

Use of IT,
Websites & Social Media

Un Llais Cymru



One Voice Wales

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Social Media



A revolution has taken place in how we communicate. The world is experiencing its biggest ever change in how information is created and owned, as well as the speed in which it can be shared. This is changing the way we live, work and even how we speak and think. We live in an open, accessible and dynamic communications world; the use of social media will help ensure your voice is heard.

What is Social Media ?

Social media is a blanket term applied to a range of online multimedia tools that are used for creating content and two-way communication. They can be accessed via your Smartphone, PC, laptop, tablet or Smart TV. All social media accounts are free of charge and can be set up quickly and easily from an internet page. Some useful examples of social media include:

- ◆ **Blogs** – which are like an online diary journal where you can share information; examples are Wordpress, Blogger, and SimpleSite

Top tip:

Share your thoughts and activities, and comment on the issues that mean the most to you. Maintaining a regular blog could make compiling annual reports all the easier.

- ◆ **Micro blogs** – allow users to share shorter pieces of information. **X (was Twitter)** is an example of a micro-blog. Short messages which you post on **X** are each limited to 280 characters (letters, numbers and spaces). Messages are not a private means of communication and can be seen by anyone who is ‘following’ you. **X** also has a message facility where you can send messages directly to other **X** users. However, all such personally directed messages can also be viewed by all of your other followers. You can even forward other **X** users’ messages to your own followers, by using the ‘repost’ function. Messaging is a good way of promoting local events, giving live coverage at Council meetings and to give links to longer posts

Top tip:

Follow and be followed; **X** is a great tool for finding out what is happening and what people think of local and global issues. Listen first and then simply join in the conversation.

- ◆ **Social Networks** – such as **Facebook** are like having your own mini website which can include pictures and text and can provide information and photos. Typically these sites allow you to update people on what you are doing or thinking through a ‘status’ update and allow you to talk about who you are, what’s important to you, what you have done and your plans. You can invite people to be your ‘friends’ and also set different levels of access to your account, so some people can see all the information about you or you can make less detail available to others. You can also use Facebook to communicate with groups or individuals. People who find your page, comments or proposals of interest can ‘like’ you, which encourages further use, and is a useful way of taking a straw poll of your ideas

- ◆ **Linked-IN** – is a professional equivalent of Facebook. You can provide information about your career history and skills, and people with who you are ‘linked’ can endorse you for particular skills. This is a handy site for finding expertise and keeping up-to-date with business developments in your ward or area
- ◆ **Flickr/Vimeo/Instagram/You Tube** – are examples of platforms for sharing videos and photographs. Don’t forget to seek permission before taking photos to upload, or copying images from these sites. **Snapchat** is a photo messaging application for photo, video, drawing and text but is only a snapshot and can’t be kept or saved
- ◆ **Communities of Practice** – a way of like-minded people joining a community where they can share knowledge and discuss issues relevant to the community

Why Should You Use Social Media ?

Social media will allow you to open new conversations with the people you represent, and the potential for councillors using social media is huge. Your Council may already have official social media accounts.

What Are The Benefits To Councillors In Using Social Media ?

- ◆ Increasing numbers of people are using **X** and Facebook as their preferred method of communication. If you have a presence on these platforms you have the potential to establish two way communication with all of them
- ◆ It’s a useful way of finding out what people are talking about locally, their concerns and interests
- ◆ It’s useful for finding out about breaking news, the latest research or publication or the latest policy announcements from political parties
- ◆ It’s a good way of making the community more aware of the work you do personally
- ◆ Social media allows you to have a conversation with a range of people that you would never be able to physically meet and who do not traditionally seek out their local representatives
- ◆ Social media allows for immediate communication, you can pass on information and receive opinions in minutes. You can forward information from other people equally quickly. ‘Going Viral’ is not necessarily a bad thing, and refers to a mass spreading of a piece of information around the world
- ◆ The local and sometimes national press will follow councillors’ on **X** or Facebook. This means that they know what you are talking about the minute you talk about it
- ◆ Social media is mobile; you can take it around your community, on the train, to a coffee shop or coffee morning or even in bed
- ◆ You can upload pictures and videos, showing for example your role in local events, pictures of potential sites for development, new buildings, and local eyesores, a picture tells a thousand words
- ◆ It’s free and you probably already have the equipment you need; all you need is time
- ◆ It can be a lot of fun

How to Use Social Media Effectively

Choose your medium and sign up. This is very straightforward and will take you less than five minutes. Facebook and X are good places to start; you might want to begin with a trial personal account (rather than calling yourself ‘Councillor Jones’) and experiment with family and friends. Make sure that you understand how people find you and who can access your material.

REMEMBER

- ◆ On Facebook you can control who has access to different parts of your account and you can manage what the world sees and what your ‘friends’ see
- ◆ On X the whole world can see everything you tweet, even the messages that you tweet directly to other people can be viewed by anyone unless you have locked down your account to followers
- ◆ When you are ready to set up your final account, consider the identity you use. The name you give yourself online is important as it allows people to find you; prefacing your X account with ‘@Cllr’ lets people know exactly who you are and indicates that the Code of Conduct will apply. You might want to consider setting up a separate personal and professional account; you can talk about the amazing food in the restaurant around the corner to your friends and followers in your personal account, and the plans for the new bypass to your friends and followers on your professional account. However, many councillors think that some of their personal comments help break down perceptions of councillors and proves that they are normal like everyone else
- ◆ Make it easy for people to find you online. Many people will start their search for the area that you represent, so make sure you mention your location frequently as that this will then be picked up by search engines. You will also want to make sure that your social media account details are on any business cards or correspondence
- ◆ Increase your web presence by linking to other people and sites, leave comments on others’ posts and encourage others to link with you. The more you are mentioned, the more people will find you
- ◆ Choose your friends on Facebook and who you would like to follow on X bearing in mind that people know who follow them and will often follow you in return. Find people on X with links to your community by searching using the ‘hashtag’ (#) symbol to prefix your search term for example #Vale, #Cardiff, #Swansea, #South West Wales etc.
- ◆ Be disciplined about making time available to write new content and answer your ‘friends’ and ‘followers’; a regular time each week to update your Facebook status and throughout the day to check X
- ◆ Decide on what you are going to talk about and how. This could be weekly updates of your own activities as a councillor ie. notice of events, public meetings or issues on which you would like feedback, not forgetting pictures. This works better on Facebook as you can include more detail. Remember a tweet is only 280 characters and tends to be more instant and timely

Bear in mind that information, sites and media change quickly; Facebook is already reporting a drop in users. Since Twitter changed ownership and became known as X its functionality and user numbers have changed. You may want to look at the new platforms like Mastodon or Threads too. Some current examples of information and useful sites see links **1-7** in **Appendix A – Useful Links**.

Top tip:

Remember using social media is all about two-way communication, it's good for providing information to your community or flagging up press statements, but it's better as a tool to get useful feedback. You will get feedback and you should expect some people to challenge your ideas or enter into a debate with you online. This is part and parcel of social media.

Etiquette and Style

- ◆ Keep your communications clear, positive, polite and professional. Plain language helps but be prepared to use and receive abbreviations, especially on **X** with a limited character count
- ◆ Avoid being ironic or sarcastic, it can be misinterpreted
- ◆ On Facebook, you will need to monitor and, if necessary, censor the contributions that other people make to your site; delete them if they do not match your required standards of behaviour or language. Defamatory and offensive language will be attributed to the publisher as well as the original author and could incur penalties. It is up to you to decide if you want to remove posts that disagree with your position, however if you do remove them you may be accused of censoring contributions
- ◆ On **X**, you can block people who are habitually offensive or vexatious. Remember however, blocking them only stops them engaging directly with you, their tweets will continue to be public to all of their followers
- ◆ If you don't have anything to say don't say anything. Even though it's tempting to let your followers know how busy you are they will soon become bored with constant updates on your day without some relevant or interesting information

Golden Rules

Think before you tweet or post on Facebook; do not say anything, post views or opinions that you would not be prepared to –

- ◆ Discuss face to face with the person you are speaking about/to
- ◆ Write on a placard and carry down your high street and discuss and defend with anyone who sees it
- ◆ Be prepared to have minuted in a public meeting, **X** or Facebook effectively publicly minutes everything for you as you go along
- ◆ Remember to try to keep tweets and texts separate. Many people tweet comments that they would previously have texted someone privately; this may be about meeting up later (do you want all your followers knowing your plans and gate-crashing your

lunch!?) through to ‘in’ jokes that could be misinterpreted. Don’t follow an individual unless you know them or have a good reason for doing so

- ◆ If you make a mistake admit it. Mistakes happen so don’t try to cover it up as there will always be a record of what you’ve said
- ◆ Don’t enter into unhelpful online arguments; remember all of your followers or friends will be witnessing this online. Ignore people or block them if they persist in vexatious comments
- ◆ Don’t tweet or post on Facebook when you are ‘tired’ or ‘emotional’ it’s probably sensible to turn off your phone at any time when you think your judgement may be impaired
- ◆ Bear in mind that it is possible for your followers and friends to be seen; do not follow or become friends with anyone you might have a business interest with which could be misconstrued
- ◆ Do not allow anyone else access to your social media accounts, protect your passwords, especially if you use a public computer
- ◆ Just like email you can get spam in social media. Be wary about direct messages via **X**, even from people you know with messages such as ‘Hi, have you seen this photo of you on **X**?’ Delete these before opening as the spam could then be sent to all of the people you are following or contain a virus

Top tip:

Remember that once you have said something it may be seen by millions around the world within minutes.

Possible Pitfalls and how to Avoid Them

Time and Commitment – Maintaining your social media accounts can take time. Many people start enthusiastically and then lose momentum. This is risky as friends and followers may think that you are inactive or, worse, unresponsive. To avoid this –

- ◆ Only set up accounts that you can manage, choose either **X** or Facebook if necessary. It is possible to set up links between the two which will save you duplicating information
- ◆ Set time aside regularly for updates and get used to communicating ‘on the hoof’

The Law – Councillors’ new to social media tend to be concerned about the legal implications. It is an important consideration, and some councillors and politicians have fallen foul of the law, but with careful use and following some ground rules you will be fine. The style of communication employed in the social media environment tends to be fast and informal; messages can appear lightweight and transitory. Whenever you post something on social media, it becomes a publication; you have effectively made a broadcast. As it is now in the public domain it is subject to both the ‘Code of Conduct’ and to various ‘Laws’. Conduct yourself on **X** or Facebook as you would in person.

Remember that according to guidance from the Ombudsman, the ‘Code of Conduct’ applies to you whenever you are ‘Conducting the business of your authority, acting, claiming to act or give the impression you are acting in your official capacity as a member or representative of your authority’. Also the code applies if you ‘Conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or your authority into disrepute’. If you can be identified as a councillor when you are using social media, either by your account name or how you describe yourself or by what you comment upon and how you comment, the requirements of the ‘Code of Conduct’ apply. For more information please visit link 8 in **Appendix A – Useful Links**.

Behaviour – In the same way that you are required to act in council meetings or in your communities you should –

- ◆ Show respect for others; do not use social media to be rude or disrespectful
- ◆ Not disclose confidential information about people or the council
- ◆ Not bully or intimidate others; repeated negative comments about, or to, individuals could be interpreted as bullying or intimidation
- ◆ Not try to secure a benefit for yourself or a disadvantage for others
- ◆ Abide by the laws of equality

Predetermination – As a councillor, you are aware that when you act in a quasi-judicial capacity, for example on a planning or licensing committee, you should not make up your mind about an issue that is to be formally decided upon before you have heard all the relevant information. You are allowed to be predisposed to a particular view but not to have gone so far as to have predetermined your position. It is important to remember therefore that anything relevant you might have said about particular issues on social media could be used as evidence of your having made up your mind in advance.

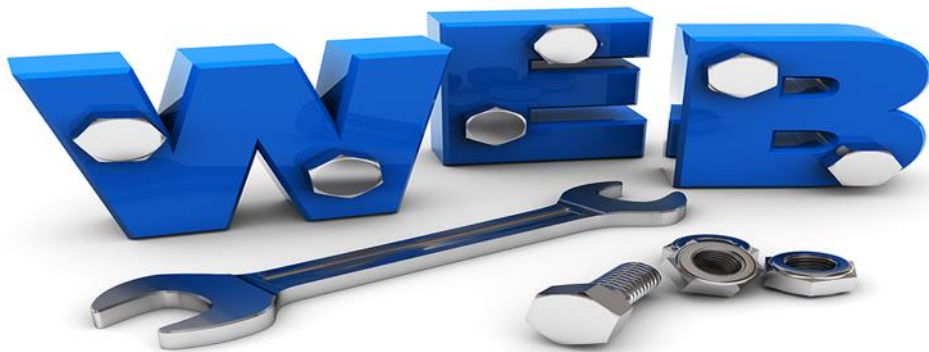
Criminal/Civil Offences – These generally apply to you already in your conduct as a councillor, but it is worth considering them as they apply to social media:

- ◆ **Harassment** – It is a criminal offence to repeatedly pursue a campaign against someone where this is likely to cause alarm, harassment nuisance or distress
- ◆ **Data Protection** – It is illegal to publish personal data about individuals unless they have given you their permission. As a councillor you are a data controller in your own right and therefore personally responsible for what you publish
- ◆ **Incitement** – It is a criminal offence to incite any criminal act
- ◆ **Discrimination and Racially Aggravated Offences (or any other protected Characteristic)** – It is a criminal offence to make a discriminatory remark about anyone based on a ‘protected characteristic’ as defined in The Equality Act
- ◆ **Malicious & Obscene Communications** – It is a criminal offence to send malicious or obscene communications
- ◆ **Defamation** – It is against the law to make a false statement about someone which damages their personal or professional reputation. Crucially, even if you simply retweet or pass on information originally posted by others, you may still be held equally as responsible as the original commentator. This can also apply to publishing

images. If found liable you could be ordered to pay a large sum of money in damages. For an example please see link **9** in **Appendix A – Useful Links**.

- ◆ **Copyright** – The legal ownership of the contents of documents, photos, videos and music belong to the person who created them. You could be in breach of copyright if you reproduce such material without the owner’s permission. Always ask for written consent before you use someone else’s material

What Makes a Good or Bad Website ?



What to Include

Sections 55-58 of The Local government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013 are concerned with access to information, in particular, access to information about Community and Town Councils. In summary, the Act requires Community and Town Councils to have websites, providing an efficient and effective means by which to inform, interact and consult with local community's. The Public Sector Bodies (Website and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 outlines the implications for councils to have "accessible" websites and media platforms and Section 55 of the Local Government (Democracy)(Wales) Act 2013 prescribes the information to be included.

The legislation requires specific documents be posted on websites, namely:

- Councils must publish electronically information about how to contact them and, if different, its clerk. The information must include a telephone number, an address and an email address, although a generic email address which a member, perhaps the Chair, could also access, would be advantageous. Councils will be expected, however, to have arrangements in place to ensure messages are regularly retrieved and responded to
- Councils must publish electronically information about each of its members ie. each member's name, their contact details, photographs if wished, political affiliation (if any) and any office held or committee they belong to within the council. If the community concerned is divided into community wards, the ward each member represents must be shown. It is not obligatory for individual members to have e-mail addresses
- Councils must also publish electronically the minutes of its meetings and, so far as reasonably practicable, documents referred to at those meetings. They must also publish their annual audited accounts electronically. In both these cases, Councils are only required to publish material produced after the date when section 55 of the Act came into force
- Under existing legislation Councils are required to post any public notices in one or more visible places within their area, and anywhere else which is suitable for giving publicity to the notice. The Act places an additional requirement on Councils to publish any such notice electronically
- Existing legislation also requires Councils to give notice of forthcoming council meetings at least three clear days before the meeting is to be held by displaying a notice in a visible place in the community. The Act places an additional requirement for such notices to be published electronically; again this must be done at least three clear days before the meeting. There is also a requirement to publish electronically, so far as is reasonably practicable, any documents relating to the meeting
- The Act contains new requirements relating to the registration of members interests. Section 81 of the Local Government Act 2000 requires a Community or Town Council, as well as other authorities, to maintain a register of members financial and other interests as are specified in the model code of conduct; up until now, the register only needed to be available for inspection at council offices but provision

made by the Act requires it also needs to be published and available to access electronically

Please note, however, Councils are not required to publish any information they are prevented from disclosing by any other legislation. These outline the minimum requirements, many Councils will want to publish far more information on their websites, however, Councils will need to have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authority Publicity when considering the appropriateness of what they wish to publish.

It is a decision for each Council to take as to whether they will operate their own independent website, or whether they decide to link up with other Council(s) in their area, or the principal council, or some other body which is happy to host their site. It is, however, a requirement there is a regularly updated website providing the public with the ability to access the information detailed above.

The Welsh Government intends to improve public engagement with local government generally and Community/Town Councils in particular and feel it now necessary for all local authorities to be contactable electronically and have published information accessible via the Internet as local residents would expect this facility in this era. The majority of Councils in Wales already have a presence online and publish information electronically. Community and Town Councils are urged to seek assistance from One Voice Wales, their Principal Council or other reliable sources if they need it to develop their web presence.

Information Management



Since the 1st January 2005 all requests for information received by a local authority have had to be answered in accordance with the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs). The only exception will be an individual's request for their own personal data which must be handled under the Data Protection Act 2018. In many respects these haven't fundamentally altered the way in which authorities interact with the public as for many years government departments have been required to respond to requests for information in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and the EIRs (1992). These regimes established that information should be disclosed wherever possible.

The access legislation is primarily about a culture change from 'need to know' to 'right to know'. For public authorities it represents a balance between greater openness and transparency of decision making on the one hand and the need to protect information where full disclosure would cause harm or be contrary to the public interest on the other.

What information is subject to the FOI Act and EIRs ?

All recorded information (apart from personal data) held by, or on behalf of, a public authority is within the scope of the FOI or the EIRs. The legislation applies regardless of age, format, origin or classification of information. It covers:

- ◆ files
- ◆ letters
- ◆ databases
- ◆ loose reports
- ◆ emails
- ◆ office notebooks
- ◆ videos
- ◆ photographs
- ◆ wall charts
- ◆ maps and so on..

It extends to closed files and archived materials as well as currently used information.

Freedom of Information & Environmental Information Regulations

What is Freedom of Information?

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act gives a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by an authority, subject to a number of exemptions. When individuals request information, they will be entitled to:

- ◆ be informed in writing whether the authority holds that information
- ◆ be supplied with the information if the authority holds it, subject to certain exemptions
- ◆ receive advice and assistance in formulating and pursuing their request

The identity of a person requesting information from the Council should normally be treated as confidential. This is in line with the Data Protection Act and the Information Commissioners advice; this also gives effect to the principal that freedom of information is

usually (but not always) 'applicant blind' i.e. the response to any request should not depend on the identity of, motive of or knowledge about, the requester.

The working assumption is that an authority should not release the names of an information requestor to any person either internally or externally, unless they fall under the following categories:

- ◆ the press
- ◆ businesses (only to confirm that it is a business requesting the information, individual names must not be given out)
- ◆ members of the public (only to confirm that it is a member of the public requesting the information, individual names must not be given out)

As with any working assumption there are cases where internal disclosure would be appropriate:

- ◆ where not doing so may cause a serious risk to staff or members of the public
- ◆ where the information requested may include significant personal data relating to the applicant in which case the application would need to be treated in part as a subject access request. Subject Access Request (SAR) is a request by an individual under section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998 to be informed what personal data the authority holds about them, what the authority is using it for, and who it may be disclosed to
- ◆ where there is a reasonable possibility that the information requested may include significant amounts of data supplied by or already known to the applicant in which case that information could be effectively removed from scope using the s21 exemption - 'information already accessible to the applicant'

The provision of advice and assistance is subject to a statutory Code of Practice issued under s45 of the FOI Act.

The FOI Act also requires all public authorities to adopt and maintain a **publication scheme**, which sets out what information the Council will make available to the public as a matter of course, when and how it is made available and whether the information is available free of charge or on payment.

The Act contains a number of exemptions. Some of these are 'absolute' but many are qualified in that they are subject to a public interest test.

What is Environmental Information?

In summary environmental information is any information in written, visual, aural, electronic or any other material form on -

- ◆ the state of the elements of the environment, such as air and atmosphere, water, soil, land, landscape and natural sites and the interaction among these elements
- ◆ factors, such as substances, energy, noise, radiation or waste, including emissions, discharges and other releases into the environment
- ◆ policies, plans, programmes, reports, environmental agreements, and activities affecting or likely to affect the environment
- ◆ cost-benefit and other economic analyses relating to the environment
- ◆ the state of human health and safety, including the contamination of the food chain, conditions of human life, cultural sites and built structures in as much as they are affected by the environment

Differences from FOI Act

Whilst EIR broadly mirrors the FOI regime there are a number of significant differences:

- ◆ FOI requests must be made in writing, EIR requests do not
- ◆ information held on behalf of a third party is not excluded
- ◆ response to FOI requests must be made within 20 working days; under EIR time taken to make a decision on exemptions is not included in the basic 20 day response period, however, you may unilaterally extend the basic 20 day response period to 40 days if the complexity or volume of information requested makes it impossible to comply with the request or make an exemption decision within 20 days
- ◆ there are no fees regulations as such but you may charge a reasonable amount, however, you cannot charge for information on public registers or for allowing inspection of documents at your offices
- ◆ there is a duty to progressively make information available by electronic means
- ◆ some exemptions are 'missing'; there is for example no exemption that disclosure might hinder the giving of advice or be prejudicial to the conduct of public affairs

Responsibility for FOI/EIR

All authorities should have a nominated officer to deal with FOI/EIR requests.

Fees and Costs Exemption

The ability to charge for supplying information is governed by the Fees Regulations. In practice this means most requests will be dealt with free of charge other than copying charges and as a matter of policy no charge should be levied for less than £10 as smaller sums are uneconomic to process. If the information is held electronically then no charge can be levied as information where practical should be issued to an applicant electronically; there is a duty to make information available by these means. You also cannot charge for information on public registers or for allowing inspection of documents at your offices.

Appendix A

USEFUL LINKS

- 1) X
<https://help.twitter.com/en/using-x/download-the-x-app>
- 2) Facebook - <https://en-gb.facebook.com/>
- 3) 21st Century Councillors (useful guidance for members using social media) –
<https://21stcenturypublicservant.wordpress.com/2016/07/18/the-21st-century-councillor-on-social-media/>
- 4) <https://www.ombudsman.wales/information-for-elected-members/>
- 5) ‘High Court: Sally Bercow's Lord McAlpine tweet was libel’ -
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-22652083>
- 6) Free AV software - <http://www.techradar.com/news/software/applications/best-free-antivirus-9-reviewed-and-rated-1057786>
- 7) Vision ICT - <http://www.visionict.com>
- 8) Choosing a domain name – <http://www.nominet.org.uk/uk-domain-names/registering-uk-domain/choosing-domain-name>
- 9) Choosing a registrar to register your domain name - <http://www.nominet.org.uk/uk-domain-names/registering-uk-domain/choosing-registrar>
- 10) Searching for a good web host - <http://www.wikihow.com/Choose-a-Web-Host>
- 11) Guide to Cyber Security -
https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/11.106%20Cyber%20Security%20councillor%27s%20guide_v04_WEB_0.pdf
- 12) Understanding accessibility requirements for public sector bodies

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>
- 13) NALC website accessibility guidelines:

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/publications/3597-website-accessibility-and-publishing-guidelines/file>

Appendix B

Understanding accessibility requirements for public sector bodies

See for full details: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>

Who has to meet the 2018 accessibility regulations

All public sector bodies have to meet the 2018 requirements, unless they are exempt.

Public sector bodies include:

- central government and local government organisations
- some charities and other non-government organisations

Understanding accessibility

Making a website or mobile app accessible means making sure it can be used by as many people as possible.

This includes those with:

- impaired vision
- motor difficulties
- cognitive impairments or learning disabilities
- deafness or impaired hearing

At least [1 in 5 people in the UK have a long term illness, impairment or disability](#). Many more have a temporary disability.

Accessibility means more than putting things online. It means making your content and design clear and simple enough so that most people can use it without needing to adapt it, while supporting those who do need to adapt things.

For example, someone with impaired vision might use a screen reader (software that lets a user navigate a website and 'read out' the content), braille display or screen magnifier. Or someone with motor difficulties might use a special mouse, speech recognition software or on-screen keyboard emulator.

Why making your public sector website or mobile app accessible is important

People may not have a choice when using a public sector website or mobile app, so it's important they work for everyone. The people who need them the most are often the people who find them hardest to use.

Accessible websites usually work better for everyone. They are often faster, easier to use and appear higher in search engine rankings.

Most public sector websites and mobile apps do not currently meet accessibility requirements. For example, a study by the [Society for innovation, technology and modernisation](#) found that 4 in 10 local council homepages failed basic tests for accessibility.

Common problems include websites that are not easy to use on a mobile or cannot be navigated using a keyboard, inaccessible PDF forms that cannot be read out on screen readers, and poor colour contrast that makes text difficult to read - especially for visually impaired people.

You may be breaking the law if your public sector website or mobile app does not meet accessibility requirements.

Welsh Government Guidance – Access to Information on Community and Town Councils

Status and Application

This guidance applies to Community and Town Councils in Wales. It is issued, in part under section 55(1) of the Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013. When carrying out their duties under section 55(1) of this Act Community and Town Councils have a statutory duty to have regard to this guidance.

This guidance also applies to the provision made in the Act concerning public notices, council meetings and proceedings and registers of members' interests.

Background

1. The Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013, referred to as “the Act” throughout this guidance, gained Royal Assent on 30 July 2013. Its primary purpose was to reform the constitution and functions of what is now known as the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission. The Act, however, introduced various other provisions connected with local government.
2. Sections 55 to 58 of the Act are concerned with access to information, and most particularly, access to information about Community Councils. (For the purposes of this guidance, any reference to a Community Council or Councils includes any Community, Town or City Council which serves a community or grouped community and was established in accord with Part II of the Local Government Act 1972 (“the 1972 Act”).
3. In summary, the Act requires Community Councils to have websites; to publish notices and papers electronically; and to publish their register of members' interests electronically (those maintained under section 81 of the Local Government Act 2000).

What the legislation requires

4. Section 55 of The Act requires Community Councils to publish electronically information about how to contact it and, if different, its clerk. The information which must be available electronically includes a telephone number, a postal address and an email address.
5. In addition, the council must publish electronically information about each of its members, including a list of the councils members, each member's name, their contact details, political affiliation (if any) and any office held or committee they belong to within the council. If the community concerned is divided into community wards, the ward each member represents must be shown.
6. The Community Council must also publish electronically the minutes of its meetings and, so far as reasonably practicable, documents referred to at those meetings. They must also publish their annual audited accounts electronically. In both these cases, councils are only required to publish material produced after the date when section 55 came into force. Community Councils are not required to publish any information they are prevented from disclosing by any other legislation.

7. In carrying out its duties under Section 55, Community Councils must have regard to this guidance.
8. Under existing legislation Community Councils are required to post any public notices in one or more conspicuous places within their area, and anywhere else which appears to be desirable for giving publicity to the notice (section 232 of the 1972 Act). The Act places an additional requirement on Community Councils to publish any such notice electronically.
9. Existing legislation requires Community Councils to give notice of forthcoming council meetings three clear days before the meeting is to be held by displaying a notice in a conspicuous place in the community. The Act places an additional requirement for such notices to be published electronically. This must be done three clear days before the meeting. There is also a requirement to publish electronically, so far as is reasonably practicable, any documents relating to the business to be transacted at the meeting. This requirement does not apply where the documents relate to business which, in the opinion of the council, is likely to be transacted in private or where the disclosure of such documents would be contrary to any other legislation.
10. Under Schedule 12 to the Act a group of local government electors may call a community meeting. Where a meeting has been convened those convening the meeting must give notice to the Community Council (if there is no Community Council established in the area notice must be given to the principal council in whose area the community lies). Under the new provisions, notice may be given to the Community Council either in writing or electronically. Where it is given in electronic form the notice must comply with the technical requirements set by the principal council.
11. Community Councils and Principal Councils must provide a facility for notices to be given electronically and public notice of the community meeting must be published electronically as well as through traditional mediums.
12. Finally, the Act contains new requirements relating to the registration of members' interest. Section 81 of the Local Government Act 2000 requires a Community Council (as well as other authorities) to maintain a register of members' financial and other interests as are specified in the model code of conduct. Up until now, the register only needed to be available for inspection at council offices. Provision made by the Act requires it also needs to be published and available to access electronically.

Guidance

13. It is a decision for each Community Council to take as to whether they will operate their own, independent website, or whether they decide to link up with other Community Councils in their area, or the principal council, or some other body which is happy to host their site. It is, however, a requirement there is a regularly updated website providing the public with the ability to access the information described above.
14. The Welsh Government intends to improve public engagement with local government generally and Community Councils in particular. We feel it necessary for all local authorities to be contactable electronically and have published information on the Internet. Local residents would expect to be able to have this facility in this era. The new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 outlines more specific implications for community and town councils to become more accessible with the ability for electronic agendas and multi location meetings (hybrid). Members of the public, the press and Councillors must be able to "hear and be heard" at community/town council meetings
15. The majority of Community Councils in Wales already have a presence online and publish information electronically. Community Councils are urged to seek assistance from

One Voice Wales, their Principal Council or other reliable sources if they need it to develop their web presence.

16. Under section 55, the Council must publish electronically its telephone number, postal address and e-mail address on the website. The information must also be available for the Council's clerk if it is different to the Council's contact details, although a generic e-mail address which a member, perhaps the Chair, to the council, could also use, would be advantageous. In some cases, the Community Council will have its own, or a share of, offices and the telephone number, postal address and e-mail address for these premises would be appropriate. Councils will be expected, however, to have arrangements to ensure messages are regularly retrieved and responded to.

17. It is not obligatory for individual members to have e-mail addresses. In a Principal Council this would be expected because the Council itself can usually provide e-mail addresses on the council's site. However, the members' names must be listed and details of how they may be contacted must be available online. Some councils will wish to place photographs of each member but this is a decision for them.

18. The Act requires the political affiliation of the members of the council is published. Some Community Councils choose not to do this at present. However, the public has a right to know the political persuasions of those in elected office or whether they are independent of any group. It is unacceptable for a member to hide their political affiliation if they have been elected on a political ticket, unless they have clearly breached with their political group since election.

19. If the Community Council is divided into community wards, the ward the member represents must be published. If they hold office of some sort in the council or belong to a council committee of some sort, it must be published on the site.

20. It is not necessary to delineate those members who were elected and those subsequently co-opted to fill vacancies. Co-opted members are full members of the council.

21. Paragraphs 4 to 12 above describe the documents which need to be posted on the website. Councils should develop procedures for keeping their site in good order, with past documents archived for a reasonable period, but easily accessible from the front page.

22. The Act provisions should be viewed as outlining the minimum requirements. Many councils will want to place far more information than this on their webpages and are encouraged to do so. Councils will need to have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authority Publicity when considering the appropriateness of what they may wish to publish.

One Voice Wales Website Guidelines

Introduction

Websites provide an efficient and effective means by which to inform, interact and consult with our local communities. However website development with community councils across Wales has developed in an ad hoc way over many years. Many Community and Town Councils have developed excellent dynamic websites enabling full interaction and consultation with their local communities but there are also a large number of councils who do not have a website presence on the internet at all and of course, many somewhere in between.

These guidelines have been produced by One Voice Wales to serve two clear purposes:

1. To support and encourage Community and Town Councils to develop a website.
2. To define a model, at two levels, for the content and functionality of a typical Community or Town Council website.

1. Support and Encouragement:

- For many Community and Town Councils the world of IT and the Internet is an area where many do not feel they have the relevant skills, knowledge or understanding in order to contemplate developing a website. The idea of these guidelines is to provide councils with a focus to develop confidence and to provide support for those councils seeking to implement their own websites. Councils wishing to develop a website can use the guidelines to provide a framework from which to work. There is also additional support available to councils through the One Voice Wales partner organisation.
- The guidelines are also intended to support Community Councils who already have a website to judge its scope and operability against the model criteria in order to ensure that it meets the required standard. Otherwise, the guidelines will point to the additional content or functions that are needed to ensure greater effectiveness.
- Additionally, websites are often seen as prohibitive in terms of cost and in terms of their potentially time consuming demands. One Voice Wales seeks to ensure that, through its established partnerships, the basic **Level 1** website, as detailed in the guidelines below, will be available to any council within a reasonable budget.

2. Website Content and Functionality

- Community and Town Council websites should provide an effective means by which to inform, interact and consult with the local community.
- These website guidelines seek to ensure that, in whatever community an individual may live across Wales, they will have access to a basic and consistent level of information and have the ability to communicate with the Council through such a website.
- These guidelines also outline the basic technical functions that should underpin a Community or Town Council website.
- One Voice Wales has kept these guidelines brief and understandable in order to focus on achieving a consistent approach to website development. Two levels of functionality have been defined. **Level 1** provides the minimal functionality and content that should be reached by any Community or Town Council website. **Level 2** includes additional functions that can be added to a website to further enhance the accessibility, interactivity and consultative opportunities within it. These additional functions can be added as and when any council decides to further develop its web presence.

Level 1 Website Criteria

Website Design

1. A website design that reflects the local community and environment.

2. A website with a Content Management System (CMS) to enable the full editing of every page to enable the website to be quickly and easily updated by the council staff, councillors or an agreed volunteer in order that the website is maintained and kept up to date, a key necessity for any website.
3. Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant. Within the DDA, a government sector website must have at least what is termed a w3c web content ability guideline at a level 2 compliance rating. The Local Government (Democracy)(Wales) Act 2013, s55 and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 outline the requirements to ensure that websites are accessible to everyone.
4. Website content available in both the Welsh and English languages.

Generic Website Content

1. Contact Information for Clerk including phone number and e-mail.
2. Background information on the area and community.
3. General enquiry form to enable the local community to communicate and interact with the Council easily.
4. Useful website links and other addresses, phone numbers or other contact points for emergency and local services.
5. General community information – medical, education, voluntary organisations, church and local businesses.
6. Website disclaimer and an Accessibility Statement
7. (OPTION - Local business page with potential to generate income, if required to pay for the website and support on-going sustainability).

Specific Council Information

1. Councillor contact information.
2. Agendas & minutes for Council meetings/main committees.
3. Planning information.
4. Annual report (all Councils) and accounts. A Training Plan (for both members and officers) and the decision of a council meeting within 7 days
5. Newsletters.
6. Strategic documents.
7. Website links to other levels of government/associated bodies.
8. Freedom of Information Act details.

Level 2 Website (Additional) Criteria

Councils that have previously achieved a **Level 1** website or larger councils may wish to evolve their websites in order to extend the accessibility, levels of interaction and consultation available. The following website facilities would provide such opportunities.

- Website search facility – improved navigation for larger websites.
- Site map that shows all the website pages on one chart with links to those pages.
- Font size and contrast options – improved DDA compliance.

- Private website areas accessed by a user name and password to enable the Clerk/councillors to share ‘not for public viewing’ information exchange.
- Website blog.
- E-newsletter.
- Reporting forms as required.
- Forum.
- Instant on-line voting.
- On-line questionnaires.
- E-mail updates where visitors can register to be told when a website page is updated.
- User management system to allow community groups and others to have the ability to edit assigned website pages.

These guidelines have been produced to encourage and support all Community and Town Councils in either developing a website for the first time or enabling councils to ensure that their website is providing a consistent level of information across all our communities in Wales.

How Long Will Maintaining My Website & Social Media Take ?

Things to be considered when maintaining a website and social media either daily or weekly –

Tasks	Hours (Daily)	Hours (weekly)
Edrych ar ac ymateb i ebyst		
Updating website content incl. events/meetings/minutes/photos		
Checking neighbouring authority(s)/local websites for mutual content		
Checking website content meets WG/OVW/legal guidelines		
Checking social media accounts		
Replying to responses received on social media accounts		
Updating social media accounts		
Data tidying ie. possible archiving of material		
Total		

GLOSSARY



Social Media

Blog – Term derived from Web-log i.e. an internet log or diary

Blogosphere – All the Blogs on the Internet

Community of Practice – Group of people who are members of an online ‘club’ because they have a role or an interest in an area of work

Direct Message – A message sent via social media to someone who follows you or who you follow

Facebook – Social networking site

Flickr/Vimeo/Instagram/You Tube – Photo and video sharing sites

Follower – Someone who has chosen to follow you on social media

Friend – Someone who you have allowed to access your Facebook page, or someone whose page you have access to; not necessarily a real friend

Forum – A (virtual) discussion area

Hashtag – A hashtag or # is a way of denoting a keyword which can be used as a search term on X

Instagram – A platform for sharing photos and videos

Instant Messaging – A conversation with another person via, for example, Microsoft Live Messenger or Yahoo Messenger. A conversation which, if you indicate that you are available for a chat is more immediate than email and easier to type than a text

Linked-IN – A professional equivalent of Facebook

Microblog – Short blog e.g. X using a maximum of 280 characters

Pinterest – A virtual pin board for creating and sharing images and ideas

Rebelmouse - a complete digital publishing toolbox that's built for modern-day content creators

Repost – To forward a message read on social media

SM – Social Media

X (wasTwitter) – A micro-blog site



Website Development

Client – Data and program user

Disk Image – is a single file containing the complete contents and structure representing a data storage medium or device, such as a hard drive, optical disc, or USB flash drive

Encryption – The process of encoding to protect information ie. passwords

GB – Gigabyte

Hard Disk/Drive – Storage device used for storing and retrieving digital information

Host (server) – Data and program store

TB – Terabyte

URL – Uniform Resource Locator

Information Management

EIRs – Environmental Information Regulations

FOI – Freedom of Information

Publication Scheme – Sets out what information a Council will make available to the public as a matter of course including how and when it is made available