

## **A Councillors' guide to using social media**

### **What is social media?**

Social media is a collective term used to describe easy ways to create and publish on the internet. People generally use the term to describe how organisations and individuals share content – text, video and pictures – and create conversations on the web. It is transforming the way that companies do business and individuals interact with each other. It is providing a voice for those who weren't well heard before. Social media will change the way that councillors and councils interact with local people. Councillors, councils and their partners are using social media for a wide range of purposes. It is being used as a way to spark innovation, drive efficiency and engage in conversations with local people. As well as using social media themselves, members should ensure that their local authority as an organisation is using it well.

Unhelpfully, when many people talk about social media, they talk about the tools. Twitter. YouTube. Blogging. This can seem like impenetrable jargon. The important thing to remember about social media is that it's social. It's about communication. See Appendix 1 for a guide to the tools

Social media is usually fairly open, meaning a wide variety of people can see, comment on or collaborate on materials. The tools are usually free or low-cost and very often easy-to use, requiring no more skill than adding an attachment to an email or creating a Word document. And most importantly, social media is designed to be shareable, meaning that it's very easy for people to forward, link to or even re-publish content. This means there are very low barriers to entry for sharing opinions with a potentially very wide audience.

You may also see the term 'web 2.0'. This is used as shorthand to describe how social media has changed the content of the internet from being dominated by one-way publishing or e-commerce, to a greater emphasis on words, pictures, music and videos being published, shared and commented on by ordinary people

Attached at Appendix 2 are examples of how some councils are using social media.

### **Opportunities not taken**

Although social media can be used to effectively and efficiently support council priorities, in most councils these opportunities have not yet been fully exploited. There are significant barriers to using social media within councils for both councillors and officers who wish to engage with citizens to improve local services. Some are technical, but most are cultural.

For example:

- Access to social media sites like Facebook, blogs, Twitter and YouTube is routinely blocked from council computers.
- There may be no clear policy on using social media for councillors or officers either in a personal capacity or in an official capacity.
- There may be a lack of clarity about whether a councillor's blog or social media profile can be linked from council corporate sites and whether this counts as political or council business.

- Communications strategies rarely incorporate social approaches.
- There often isn't a clear policy for responding to comments from citizens on social networks, whether these be compliments, complaints or service requests.
- Computers can be out-of-date or ill-equipped to use social media. For example, older versions of web browsers or computers with no sound makes viewing residents' YouTube videos impossible.

### **A word of warning... staying out of trouble online**

Any form of communication is rife with the possibility of misunderstandings. Social media is perhaps no more or no less vulnerable to this, but there are some new ways to misfire with your message. Although the best use of social media is conversational in tone, publishing to the web is still publishing. What you've 'said' on the web is written down and it's permanent.

In the main, councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. There are some additional duties around using their websites for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken when writing on planning matters.

### **Libel**

If you publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation they may take a libel action against you. This will also apply if you allow someone else to publish something libellous on your website if you know about it and don't take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel claim against you will result in an award of damages against you.

### **Copyright**

Placing images or text on your site from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about, or seek permission in advance. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you.

### **Data Protection**

Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission.

### **Bias and pre-determination**

If you are involved in determining planning or licensing applications or other quasi-judicial decisions, avoid publishing anything on your blog that might suggest you don't have an open mind about a matter you may be involved in determining. If not, the decision runs the risk of being invalidated.

### **Obscene material**

It goes without saying that you should avoid publishing anything in your blog that people would consider obscene. Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

### **Electoral periods**

The Electoral Commission requires that candidates provide a return of expenditure on any form of advertising or campaign literature and that includes web advertising. And there are additional requirements, such as imprint standards for materials which can be downloaded from their website.

### **The council's legal position**

Material published by a local authority as an organisation is, for obvious reasons, restricted in terms of content. It must not contain party political material and, in relation to other material, should not persuade the public to a particular view, promote the personal image of a particular councillor, promote an individual councillor's proposals, decisions or recommendations, or personalise issues. Nor should the council assist in the publication of any material that does any of the above.

Some councils take a strict line on this and do not provide links to councillor blogs or social media accounts from councillor profile pages. But many people (especially young people) prefer to communicate via social networks and so this is as valid a method of communication as an email address. This can have significant advantages in terms of transparency and the ability to answer frequently asked questions more efficiently through an open format. Bearing in mind, of course, the data protection requirements.

### **The Members' Code of Conduct**

It's worth pointing out that councillors can have 'blurred identities'. This means you have a social media account where you comment both as a councillor and as an individual. For example a Facebook account where you've posted about a great night out (personal) and another time explained the council position on pothole repair (councillor). It may be clear in your mind when you are posting in a private capacity or as a councillor, but it could be less clear to others. Such blurred identities might for example have implications where your views are taken as those of your organisation or political party, rather than your personal opinion. So it's worth mentioning the need to get your on social media accounts/ profiles clear, then you can be confident as to what you can and can't say while you are representing your organisation or party.

How you use your online identity will also determine how online content will be treated in respect of the Members' Code of Conduct. Councillors are expected to communicate politically. There is a difference between communicating on behalf of the council, for example blogging as an un-elected Mayor, or as a councillor or as a private citizen, and the former will be held to a higher standard than the latter. The key to whether your online activity is subject to the Code of Conduct is whether you are giving the impression that you are acting as a councillor. And that stands whether you are in fact acting in an official capacity or simply giving the impression that you are doing so.

This may be less than clear if you have a private blog or a Facebook profile. There are a number of factors which will come into play which are more a question of judgement than a hard and fast line. For example, a Standards Committee may take into account how well known or high profile you are as a councillor, the privacy settings on your blog or social networking site, the content of the site itself and what you say on it. Most councillors are using their online profile to communicate with citizens about representing their local area so engaging the code, if necessary, should be a relatively straightforward decision. Since the judgement of whether you are perceived to be acting as a

councillor will be taken by someone else, it's safest to assume that any online activity can be linked to your official role.

Unless you've gone to significant effort to keep an online persona completely separate from your councillor identity, you are unlikely to be able to claim that you were acting in a completely private capacity.

Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct will apply to your online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication you undertake. Members should comply with the general principles of the Code in what they publish and what they allow others to publish.

You will need to be particularly aware of the following sections of the Code:

- **Treat others with respect.** Avoid personal attacks and disrespectful, rude or offensive comments.
- **Comply with equality laws.** Take care in publishing anything that might be considered sexist, racist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith.
- **Refrain from publishing anything you have received in confidence.**
- **Ensure you don't bring the council, or your councillor role, into disrepute.**

Members of the public (or other members or officers) may make a complaint about you if you contravene the Code of Conduct. That complaint, and the sanctions that may be imposed, will be considered by the Standards Committee.

### **Just using good sense**

There are few additional things to be aware to ensure you are well-respected online. For those new to the online world it can take a short time to get used to the culture of the web.

Avoiding gaffes and maintaining good 'netiquette'

- Make your commenting policy clear

You will need to take note of the comments that other people make on your site. It may be a fine line to tread, but if you allow offensive or disrespectful comments to stand on your site then it can put off other members of your community and you may even be called to account under the Code of Conduct. For blogs, the easiest way to handle this is to moderate comments and to state clearly on your site that you're doing so and reasons why comments may be rejected. For Facebook or other social networks, including multi-media sites like YouTube and Flickr where people can post public or semi-public messages to your profile, you will need to regularly check on messages (you can be notified by email) or, far less preferably, disable message posting.

- Allow disagreement

Some comments may be out of line, but on the other hand deleting the comments of people who disagree with you will backfire. You can't stop them from posting the same comment elsewhere, then linking back to your site and saying you are gagging those who disagree with you.

- Think before you publish

Words can't be unspoken and even if you delete a hastily fired off blog post or tweet it will probably have already been read and will be indexed or duplicated in places on the web beyond your reach.

- Beware the irony

Few writers are able to communicate sarcasm or irony through short online messages. It's probably best to assume that you're one of those that can't.

- Don't be creepy

Some of the terminology in social media, like 'following' or 'friending' can imply an intimacy that's not really there. Both terms just mean you have linked your account to someone else so you can share information. Savvy internet users are used to this, but some people can feel a frisson of unease when their council, local police service or councillor begins following them on Twitter before establishing some sort of online relationship. Some councillors wait to be followed themselves first. Do make use of other communication functions that social media allows you. Twitter's 'list' function, for example, can help you to follow local people in a less direct way. And bloggers are almost invariably happy for you to link to them, so you don't need to ask first in this instance.

- Own up: Social media is transparent

The best bloggers admit mistakes rather than try to cover them up (which isn't possible online). Amending your text and acknowledging your mistake – perhaps by putting a line through the offending words and inserting a correction or providing an update section at the bottom of a blog post

– shows you are not pretending it never happened, and is much better than just deleting it when dealing with online misfires.

- Avoid the trolls

You know that person who always shows up to area forums and asks the tricky but entirely irrelevant questions? That person has an equally difficult cousin who likes to go online. As you begin to use social media, you'll find some argumentative characters out there. Don't get bogged down. You don't have to respond to everything. Ignore if necessary.

### **Building engagement**

More and more local politicians will start embracing social media as part of their political profile. During elections, they will use it to campaign, to organise their supporters, to solicit donations and to explain their positions. While in office, they will use social media to listen and engage with local people, to provide information to local residents and perhaps to campaign on local issues.

Search engines like Google love blogs because they are usually frequently updated and their structure makes it easy to point directly to relevant content. But you can do a few things to make

your online presence easier to find. As you begin to use social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and especially blogging, you'll want to build up their readership to extend their impact.

These tips are based on the advice of Mary Reid, Kingston-upon-Thames councillor and long-time blogger.

#### 1. Choose your name well

Your name is your political brand, so make sure that your blog name and usernames for networks like Twitter clearly identify you as you. This is particularly important if your real name has already been taken by someone else. Although you will certainly want to identify yourself as a councillor, you may or may not want to use the councillor identity as part of your website address or ID (www.cllrsmith.com for example). Keep in mind that you may not win the next election or may not stay with your current party, but still want to remain in local politics and use your online presence. It's much easier to change a few headers on your blog than to change a URL address such as www.democratpat.com. It's slightly easier to change your Twitter ID.

#### 2. Make your blog search engine-friendly

Most people will be interested in you because of the place you represent. Make sure that your ward, your council and commonly used neighbourhood names are included in any 'about' sections and are frequently mentioned in individual blog posts where relevant. Location, location, location.

#### 3. Content is king

If you're covering local issues well, you may be the only online source of information that's important to local people but not listed in the local newspaper. Local people searching for information about schools, libraries or parking will come to your blog.

#### 4. Get linking

If there are other political bloggers, particularly in your area, start linking to them. Ask members of your own party to link to you. The more linked you are by websites with lots of sites linking to them, the more you'll be found in internet searches.

#### 5. Cross-link

Make sure that all your relevant social media accounts link up. Does your Twitter address link to your blog and vice versa? If you have a Facebook political page, you can set it up to be automatically updated from your blog. Is your website address in your email signature? Make sure your councillor profile on the council's website links to your blog. Some councils don't allow this, so this may be something you want to take up at an organisational level.

#### 6. Be reciprocal

The blogosphere (a term to describe the online culture of bloggers) is built as much on reading and commenting as it is on writing and publishing. Good bloggers will leave comments on others' posts and most blogs will allow you to leave a link to your website in the comments section. Some local discussion forums have this functionality, too. But be careful. You can link to your blog in all kinds of

online spaces, but make sure that it's relevant to the discussion at hand. If you've written about a specific issue being discussed, link directly to that post. If you just randomly drop links, it looks desperate.

#### 7. Leave a paper trail

Make sure your political leaflets, cards and so on have your web address or social network details.

#### 8. Be a champion for your local area

Nobody is ever too busy to read good things about themselves or their projects. When you post a good news story, email the people involved to let them know. They will likely pass it on to other people too.

#### 9. Be a good host

A good blog can provide a platform for further discussion. A good host will encourage comments, and these are a key driver for repeat visits. That usually means culling comments which are offensive (the racist, sexist, and homophobic ones or those that attack private individuals, for example) but allowing a healthy and vigorous debate, including disagreement with you.

#### 10. Be realistic

If your blog concentrates on local issues, it is going to be of interest only to a relatively small group of people. But those are often precisely the individuals who are likely to make a difference in your area. Quite 'low' numbers can actually mean a huge reach in a small area.

### A few social media tools

When people talk about social media, they often make reference to some well-known tools or products. Although there are many more than we can list here, we'll highlight a few of the general approaches and the most widely used products which are characterised by their ease of use and are free or low cost.

We've attempted to categorise these tools, but their features often mean they can cross-over into different categories and their flexibility means they can be used in many different ways. There are even tools that improve your other tools, such as Friendfeed (which pulls together content from a variety of social media tools and brings them to one place) and Ping.fm (which posts content to a variety of social media tools in one go).

#### A. Written communication

##### Blogs

Blogs are easily updated web journals, usually published by an individual or a small group. They are almost always commentable, meaning readers can share their opinions about what the author has written. Blogs have been used by councillors to share their views on public policy, share information about council services or issues of local interest, and canvas opinion. Even very 'business-oriented' local government blogs have a personal feel with bloggers sharing some detail of their daily lives, for example sharing how changes in local services have affected them, how much they enjoyed taking their kids to the village fete, or sharing pictures of tasty local produce.

There are many free blogging tools such as Blogger.com or Wordpress.com which make it easy to set up a blog in a few minutes. However, gaining readership can take longer.

Blogging has been around longer than most of the tools described here, but it is still one of the most powerful. Many councillors use a blog as the bedrock of their social media strategy.

##### Twitter

Twitter was the social media phenomenon of 2009 and is still growing. It's a way of sharing short snippets of information, links to interesting resources, telling people what you are doing or asking for help. Users are limited to 140 characters (letters, numbers, spaces and punctuation), so it's ideal for sending and receiving text information on the go. It can be used as a one-way publishing tool, pushing out short bursts of information, and many councils use it this way through corporate accounts. However, it's more powerful as a conversational tool, with councillors and local people sharing information and getting feedback.

Many councillors are already using Twitter. You can see a growing list at [www.tweetyhall.com](http://www.tweetyhall.com), a website that features councillors' use of social media to support local engagement.

On Twitter, people are all identified in the same way, by an @ sign and their username. For example, someone could be registered as @jonsmith, or @governmentmike. You can find their Twitter address by using their full user name without the @ sign



## **B.Social networking**

All of the tools we describe in this guide have an element of social networking, but there are a number of very popular sites dedicated to building social networks. Social networking means using online tools to build communities of individuals who are interested in sharing information and support. Networks like Facebook, Bebo and MySpace can be used to facilitate connections between people who already know each other, usually in a social context. But it can also be used by organisations and businesses to share information about products, services or events with a range of interested individuals. Other social networking tools like LinkedIn are built around professional identities, where the focus is specifically on an individual's career, and often their job search or developing business leads.

Some social networks are built around particular issues. For example, MumsNet was set up for parenting, while [www.harringayonline.com](http://www.harringayonline.com) focuses on a neighbourhood in the London Borough of Haringey. These sites often facilitate connections between people who don't know each other from 'real life', but who may share a common interest.

Using social networks as a councillor requires a different approach to using it as an ordinary citizen. Many councillors use Facebook in a personal capacity in the same way as anyone else would – to share personal news, information and holiday snaps with people they already know. Other councillors use their Facebook accounts more openly, 'friending' (that is, by allowing them to view their accounts, sharing information with) people they don't know personally. Facebook now allows politicians to create 'pages' which is a way of keeping personal use and professional use separate. A 'page' is similar to a regular Facebook account in style, but it is open for anyone registered on Facebook to see. On a page you can provide a political profile and can share information with supporters without disclosing personal networks or worrying that the wrong people will see the 'funny' pictures of you as a child that your friends are showing each other.

Anyone on Facebook can start a group. Councillor Allan Andrews from Coventry started the Facebook group 'I Love Earlsdon' which has been used to discuss local issues and as a focus for very local campaigns. Other councillors and candidates have used Facebook to help organise their supporters during elections and there have been a number of successful issues based campaigns with popular Facebook groups. Some were started by councillors themselves, but others have been shown support as councillors join them and contribute.

## **C.Listening**

Perhaps the most valuable use of social media is using it to listen (and perhaps engage) with conversations that are already happening. Your area, your council and maybe even you yourself are being talked about online, but do you know when and how that's happening?

Most interactive websites have something called RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds. This is a way that websites can automatically 'push out' new material as soon as it's published. This means you don't have to actually go a website to find out if there is new information on there; instead, the websites tell you with RSS. Free tools called feed readers (Google Reader and Bloglines are examples) can help you collect and subscribe to feeds in a single accessible place. Most mainstream media outlets have RSS feeds. Blogs and social networking sites almost always have them, too. You

can even generate an RSS feed from an internet search. Your council may have RSS feeds for its website (and if it doesn't, it should).

Google also allows you to set up something called an 'alert'. Instead of you having to type a specific word or phrase into Google each day to check if anything new has been written about it, the website sends you an email detailing all the new instances of that word online. Alerts can provide daily or instant news about local issues straight to your email inbox. You can set up alerts for the name of your council, your ward, hot local issues or even your own name.

Tools like Addictomatic and features within a Google account can help you bring all your feeds together into one place. These can be private so only one or a few people can see them, or you can make these pages public. 'Listening' to the social web will give you a more detailed picture of what people are concerned about. As a councillor, you will have to make a decision about how you act on that information.

#### **D. Collaborative working**

Wikipedia is the most famous example of people coming together to create a document or information resource. It is built with a tool called a wiki, which means anyone on the internet can go onto the site and add to or edit the content. Formby Parish Council has developed and consulted on its community plan using a wiki. This guidance itself was developed on a wiki.

But you don't have to set up a wiki to help people bring their ideas together online. Instead, you can also use social media to 'crowdsource' policy ideas and initiatives. Crowdsourcing is the internet equivalent of 'workshopping' an idea with the public. The White House under US President Barack Obama has used a collaborative tool called Mixed Ink to allow citizens direct access to the policy making process. Closer to home, the Mayor of London's office has launched a climate change consultation which calls for individuals to submit their own ideas and rate others people's. You can see this at: [www.london.gov.uk/climatechange](http://www.london.gov.uk/climatechange)

#### **E. Videos and pictures**

Services like YouTube and Vimeo allow anyone to upload and share videos with the world. Image sharing services like Flickr, Picasa or SmugMug allow people to share photos. Many councils and councillors are using these services to share video diaries or images of their local areas.

Local people too are using these services to share content about the area you serve. There will almost certainly be a group on Flickr sharing positive and negative images of your area. Someone may be complaining about your council services on YouTube.

Stratford-on-Avon council has been a leader in using Flickr photos to promote its area. Another example is councillor Daisy Benson of the Redlands area of Reading who with her councillor colleague Glen Goodall has been using a Flickr group called 'Tagging isn't art, it's criminal damage' to highlight examples of graffiti in her area. She encourages residents to upload and share their photos as well with the aim of getting it removed.

### Possible uses of social media for Councillors:

#### Providing information about services

In February 2010, the Society of Information Technology Management (Socitm) provided an audit of councils' social media usage and showed that 154 councils are using Twitter and 73 have Facebook pages. Some other uses of social media for services include:

- Staffordshire's RateMyPlace.org.uk, which provides food safety ratings for local people and a place for local people to share reviews of eateries.
- Islington's Facebook group, which is used to promote and share information about recycling in the borough.
- ManchesterLitList, a blog that provides information about literary events and featured books.
- Sutton Council providing information about grit bin locations which was mapped by a member of the public who is a web developer. The map was then hosted on Sutton's website informing residents of their locations so citizens could grit and clear icy pavements themselves.
- Many schools and councils used Twitter and easy to update blogs to alert parents of school closures during the heavy snow in January 2010.

Redbridge's Big Conversation provided a platform for local people to set priorities for spending and engage in policy discussion during a major borough-wide consultation, providing a place for local people to discuss issues. Just as you would consider what people are saying at area forums, councillors should take account of these discussions in their decision-making and can find that these platforms are a good way to explain why difficult decisions have been reached.

In the 2009 local elections, councils with integrated and interactive reporting (for example mixing traditional web communications with tools like Twitter or blogs) doubled traffic to their websites. (Source Socitm). Derbyshire County Council used a mix of online tools and channels to support and report local elections results in June 2009. This included multimedia web content, social bookmarking (a way of storing, sharing and recommending websites to others) and real-time results delivered through web graphics, Twitter and a dedicated Facebook page. Media interest was high and citizen feedback was extremely positive. Visitor levels to the council's website were the highest ever recorded.

#### Supporting local democracy

Gathering customer insight and managing customer relationships

Barnet Council is using social media monitoring tools to find out about conversations that are taking place online and tackle complaints about services. Greater Manchester Police are using social media monitoring to read what people are saying publicly online to identify and tackle fear of crime.

Some well-known commercial brands use communities of users to answer questions and resolve complaints, and several councils are beginning to experiment in this area. This has the potential to reduce transaction costs for the council and provide a more 'human' face to dealing with

bureaucracy. In Newcastle, engagement with a Facebook group critical of the council's perceived role in shutting down a popular nightclub helped to explain the issues around noise enforcement. As a result, one of the group's organisers met with council officials and the council has since advised a cooperative that aims to buy the bar.

Councillors will find that these tools provide a vital insight into what's going on in their communities and often allow them to engage directly with the key players.

### **Promoting culture**

Medway Council is one of many that uses Facebook to promote festivals and events.

The London Borough of Wandsworth's film office uses Flickr, an image sharing social network, to promote film and television locations. Many museums, often local authority supported, are using a combination of social media tools to promote collections, events and special exhibitions. Councillors can support cultural events by joining Facebook groups or promoting them through their own social networking profiles. The council-run Facebook page for Coventry has over 11,000 fans

### **Supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience**

There is strong evidence that online networking can promote better connected neighbourhoods. One American study showed that neighbours who were connected online were much more likely to talk to and engage with the people who lived near them <sup>8</sup>.

Local networks like Harringay Online or Pits n Pots in Stoke-on-Trent provide an online platform for the views of local residents. Although these are usually independent websites, councillors can and should engage with these sites constructively.

### **Internal communications and learning and development**

Many councils are using the tools of social media such as videos, blogs and internal social networks to support internal communications. Councillors can take advantage of these learning opportunities themselves and encourage the use of internal networks like Yammer (a corporate version of Twitter) within their councils and use them to reach a wide range of officers in their council or among partners.

### **Open data**

Governments around the world are making efforts to open up their data and make it available for re-use. The US began with data.gov and the UK has upped the ante with the comprehensive (though not yet complete) data.gov.uk which focuses on central government data. Opening up data sets promotes the notion of a government responsible to the people it serves, giving them the tools of information and transparency to hold it to account. But there are other benefits, too, which include better interchange of information between public sector partners and the re-use of open government data to provide useful information and services to citizens.

Some councils are making strides with open data, notably Lichfield and the GLA and others are experimenting with some data sets. Barnet, Windsor and Maidenhead and a few others are experimenting with exposing data on all purchases over £500. Kent County Council has made more

than 500 data sets available online as part of its 'Pic and Mix' project. Visitors can browse the data catalogue and use online tools (known as mashups) to transform and personalise public data. This essentially means they can combine different statistics to make it useful to them in a variety of contexts. Leicester City Council have just received funding from the LGA to make more Open Data available from our website.

This puts citizens in control of public information and avoids unnecessary contact with the council, Empowering citizens in this way means they can solve their own problems and become more engaged with their community. Early indications from US cities like San Francisco, Chicago and Washington, which have already opened their data, show that significant value can be created through open data and that savings can be achieved by reducing the cost of freedom of information requests.

Councillors can play a vital role in providing the assurance that's it's ok to put information in the hands of the people or use the data themselves to hold a range of public services to account.

### **Security Issues Relating to Social Media**

Many social media sites offer the ability to link accounts – so that you can use one account to log into many sites and your smartphone. While this makes using these sites more convenient, it increases the risk of identity theft or somebody taking over your account. For example, if you lose your Smart Phone or if your password is compromised somebody could post information on numerous websites as if they were you.

There is some very good guidance on this website: <https://www.getsafeonline.org/social-networking/social-networking-sites/> and here: <https://www.getsafeonline.org/protecting-yourself/cyberstalking/>

In particular, here are some tips that will help to avoid common problems with Social Media:

- Use a strong password for all social media sites and webmail
- Use a different password for each site and where possible different usernames – guidance here: <https://www.getsafeonline.org/protecting-yourself/passwords/>
- Ensure your mobile device is encrypted and is protected with a password
- Don't use one Social Media account to log into too many other accounts
- Change the password on any webmail accounts frequently.
- Never login or enter personal or financial information on a website to which you have been directed from a link in an e-mail or a QR code.

Be aware of Phishing – a common trick is where the hackers impersonate one of the usual Facebook or LinkedIn e-mails such as a friend request. The link in the e-mail goes through to a carefully crafted website that looks very much like the real thing and prompts you for your username and password in the normal way. It can be very hard to distinguish the fakes from the real thing.

If you have your own Blog or website – for example a WordPress site, it is very important that the underlying software is kept up to date and backed up. All content management systems (CMS), or any website for that matter, are vulnerable to hackers who try to exploit known vulnerabilities in the

system. Usually, updates to the software are quickly issued when security flaws are discovered. If these are applied the software will be safe.