

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

PURPOSE

Social media is the collective term for various sites and applications that enable people to collaborate, network and share content online: thoughts, opinions, ideas, knowledge, experience and analysis, photos, videos etc. This includes social networks, collaboration tools, blogs and messaging services.

Social media is everywhere – it's central to people's lives and integral to how many of us communicate with each other. Social media is therefore an essential part of the parliament's external communications function in supporting parliamentary business, public engagement and marketing.

Good use of social media can help Scottish Parliament Staff (SPS) better understand, respond to, and engage with a wider audience and specific stakeholders.

Whilst it has a role to play in raising awareness and dissemination of information, it's also about the social connections and conversations we have with our stakeholders and colleagues.

It enables two-way communications with people in places where they are already engaging, can improve scrutiny and law-making by widening the consultation process, and provides a cost effective way of targeting specific audiences and marketing the Parliament as a place to visit.

The purpose of this policy is to set out how the SPS manages the use of social media on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB).

We want staff to:

- feel empowered to take advantage of the engagement opportunities provided by social media;
- plan appropriately to make effective use of social media in their business area; and

be clear on governance arrangements and understand their responsibilities.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all use of social media for parliamentary business and public engagement purposes, and for internal collaboration. Use of internal tools (such as blogs or content sharing and discussion forums on Sharepoint) do not require the same consultation process as set out below for external communication purposes (these can be set up at the discretion of site owners), whilst personal responsibilities and our rules of use are the same.

The policy does not apply to individuals' personal social media channels and use of these. Staff should refer to the Staff Handbook for guidance on this.

It applies to all SPCB staff, staff on secondment and contractors who are authorised to use the SPCB's internet, e-mail and other business communications systems.

POLICY

Social media is integral to the successful delivery of the public engagement strategy.

We use it to:

- raise awareness,
- widen reach,
- target specific audiences,
- increase participation,
- engage with audiences in the space they are already in,
- engage with our influencers who we encourage to advocate our campaigns,
- listen and gain audience insight,
- market the Parliament as a place to visit,
- promote events and exhibitions.

However we cannot achieve this by simply being active on social media. Launching a Twitter account or a Facebook page is not a shortcut to a mass audience; neither is it seen as being particularly innovative. Users expect more than a simple news feed; they expect to be able to connect and interact, and we need to be able to commit to that.

Successful engagement requires us to be clear about what we are trying to achieve, and understand how use of a particular channel or social media campaign will help us do so. This involves an ongoing cycle of content planning, monitoring and responding, planning content, and measuring and evaluating. We also need to understand what the resource requirement is to sustain this activity and commit to that.

All this requires responsible use of social media within an agreed strategic framework.

Any requests for new accounts or channels will be considered against our public engagement priorities. This will ensure that any agreed new activities will support and help deliver these.

There should be a strong business case for each new proposal – any new activity needs to add value rather than just adding to our existing offerings. Social media is not an alternative to using the website, which remains our primary external communications tool and information resource.

Too many channels, accounts and voices creates noise which can detract from our key messages, dilute our brand and confuse our stakeholders. When planning engagement campaigns the existing corporate channels should be used, unless there is a distinct or niche audience that we cannot reach on these. We need to strike a balance between effectively targeting stakeholders and saturating them with options.

The Parliament's content strategy applies to social content as well as what is published on our websites. The needs and expectations of our target audiences should always be the starting point rather than an office or team wanting to do

something different. We encourage innovation but this needs to meet a known user need.

Even when there is evidence that a different or emerging channel is where a target audience is active, we need to consider if we have appropriate content as well as the capacity and resource to manage. It is not enough, and potentially reputationally damaging, to simply be on a channel. We need to ensure that we have engaging content for the intended audience, and can plan and sustain activity.

GOVERNANCE

Head of Engagement and Communications Group

Susan Duffy is the owner of the social media policy and responsible for ensuring it is adhered to. This is in line with her responsibilities for delivering the Public Engagement Strategy, and Service Owner of the content strategy. .

Parliament Communications Office (PCO)

Day-to-day implementation and resolution of operational issues is the responsibility of the Parliament Communications Office (PCO). In practice the Head of Engagement and Communication will only be involved in discussions or decision making when something cannot be agreed between PCO and the office or team in question.

Digital Communications and Content Team (DCCT)

DCCT is part of PCO. It is responsible for the management and development of our web and social media channels. As well as the day to day running of the main corporate channels it oversees activity across the organisation, and uses performance data and user insight to drive improvements. This includes working with offices to ensure that the policy is understood and applied, and that staff with responsibilities for creating and posting content have access to the right tools and are given appropriate levels of up to date training and guidance.

Your responsibilities

If you use social media in your SPS role your responsibilities are to:

- respect the needs of the Parliament to protect its reputation, its legal obligations, its information, and its systems;

- adhere to our agreed standards, rules of use and guidelines;
- ensure your content and online behaviour reflects the Parliament's values and is in line with the policy on personal use of social media. Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action;
- use agreed corporate tools to run and manage your account(s);
- work with DCCT to ensure that your accounts are set up to enable effective measurement and evaluations;
- use channels appropriately and with engagement in mind (need to be responsive etc);
- be accurate and informative in explaining SPCB policies and activities;
- respond to comments, views and questions in a professional, positive and timely manner;
- stick to your area of expertise and seek guidance if conversations develop beyond this. You should not commit the SPCB to any action or initiative unless you have authority to do so;
- avoid posting any personal or confidential information;
- only publish about content that is already in the public domain or that has been approved;
- use judgement to quickly escalate any online activity which could become damaging to the reputation of the SPCB to PCO;
- comply with any posting restrictions that are put in place by the organisation (such as a result of an incident, business continuity response or because of rules around an election or referendum).

Advice on any of this is available from DCCT.

New proposals

All staff proposals to set up a new account or use a new social media channel under the terms of this policy must be approved in principle with your Office Head, before discussing your proposal with DCCT.

Your proposal should address:

- Which public engagement priority does your proposal support?

- What are your objectives? What are you trying to achieve?
 - Raising awareness?
 - Involvement/engagement?
 - Participation?
 - Advocacy/feedback?
- What is your intended audience?
 - How familiar are you with this and its use of social media?
 - How do you plan to build and sustain an audience?
- Can you use one of our existing channels or accounts to meet your objectives? (if not, why not?)
- What channel are you proposing to use and why?
 - Have you considered other channels? (if so, why were these discounted?)
- What is your content?
 - How will you plan content?
 - How often do you plan to post content?
 - How will you ensure that your content is creative, innovative and engaging?
 - What other teams need to be involved in creating content?
 - Are there any costs associated with this?
- How will your channel/account be managed?
 - How will it be resourced?

- How will you monitor/respond?
- How will you measure the effectiveness of your activity?
 - What are your targets? How will you define the success of this activity?
 - How will you report on this?
 - What will you do if you do not meet your objectives?

DCCT will assess the request and discuss the best way of using social media to help you achieve your objectives. This may simply be an endorsement of your proposal, or it may involve advising you against your initial proposal and working with you to develop an alternative plan that would be a better way of achieving your aims.

Where there are disagreements between DCCT and the business area about the merits of a new account, how it should be managed, or how it will be evaluated, DCCT will escalate to the Head of Engagement and Communications who will be asked to make a decision.

Whatever approach is taken, DCCT will help with the set-up and provide advice and training, as well as ongoing support.

Closing activities down

Not all our activities will prove to be effective. Given the speed at which the digital landscape changes, we need to monitor and adapt our services. What is effective at one time may well just not work at all before too long. Learning from experiences (both good and bad) and ongoing evaluation and analysis is key to success.

If an account does not prove to be effective despite best efforts or because it cannot be adequately resourced, then it should be closed. This would be discussed between the business area and DCCT in the first instance, and an exit strategy should be developed. If agreement on this cannot be reached then DCCT will again the Head of Engagement and Communications, who will be asked to make a decision.

