

Making local government more accessible using online resources

To help make it easier for local people to get in touch with councillors and find out what they are doing in their role we are looking to use social media as a way of improving community engagement.

With so many people now using tools such as Twitter and Facebook it is important councillors consider using these channels as well as the traditional methods of phone, email and face-to-face contact.

Guidelines for Chorley Councillors

The idea is that all councillors will be encouraged to set up accounts on both Facebook and Twitter with training provided to cover the basic use of these sites.

What are the rules?

There will be no separate rules as such but there will be a set of guidelines to help make best use of these sites. It is important to note that when using these sites as a councillor you will still be governed by the code of conduct so you just need to be aware of that at all times.

When using the sites you will be representing yourself as a councillor and not the council. However, it is important that you do not submit any defamatory, offensive or illegal material of any nature as this could lead to legal action being taken against you. Unlike other media you may use, such as the local press, your comments won't be moderated by a third party so you will be responsible for what you say. One way of interpreting this is that if you wouldn't say it in a meeting, don't say it online.

Twitter

Each councillor will be encouraged to set up a Twitter account, or if they already have one, be encouraged to format the account so it becomes recognisable as a Chorley councillor account. If they currently have an account that is purely personal then, if preferred, set up a separate council associated account. The reason for this is that by having a uniformity across the councillor profiles people will know straightaway that it is a Chorley councillor account. The guidelines include:

- The accounts should be set up using their council email address and formatted to include:
 - Name – Cllr A Example
 - Username - @Cllr_AExample – should this be already taken an alternative will be provided
 - Biography – must contain councillor’s name, political party, ward and any added responsibility such as executive member – (any further information to describe themselves is optional here)
 - Profile photo – can be any that clearly shows their face and gives a professional image – it is advised that the official council photos be used
- The accounts should be accessed at least once a week to check for messages
- Posts can contain a mixture of both personal and councillor-related information
- If you ‘re-tweet’ another post then the detail contained in that post will be associated with you so just be aware of this as per set out in the rules above
- There will be an option to include a Twitter profile on councillor business cards
- All accounts should have the privacy settings set as public
- A list will be created from the official Chorley Council account that will include all official councillor accounts
- The password for the account should be shared with democratic services to allow them to remove the account should it become dormant or if an infrequently checked account is accessed by a malicious third party then it can be removed on the councillors behalf to protect both their reputation and that of the council.

Facebook

Unlike Twitter, which is a micro-blogging site, Facebook allows greater scope for interaction between councillors and individuals/groups in the local community.

Members are encouraged to choose to set up an official page and/or create an official councillor profile. The page would act like a mini-website and enable people to ask questions, take part in debate and choose to get updates included in their news feed. The profile would be as people on Facebook have themselves but be set up in an official councillor capacity.

The guidelines include:

- The accounts should be set up using their council email address and formatted to include:
 - Name – Councillor An Example
 - Biography – as Twitter
 - Profile photo – as Twitter
- The accounts should be accessed at least once a week to check for messages
- Posts can contain a mixture of both personal and councillor-related information
- The password for the account should be shared with democratic services to allow them to remove the account should it become dormant
- All accounts should have the privacy settings set as public

Other information

The idea of this is not to restrict councillors from setting up profiles on any other sites or running their own personal accounts on these sites. If you need any help or advice then training sessions can be arranged.