

#FollowMe2

A social media guide for elected members

dan slee

Future comms made easy

National
Communications
Group Scotland

is.
improvement service

This guide has been produced by The National Communications Advisory Group (Scotland) and the Improvement Service in collaboration with freelance communications specialist Dan Slee.

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.

dan slee
Future comms made easy

National
Communications
Group Scotland

is.
improvement service

Contents

Introduction	4
Making sense of the social media channels you can use	5
Social media checklist for age groups	10
Getting yourself set up	11
How elected members are using social media in Scotland	13
How to get started	14
Things to remember	18
Tips for shaping content	20
When to post and engage	21
Traditional media and social media	22
What to do when things go wrong	25

Introduction

Humans are born wired for connection – it's in our bones, as strong a need as food, water and warmth.

When we are happy, sad, frustrated or angry there is something deep inside that makes us want to connect with another person.

When the Scottish men's football team reached the Euro 2020 finals, their dressing room celebrations saw them sing disco hit 'Yes Sir I Can Boogie'. People watched, liked and shared. Then recorded their own version.

Social media is a powerful tool for plugging into the conversations of the nation. As an elected member it can allow you to take the temperature of an issue and hear views as well as giving you the chance to make your case.

In 2014, more Scots turned to social media to decide how they would vote in #IndyRef than newspapers.¹ How local politicians use such channels will have a real say in the future of Scotland as well as the future of bin collections and other council services.

More than 80 per cent of people in Scotland have a social media account. More than 95 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds use social media at least once a day. But you'd be wrong to think this was just young people. Sixty per cent of over 65s also use it at least once a day, too.²

This is the second updated version of #FollowMe a guide for elected members in Scotland. It is designed to help candidates and elected members use social media to help them with their duties.

Equipment to use

Having social media apps on your smartphone means you can post while you're out and about. But do check your council's Acceptable Use Policy on how you are able to use your device.

¹ <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2014/10/17/social-media-more-influential-information-source-newspapers-scottish-independence>

² <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/multi-sector-research/cmr/cmr-2021>

Making sense of the social media channels you can use

Key social media channels explained

The important thing to remember is that you don't have to use **ALL** the available social media accounts. Here's a list. See which will work for you.

Facebook

If you're keen to reach people over the age of 30 Facebook is where you can find people online. Nothing can replace the sheer weight of numbers that you can find on Mark Zuckerberg's original invention.



Numbers: Overall, 70 per cent of the population are likely to be on Facebook.

Why people use it: To keep in touch with family and friends.

Who you'll reach: You'll probably reach over 30s on your Facebook page, especially in community Facebook groups in your area and on newspaper Facebook pages.

What's the catch: Buckle up. It can get noisy.

Tip: Everyone who joins Facebook needs to create a Facebook profile. This is an account that has to be in their own name. Once you've made that you can use it to make a Facebook page. Post what you are up to here. You can sometimes use your page to ask to join Facebook groups set-up in your community. Not every group will let you join. Don't create multiple profiles. It's against terms and conditions. Keep your own profile as private as you can if you want to create some distance.

Tip: Community Facebook groups have thrived as a way to find out what happens in your area. In the Shetland Islands, for example, there are more than 350,000 individual memberships of 190 community groups that cover items for sale and local history as well as community noticeboard groups and a group for Mums.

Instagram

Lights, camera, action! Portrait shaped videos called Reels are most popular here.

Numbers: If you're after under 30s this is where you've a best chance to find them.

Why people use it: To post and share pictures and video and find entertaining content from brands and influencers.

Who you'll reach: First time voters, people making their way in their lives, careers and relationships.

What's the catch: It's hard to find people in your ward or neighbourhood.



WhatsApp

This is as close as you'll get to a universal social media channel. A majority of all ages use it and it's become a key way elected members organise their supporters.

Numbers:: Almost half the population use it.

Why people use it To keep in touch with groups of family, colleagues or like minded people you're likely to know in real life.

Who you'll reach: All ages.

What's the catch: It's a great way to organise your campaign supporters but it's trickier to reach people you don't know.



Tip: Instagram was set up as a picture sharing social network. It's since gravitated to being more of a video sharing network. These are called Reels and tend to be shot in portrait format. They can be a minute long.

Tip: WhatsApp groups can be useful ways to mobilise your supporters in your ward as well as keeping them informed of what you've been up to. If you've added an important post to social media, flag it up with your team on WhatsApp to make sure they don't miss it.

Messenger

This Facebook tool is great for sending a private message to Facebook friends. Have a Facebook page and you may well be messaged on Messenger.



Numbers: If you have a Facebook page the chances are you'll be on Messenger too.

Why people use it: To keep in touch with friends, family and brands. You may get people raising a ward issue with you using Messenger they don't want to share in public.

Who you'll reach: If people like your page they can message you. It's more incoming than a way to reach lots of people.

What's the catch: It's for one-to-one discussion rather than mass broadcasting and you might have to spend time managing incoming messages.

Tip: If you have a Facebook page people will be able to use Messenger to send you a private message. It's worth keeping an eye out for them when you check your page.

X (formerly Twitter)

Great for breaking news and swapping political discussion but now less useful at reaching your voters in your ward.



Numbers: On the wane - now the 6th largest social media platform with about a third of people using it regularly.

Why people use it: Breaking news, emergencies and live events are X's strengths.

Who you'll reach: You can reach fellow political geeks and fellow councillors.

What's the catch: A deserved reputation for being hostile and toxic to people in the public eye.

Tip: You can post a picture for a news story you think a journalist or two will be interested in and then tag them in the picture. It acts as a tap on the shoulder.

TikTok

It's the hip new kid in town. It's the new fun challenger video network that's making the old guard worried.

Numbers: Less than 20 per cent use it but numbers are growing - especially outside the under 24 demographic where it first boomed.

Why people use it: For fun and entertaining content.

Who you'll reach: Young people and increasing numbers of older ones too.

What's the catch: You'll need to be confident in front of a camera to communicate on TikTok.



Tip: TikTok is a video network. Add a hashtag for your area and your ward when you post your clip.

Nextdoor



You can join a neighbourhood group in your town, village or city.

Numbers: Low but growing. Around 6 per cent of the population are using it.

Why people use it: To find out what's happening in their community.

Who you'll reach: Over 55-year-olds.

What's the catch: You're unlikely to reach many people under 50.

Tip: Let people know about the things you've improved in your area. Bread and butter things like moving fly-tipping from the back of the shops on the High Street work well.

Other channels

Social media channels have all embraced video. So you can be a councillor shooting video and get by without having a **YouTube** account. Simply post your clips to whichever channel you're using instead. **LinkedIn** is a useful channel used by professional people. If economic regeneration is a responsibility this is a great way to talk to professional people. You can do that with your own profile by connecting with business people.



Your page or account needs attention to grow. Spend a few minutes a day on reading and replying to incoming messages. That way you connect with people and encourage them to connect with you. Post regularly, too.



Be careful of sharing pictures and video to to your social media account pictures and video unless you shot them or you have clear permission from their owner. Don't take pictures or video from the internet without permission. You could get a nasty surprise from the owner when they ask for money and for you to delete it.



If you are including people in pictures or video get their permission. You need to tell them exactly how you are using it and if you're using it on your elected member or party account.



Don't use copyrighted music unless you have the permission of the rights holder. Record companies and social media platforms use web tools to spot copyrighted material and either stop you uploading it or delete it once you have.



You can see how your page or account is doing by taking a look at the insights. These are only available to you and show how many people saw or clicked on what you've posted.

Social media checklist for age groups

The social media channel you select will dictate which age group you are likely to connect with. In 2022, this is how the landscape looks. Over time things will change. Here's a ready reckoner.

Social media channels and age

	13-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Facebook	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Instagram	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	
WhatsApp		✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Messenger		✓	✓	✓	✓
X (formerly Twitter)	✓	✓	✓		
TikTok	✓✓✓	✓	✓		
Nextdoor			✓	✓	✓✓

Getting yourself set up

Have a set of social media house rules

When you start using social media in earnest - as a candidate or councillor - then it's worth having a set of house rules.

This sets out what people can expect from you and also expectations you can set for other people's behaviour.

These will apply when people look to come and engage with you on your social media page or profile. It's worth having these Plain English set of rules that are clearly displayed.

Remember, politics is a discussion of different points of view. Not everyone will agree with you.

Feel free to use these rules as a starting point for what you do.

Social media house rules

Here's an example set:

Welcome to my social media account which sets out some of my work and issues that concern me. If you want to be part of the online community here please observe these rules which are designed to promote respect and online safety.

What you can expect from me as the owner of this social media account

I'll look to monitor this account and will try and respond as time allows.

Anyone looking to contact me privately with specific queries or case work are encouraged to do so by emailing [insert email] or call [insert phone number].

What other users can expect of you

Debate and disagreement are welcome but please be courteous and respectful of others.

Be respectful and polite. Racism, threats, intolerance, abuse or intimidation are not acceptable.

Don't post misinformation or disinformation.

Don't post personal details publicly here or make public allegations. Please make formal complaints in the appropriate place.

Page admins reserve the right to block or report people who break these rules to the police.

You may want to add an expectation of when you'll monitor the page and how quickly you'll try and respond.

Now you're taking your first steps, here's how elected members are using social media.

Local Government bodies across the four UK nations have developed resources for councillors to help with Civility in Public Life. This includes [Rules of Engagement](#) which can be added to your social media profiles to outline the ways in which you intend to engage with people online.

Rules of engagement

Welcome to my page, which aims to communicate my activities as a councillor.

If you wish to be a part of this online community, you must agree to abide by this code of digital engagement, which is designed to keep everyone safe.

RULE 1
Debate and disagreement are welcome on this page, but only if expressed with courtesy, respect and politeness.

RULE 2
Posts should not contain abuse, harassment, intimidation or threats of any form.

RULE 3
Posts should not contain any form of discrimination – including racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or religious intolerance.

RULE 4
Posts should not spread false or unverified information.

RULE 5
For transparency reasons, users should not post anonymously.

If any of these rules are broken, page admins reserve the right to delete posts, block users and report content to the police if necessary.

It may not be possible to respond to all queries on this page due to time constraints – if you have specific enquiries or casework, please send directly to my official email.

How elected members are using social media in Scotland

To organise their campaign team.

WhatsApp has proved invaluable for some elected members to motivate their supporters and organise leaflet deliveries and door knocking. Traditional campaigning has been made easier by a better way to connect.

To look for case work in their ward.

Being a member of a Facebook group means you're able to see what the hot topics are as they emerge. Speeding cars? Residents are likely to let off steam in their local group. Nextdoor is good for this, too.

To reach journalists.

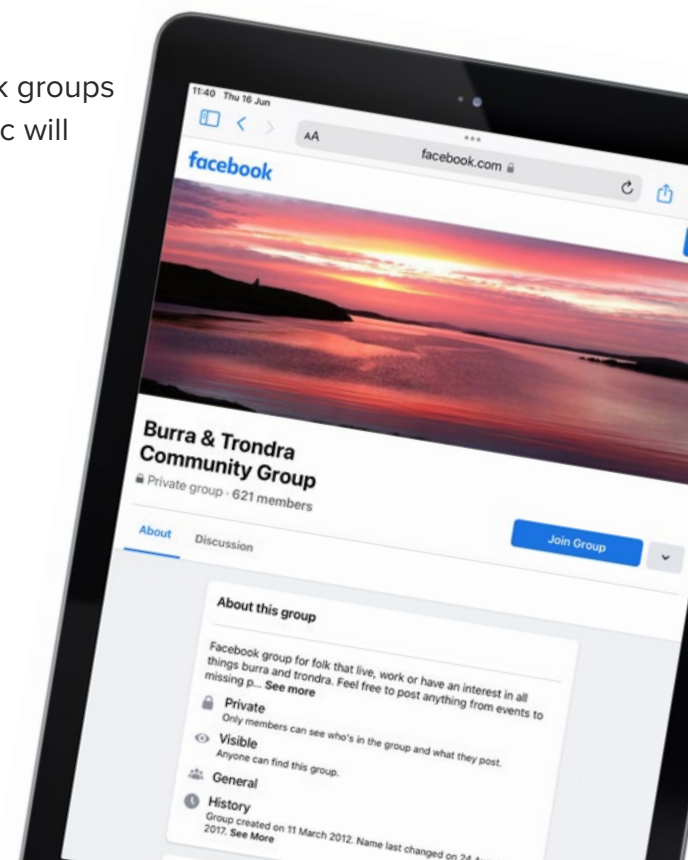
Switch on X and you'll find reporters who will cover your ward and will be interested in your stories. You can flag up media releases and content that you'll post which they may be interested in.

To compare notes with other elected members.

You'll find a network of elected members on X and also by invitation in closed WhatsApp groups, too.

To listen and take the temperature.

Again, community Facebook groups are invaluable. That hot topic will shine through.



How to get started

Before your first post

If you're looking to dip your toe into a social media channel for the first time here's some tips.

Use a mobile phone. If you want to create a barrier between your home life and your councillor life then downloading social media apps to your councillor phone may be a way to go. Check with your council IT policy over this to see what that says.

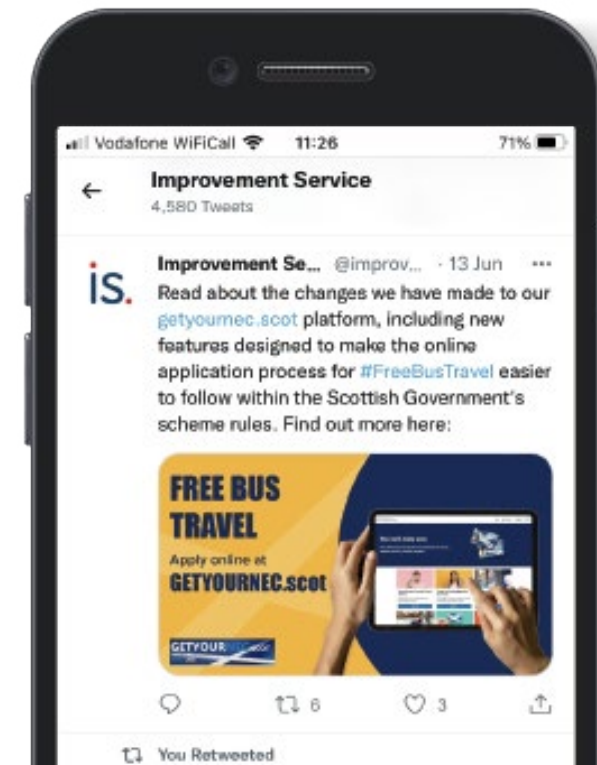
Firstly, just watch. Join and then just spend the first month or so watching.

Follow. Follow or like people or organisations you know or that are related to you. Add accounts that reflect your hobbies or interests too. Like walking? Maybe National Trust for Scotland will be for you. Remember, regardless of the account just because you follow them doesn't mean you support all their views.

Avoid following or liking fake accounts and bots. Bots are automatically created profiles often with stolen photographs to make them look like real people. One way to spot them is that they sometimes can be names with numbers. Block them using the 'block' tool. Don't 'favourite' a post by one of these accounts. People will be able to see your interaction.

Avoid clicking on private message links. A favourite tactic of scammers is to send you a private message with a link. Don't click on them. They can sometimes download damaging malware.

Check. Now, that's you set up, take a look to see how people are using it. Is it informal? What kind of things work best? Are people argumentative? Or supportive?



Your first few posts

You'll want to get into your stride if you decide the channel is for you. But what do you post?

The best piece of advice before you hit send for the first time is this...

Before you hit send ask yourself, can I show this to...

- my Mum?
- my boss?
- a reporter?

If you're in two minds about whether or not you can, do yourself a favour and don't send it. If in doubt, leave it out.

As you go from strength to strength, here's a few ideas on what you can post about.

Remember, social media is about conversation. You're joining the biggest discussion there is.

What kinds of things elected members post about

What they're campaigning about.

What they've been up to.

Ask for opinions to generate discussion.

Where they've visited in the ward.

Something about themselves maybe. A comment on the weather, the football or their pet dog.

Many councillors say that posting about politics is a real switch-off to residents. Talk about what's been in the Sunday papers by all means but the chances are you'll only be talking to political anoraks.



Remember, be respectful of private information and personal data. It's a good idea not to talk about individuals on a public forum unless they're happy for you to do so. Also, don't share pictures or video shot in schools or sensitive areas. Be very careful of sharing images of children - even at a public event - and only do so if you have the express written permission of a parent or guardian.

Tip: Hashtags can be a way to follow a topic. On X, #LES22 was used for tweets about Scottish local elections. On TikTok, #glasgow is used by people posting video about Glasgow. They are now less important on other channels.

Tip: Try and make what you post as accessible as possible. This is a legal requirement. So, use plain English. Don't upload posters with information unless you repeat it as text. This is so people who rely on screenreaders can read it. The RNIB have some good tips here: <https://bit.ly/accessible-social>

Be safe

Some politicians don't tell people in real time where they are, especially if they are on their own. Maybe don't tell people in advance or consider waiting until you're home before you post that picture of the fly-tipping you've been investigating or that night meeting you've been at.

Some social media platforms will automatically add a location when you post. Make sure this is switched off if you don't want to share that location.

When to reply to people

Remember that social media is a conversation.

You'll soon begin to work out those who genuinely want to talk to you and those who want to try and wind you up.

- **Reply if you can help** and move the conversation on.
- **Feel free to signpost** to somewhere that can help.
- **Try and take it offline.** Especially if the person has some personal information to share.

- If people are raging, satirising or being sarcastic feel free to **monitor rather than engage** with them.
- **If people are abusive, think twice** about engaging. It can send a message that abuse doesn't have consequences.

I've heard of algorithms - what are they?

Each social media platform has an algorithm. Basically, these are ways the platform will automatically sort through all the things you could see and stack them in an order it guesses you'll prefer. So, you'll generally see more updates from people you interact with. The friend you chatted with on Facebook yesterday? You're more likely to see what they post today rather than the carpet shop whose page you liked a few years ago.

Each social media platform jealously guards its own algorithm. However, conversation and discussion tend to be rewarded. Posting a link to an external website is not.



Things to remember

Now you've got your feet under the table, you've worked out the channel you want to use and you're starting to build your confidence. Here's a number of things elected members need to remember when they use social media.

1 You can use social media take the temperature

As we've looked at, the controversial planning applications will often find a voice online before they turn up at your ward surgery. Social media is a good way to see the strength of feeling. Look for numbers rather than just one loud voice.

2 What you put online stays online

What you post has a habit of not going away even if you delete it. The councillor who accidentally posts a regrettable picture or a poorly thought through opinion may find that someone has quickly screenshotted the offending article to make sure it is saved for posterity.

3 Be yourself

Be human. It's okay to talk about the weather, the Scottish football team, your dog walk or the first daffodils of spring. Humans respond to humans.

4 Your professional standards apply online

The Councillor's code of conduct still applies online just as much as it does offline. So does your political party's code of conduct and any professional bodies you may belong to.

5 Defamation applies online, too

What you post online matters. If you think you are a victim or if you've been accused, take legal advice.

The Defamation and Malicious Publication (Scotland) Act 2021 (the Act) became law in 2021 and is being made active. Defamation is defined under the new Act as the publishing of a statement which has caused, or is likely to cause, serious harm to the reputation of another; that is, if it tends to lower the person's reputation in the estimation of ordinary persons. Be careful. Defamation can prove to be very expensive. For legal advice talk to your legal department.



6

Be cautious when you post about politics

Feel free to post about politics. But be aware, feedback from elected members is that the ordinary man and woman in the street often switches off if you do. People respond well to you talking about the ward you represent and how you're improving it. They like to see you in a picture and video in the ward, too. They're less keen on your hot take from a Sunday morning political show.

7

Not after 9pm on a Friday

Feedback from elected members is that going online after 9pm on a Friday isn't worth it. You're unlikely to have a level-headed conversation with someone who may be unwinding after a bad week with a drink in one hand and their smartphone in another.



Tips for shaping content

Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg talks about social media at first being text then as people's smartphones got better it was also about pictures. Now, a big chunk of social media is video.

Speak in plain English. Iron out the jargon and spell it out. You'll connect with more people that way.

Write about, photograph and video your ward and explain what you like about it and what you're doing to improve it. The bandstand in the park, walking the dog in the nature reserve or on the street where residents are asking for speed humps. Take a pic of yourself there.

Selfie videos are your friend. Take a video of yourself out and about talking about the issue you are tackling. One good tip is to think of the story, a statistic and a soundbite. How does this make you feel? Web tools like capcut or kinemaster can help you with basic editing. Shoot in portrait mode for Facebook, Instagram or TikTok.

Selfie photos with who you meet. If you're on patrol with police officers as part of your work take a selfie to show who you're out with. If you've popped into the community centre to see a local pensioners' club, ask permission to take a pic and explain you want to post it online.

The human day to day. It's fine to talk about the weather or other things that make you human.

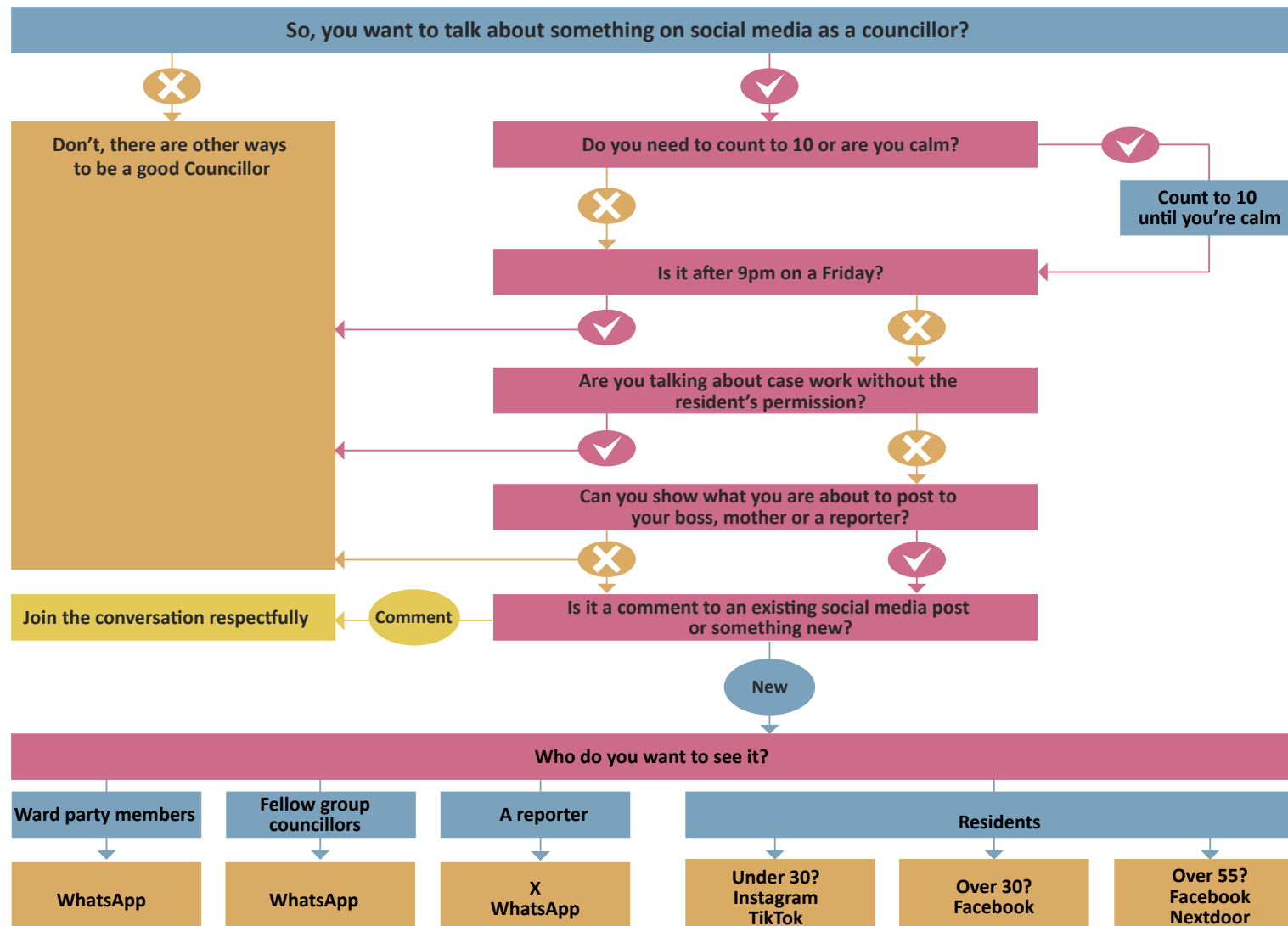
Ask for opinions. The algorithms that run social media channels love discussion. Ask for opinions - remember, keep it respectful.

Photos of the ward. When you are out and about take a picture off the beaten track to see if people can identify it.

Look to comment. Feel free to take part in the wider conversation in the ward. Chip into the discussion in a Facebook group or wherever you find it.



When to post and engage



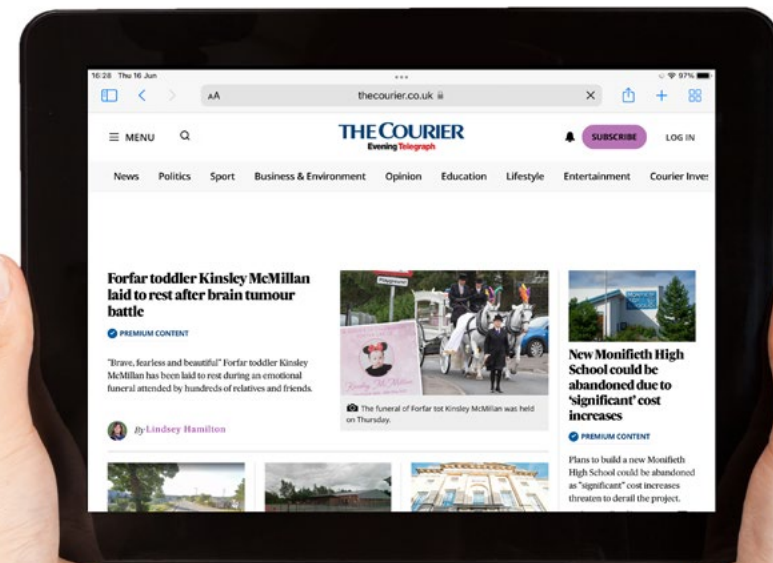
Traditional media and social media

Traditional media used to be the only show in town. The elected member needed to be on good terms with the municipal reporter.

They still have a role to play. Instead of an audience reading an inky evening newspaper their audience is online.

Facebook is a big driver of traffic to the newspaper website which is often ringed with pop-up ads. Content that works well online includes video and pictures.

Here is a breakdown of Scottish councils, the largest newspaper in their area and how much their digital content - their website and social media - is seen within that area.



How much newspapers rely on digital content

(data: jicregonline and Facebook, 2022)

Council area	Largest news outlet	Largest news outlet's digital reach (%)	Facebook
Aberdeen City	Aberdeen Press & Journal	79.8	88,000
Aberdeenshire	Aberdeen Evening Express	65.9	121,096
Angus	Dundee - The Courier	15.8	69,000
Argyll & Bute	Oban Times & West Highland Times	17.4	17,465
Clackmannanshire	Alloa & Hillfoots Advertiser Journal	79.7	16,416
Dumfries and Galloway	Dumfries and Galloway Standard	63.5	18,000
Dundee City	Dundee - The Courier	83.7	69,000
East Ayrshire	Kilmarnock Standard	54.9	25,000
East Dunbartonshire	Glasgow Times	37.4	140,000
East Lothian	East Lothian Courier	83.6	24,000
East Renfrewshire	Glasgow Times	36.3	140,000
Edinburgh City	Edinburgh Evening News	83.4	234,000
Falkirk	Falkirk Herald	79.4	47,000
Fife	Dundee - The Courier	72.7	69,000
Glasgow City	Glasgow Times	41.7	140,000
Highland	Aberdeen Press & Journal	44.1	88,000
Inverclyde	Greenock Telegraph	79.2	37,000
Midlothian	Edinburgh Evening News	77.9	234,000
Moray	Northern Scot	65.9	19,284

Council area	Largest news outlet	Largest news outlet's digital reach (%)	Facebook
North Ayrshire	Ardrossan Herald & Irvine Times Group	62.8	19,000
North Lanarkshire	Glasgow Times	27.9	140,000
Orkney Islands	The Orcadian	84.0	19,900
Perth and Kinross	Dundee - The Courier	83.0	69,000
Renfrewshire	Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette Series	41.4	13,000
Scottish Borders	The Southern Reporter	53.9	15,780
Shetland Islands	Shetland News	n/a	28,000
South Ayrshire	Ayrshire Post / Ayrshire Live	73.9	45,344
South Lanarkshire	Glasgow Times	29.3	140,000
Stirling	Stirling Observer	62.4	18,000
West Dunbartonshire	Lennox Herald	44.2	14,000
Western Isles (Comhairle nan Eilnean Siar)	Aberdeen Press & Journal	40.8	88,000
West Lothian	Edinburgh Evening News	84.0	234,000

What to do when things go wrong

Social media is a conversation and sometimes things don't go according to plan.

You'll find the social media house rules useful for governing online behaviour on your profiles. It's especially useful on a Facebook page.

If you've made a mistake

Most things online can be fixed by deleting, acknowledging the mistake and apologising. If it's something more serious, seek the advice of your council communications team.

If you're the victim of online abuse or trolling

The social media house rules can be useful for governing behaviour on your page but they won't govern the rest of the internet. Abuse and trolling can be corrosive. Academic research says it can often be more harmful than other types of abuse.

Here's sound advice on what to do:

Don't feed the troll. Trolls are people who make intentionally inflammatory statements to elicit an emotional response. They crave attention and a response. Ignore them. They hate that.

Take a screenshot. This captures what is on your device. You may need to download an app to help you do this. Lightshot is one app that can do this on android or Apple. This records the offending content as a picture.

Feel free to block or mute. If you've already explained how you'll be using social media in your house rules, people know what you'll tolerate. Nobody should put up with abuse.

Don't let people know this is getting to you. It only encourages people.

Switch off alerts. You may have a setting where your device pings every time you get a message. Switch this off on your device and put it in a drawer.

Report it. You can report individual tweets and other updates to the social media companies themselves. There may be other places you want to report it depending on who made the offending update. Talk to your communications team and your council's legal department. Don't suffer in silence.

