

Tips for YouTube and video
YouTube is one of the largest social media sites and has for years been the place to go for video.

Keep it brief. Sixty seconds is ideal. Don’t post more than three minutes because the vast majority of your audience won’t stick around to watch it.

Include residents where you can. Videos of talking heads can be a bit limiting so if there are residents who don’t mind being filmed that’s excellent. Be careful. Whatever they say, you as a publisher are responsible for it. It’s not a good idea to publish swearing or accusations. But videos of a celebration or an event can work well.
**Explanation or demonstration videos work well.** Search for a YouTube video of how to change a bike tyre on YouTube and you’ll find several videos with six-digit viewer figures.

**Sharing.** On your other social media accounts it’s fine to share a YouTube video posted by someone else. For example, the main council account or MacMillan Cancer Support. However, take care over the content as you could be held responsible if it is inappropriate.

**Other sites for video.** An alternative to YouTube is Vimeo, which works much in the same way but with greater controls on the comments. You can also add up to 30 seconds of video to Twitter, six seconds using the Vine app and up to 15 seconds using Instagram. Facebook can also store long videos of up to 20 minutes, but they are currently less searchable than on YouTube.

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**Councillor Case Study**

“I tend to use Facebook and Twitter in real time, posting as I go so that it doesn’t become an extra job, but I devote maybe an hour or two a week to my blog. I decided to keep my blog on WordPress which means that the software behind the blog is automatically updated.

“I use tags on WordPress to try and increase the visibility of my posts online for relevant searches. For each post, I’ll add between 10 and 15 tags or keywords taken from words in my post, things like very specific geographic mentions, road names or local community groups in my ward. This means that while I might not get that many views for general searches, I’ll come up on the first page of Google search results whenever someone is searching using the terms I’ve tagged.

“The more things you start, the more you have to maintain, so I use WordPress tools to automatically post new blog posts on to Twitter and Facebook to save time.”
How to get started with LinkedIn

This is a network primarily used by professional people. The emphasis is on work and career rather than holiday pics. But that doesn’t mean it’s only for people trying to get new jobs. It’s excellent at talking business to business or council to business.

The great strength of LinkedIn to an elected member is that it can bring you into contact with the business community. If regeneration or consulting with business is part of your remit a LinkedIn profile is a major asset.

Platform: LinkedIn

How many adults in Scotland use it? 29 per cent

What is it best at? Mainly text

What are the advantages? Used by professional people mainly as an online CV and for networking. Good for engaging business people.

What are the disadvantages? Less social interaction and it takes lots of practice to master engaging with other users. More powerful for paying users. More professional in tone and manner and limited to reaching professional people.

The first steps...

Go to LinkedIn.com and create a profile. You’ll be asked a few questions about where you worked and what qualifications you have and where from. Don’t forget to add a profile picture.

The next steps...

You can join groups around a geographical area or a trade. This is a place where people with a shared common interest can go. For example, Stirling Business Connections or the Highlands & Islands Food and Drink Forum. It’s fine to ask a question but the time it takes for answers to come back is appreciably longer than on other sites.

Tips

Connect. As with any social media platform it’s about conversation so you need to connect with others. You can use your email contacts lists automatically in many cases for sending out invitations to connect.

Be yourself. Think of LinkedIn as a business breakfast or meeting that you might want to attend to meet business people, to understand their points of view and to explain yours.

Be professional. This is not the place for holiday snaps or photos of your dinner. LinkedIn is altogether more professional and work-related.
How to get started with a blog

Blogs have been an enduring platform for people from all walks of life to present their views. Elected members can present their opinions and campaign as well as ask questions.

Platform: Wordpress.com or Blogger.com
How many adults in Scotland use it? n/a
What is it best at? Text, images and video.
What are the advantages? Can present views and ask questions. A blog post can be then shared across social media. Text online can be re-used in leaflets.
What are the disadvantages? It can take time to build an audience.

Blogs can be used by residents, businesses and community groups as well as political parties and politicians. Hyperlocal blogs, such as The Edinburgh Reporter\(^\text{18}\) or the Newtonmore Community site\(^\text{19}\), can help fill the gaps left by declining newsrooms and can give an extra voice to the local area. As an elected member, look to visit similar local sites and comment where you are able to contribute.

A blog post gives you the space to set out your views or the facts around an issue on a webpage that can then be shared across other platforms.

The first steps...

There are two main free-standing blogging platforms, WordPress.com and the Google-owned Blogger.com. However, WordPress.com is acknowledged as the better.

Go to wordpress.com and follow the instructions. You’ll need to think of a name for your blog and selecting a theme from the ones provided will change how it looks online. You can get the basics up in about 10 minutes.

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18. http://www.theedinburghreporter.co.uk

There are 3.1 million people in Scotland using social media.
“After two years of being a councillor I started to realise how little people know about what is going on within their council. I thought starting the blog was a way of letting the public know what’s happening.

“Initially I used the free version of WordPress then I paid to upgrade this as it gives better control over your blogs. For example, you can schedule blogs to be published on a certain day in advance.

“I have had a lot of feedback from people and while I only share my blog on Twitter and not Facebook, the paid for WordPress version allows me to see where referrals come from. Many of these do come from Facebook so other people are doing the sharing rather than me. Some posts generate more comments than others. I see these as an opportunity to continue discussions with people and if it’s looking as though we’re going to risk infringing someone’s privacy, I give them my contact details so I can continue to help them privately.

“I check each comment before it goes live to ensure no-one’s being defamatory but I will publish as many as possible as I believe in debate. It takes about 2 hours a week and I get between 100 and 700 page impressions per blog.”

What happens when it goes wrong?

Some practical advice

Of course, not everything always goes to plan and sometimes things don’t go the way you thought they would. Being an elected member is a difficult thing and thick skin is sometimes needed.

If you’ve dropped a clanger, apologise. You may have inadvertently said the wrong thing. It’s always good to put your hand up and acknowledge it if you have.

If people ‘troll’ you. Trolling is a form of bullying where people gang up to abuse and aggressively poke fun at an individual or an organisation. The likelihood is that this won’t happen, but if it does the best form of advice is to ignore them. The internet phrase is ‘do not feed the troll.’ Trolls love attention. Any kind. They hate being ignored. So ignore them. Remember that it is not trolling just because people criticise or disagree with you.

If you are worried about online security. Being hacked is a pretty rare event but it does happen from time-to-time. As with email, if you are sent a link and it looks suspect don’t open it. Just delete it. Change your password on a regular basis and don’t tick the ‘remember me’ box when you are using a public computer.
How to monitor social media

It can get noisy on social media with all the tweets, updates, pictures and videos flying around. You may not have time to listen to everything all the time.

If you have a social media account then we’d always argue that a quick check every day is helpful to see if people have sent you a message. Have a look. See if there is anything that needs responding to.

Secondly, run a quick search to see if there is anything people are talking about online. This could be the name of your ward or council area. It could be a search term on a pressing issue in your area, such as protests over a school closure.

To make this easier, there are free social media management applications that you can use such as Hootsuite (https://hootsuite.com) or Buffer (https://buffer.com) which you can use on your PC or smartphone. These can also give you some insight into how often people read or share your content.

86 per cent of councillors in Scotland who answered our survey use Facebook.

How and when to respond on social media

As you use social media more you’ll know when and how best to engage. Some councillors suggest not to use social media when you’ve had a drink of alcohol as your judgement may sometimes not be the best. That’s good advice.

There can be an expectation of quick responses on social media. Sometimes you can do that. Other times you can’t. When you can, try to engage.

We’ve drawn-up a flow-chart (overleaf) to help you.
You see content on social media about you or your work. Is it a positive, negative or neutral post?

**Positive**
A positive post can be liked, shared, commented on or left on its own. Do you want to respond?
- Acknowledge and join the conversation by commenting, liking or sharing if you want to.
- Let it stand.

**Negative**
Is someone just attempting to insult or agitate you? (Trolling)
- Are there erroneous facts in the posting and do you want to rectify?
- Is the posting result of a negative experience with your work and do you want to respond?
- Other factors: Base your response on present circumstances, time available, audience etc. Do you want to respond?
- Acknowledge and respond with factual information or signpost to where help can be found.
- If necessary, attempt to rectify or restore the situation and act upon reasonable suggestions.

**Neutral**
Is it a request or content where you can help with information?
- Acknowledge and respond with factual information or signpost to where help can be found.
- Other factors: Base your response on present circumstances.
- Monitor: Continue monitoring negative posts and consider monitoring positive posts.

When responding, always consider:

- Be transparent and honest about your connection to the content
- Be clear about sources and include links to them
- Take time to make your tone right and your response a good one
- Can you show what you’re about to post to your mother, boss or a journalist?
Where to go for more advice

There is a growing body of information and advice on how to use social media as an elected member effectively. Your Council Communications Team is there to support all elected members and can help advise you on how to make best use of social media.

Here are some other places to go for information that could help you.

**Digital Councils**
LGA guidance on using social media in local government.
www.local.gov.uk/digital-councils

**The Standards Commission for Scotland**
www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk

**The Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland**
www.ethicalstandards.org.uk