

# West Swindon Parish Council

## Social Media Strategy

### Why is it important?

The purpose of this document is to outline a strategy for the way forward in how West Swindon Parish Council uses social media. We recognise that social media can be an effective tool to support our communication and relationship building with the residents we serve.



Our goal is to develop a house style/tone of voice for the Council that encourages conversation and engagement, and keep this tone of voice consistent to build trust and

- to continue to focus on promoting good news/positive stories about West Swindon Parish Council and its services
- grow our effectiveness at reaching residents via the Parish Council's channels
- to encourage both the Parish Office and elected councillors to work collaboratively to share events and posts on behalf of the Parish Council
- to create an effective route for two-way engagement between the Parish Council and the residents of West Swindon

- to promote positive attitudes and responsible behaviour in residents across West Swindon
- to grow local understanding of who is responsible for which services, and how to report issues

### What works well?

- Positivity – posts about community projects, improvements to the area, photos of planting with before and after images have a good level of positive engagement
- Video content gets a large reach and good level of shares
- Creating a chain of stories ‘#whatmalcolmididnext’ show a human side to the Parish team’s service delivery
- Image based content works best

### What works less well?

- Sharing informative posts, such as information on road works - Swindon Borough Council news stories appear to be limited in reach and engagement
- Posts looking for active engagement – e.g asking for people to send in photos – have not always been responded to as well as we have hoped
- Comments on Facebook stories promoting a positive story can attract critical comments (often a small number of repeat commentators)
- Residents may post pictures of local issues on community pages and feeds rather than contacting the Parish Council directly
- Beneficiaries of projects, for example recipients of the Carers Wellbeing Bags commented on these posts
- The Parish Council has not been making maximum use out of other channels such as Twitter and Instagram, however Facebook and Instagram accounts have now been synced to post simultaneously

### Who is engaging with us?

Our current website gives little information on the nature of visitors to the website, this should change once the Parish Council migrates over to a new website. The Parish Council reviews a monthly Facebook social media report. Figures show that while still popular, Twitter is not the go-to social media for young or older people. Facebook continues to be the platform that over-16s favour, while Snapchat and Tik-Tok are growing in popularity and are the main social media channels for under-16s in the UK.

## Statistics and Comparisons at June 2023

### West Swindon Parish Council followers

Facebook: 993

Instagram: 396

Twitter: 14

Looking at West Swindon Parish Council's numbers in isolation, we can see that Facebook is our largest platform, followed by Instagram, then Twitter.

## Resources and Social Media Management Software

One part-time employee manages the outward communications and social media as part of their role. Social media is monitored between the hours of 8am-4pm Tuesday – Thursday. The amount of time resource available to be spent on social media varies depending on workload at the time, however with the planned redesign of the Parish Council's website, this should be improved.

Images, graphic design and video is created within the Parish Team. We recently purchased a drone and are building a library of footage from around the Parish. The videos will be saved to our YouTube channel and embedded on our new website.

There is no dedicated social media budget for boosting posts, paying for social media management software, or paying for assets (music, images).

## External Facebook Pages and Groups

There are a number of West Swindon focused external groups, such as West Swindon Community, Westlea, Sparcells and Peatmoor etc. The Parish Office does not currently monitor these pages but does share 'good news stories/positive content'. Reasons for this are as follows:

- It would be very time consuming to post on the groups/pages and then have to monitor/reply to comments, in addition to our page.
- There would be an increased likelihood of creating negative feeds and issues snowballing.
- The Parish Council does not want to encourage people to see social media routes as a mechanism for reporting an issue. Due to the nature of social media feeds, important reports or dangerous issues could get lost in the feed and would rely on staff to monitor the feed regularly.

## Our Audience

We have a wide audience, as our pages are aimed at all residents of West Swindon. Therefore our communications approach and content needs to be widely accessible and understandable.

## Frequency and type of content

Facebook is our main platform to inform residents, including information on Council meetings and services. Facebook and Twitter are used more formally. Instagram should continue to be used as a positive space, and, in particular Instagram Stories, can be used to engage with residents in a less formal manner. Instagram is not used as a point of information but has been synced with our Facebook account and is a growth point for us, and is a space that can continue to grow and be used to connect with residents.

Currently we post three to four times a week on Facebook although content is dependent on capturing the activities of the team. Only content that is important/relevant is posted, so that this content is not lost within higher quantities of less relevant content. The redevelopment of the website will enable more sharing of single posts and information across multiple channels.

## Facebook

Facebook is our largest platform and is our most important method of informing residents of local updates, events, news and information. All formats of post can be used – text, image, video, and links – as appropriate. Our level of engagement – comments, shares, direct messages – is highest on Facebook. We have not tried live streaming but this could be an option.

Types of post:

- Notice and publicity of our events
- Event pages
- Notice of meetings
- Local consultations
- Information on road closures, flooding, traffic incidents not actively promoted currently
- Reposts of key messages from other organisations such as Swindon Borough Council
- News – our press releases, photographs of projects
- Live streams of events

## Twitter

Twitter is a mainly text focused platform, although we do include images. Twitter is seen as the best platform for engagement with other pages. It would be possible to increase Twitter usage by engaging with others and retweeting more frequently, however this requires more time resources.

Types of post:

- Notice and publicity of events
- Notice of meetings
- Local consultations
- Local events
- Information on road closures, flooding, traffic incidents
- News – our press releases, photographs of projects

## Instagram

Instagram is an image based platform, so we can use it for sharing photos from events and projects. We do not use it as a point of information in the same way as Facebook and Twitter.

Types of post:

- Posters for events and projects
- Photos and videos from events and projects
- Stories – live on event days

## Snapchat

We do not use Snapchat but could move towards it use, where there are messages that need to target a younger audience. We will learn to build this.

## TikTok

We haven't accessed this channel, and we would need to learn how to use it appropriately and in a way that will resonate with our audience.

## WhatsApp

This could be used to create content for community networks however we are mindful of our limited resources. We acknowledge that this is not being used as a communication tool.

## Blogs

We haven't run a blog historically however this could be reviewed and the Chair of the Parish Council could feasibly have a blog.

## Strategy Going forward

Based on this information and analysis, this is the proposed Social Media Strategy:

To be part of a conversation with our audience and ensure our messages cut through, we need to build on our social listening. We need to be aware of what is being said and unsaid. We want to get better at two-way communication.

### **ACTION:**

- Share posts across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Hootsuite software for example may be advantageous for this)
- Promote the work of local volunteers on a regular basis
- Begin growing an understanding of other channels that are not currently used (Snapchat, Tiktok, Whatsapp)
- Increase the frequency for social media posts making more frequent use of drone and photo footage. Post frequency for all platforms may increase when jointly promoting events.
- Promote social media on the website and noticeboards

Our social media platforms are not a replacement for reporting issues, problems and requests for service. An auto-response is in place advising residents that direct messages are not monitored, and offers alternative ways to contact the Council.

### **ACTION:**

- Share posts across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram promoting where and how to contact services (e.g. Swindon BC, utility companies) about commonly occurring issues

We can measure the success of our platforms by the level of positive engagement received, including comments, shares, and reactions, however we must be aware that not all content shared can be positive and open for engagement, as one of our main aims is to keep residents informed. Growth in followers and levels of reach and engagement are recorded on a monthly basis.

### **ACTION:**

- West Swindon Parish Council's new website to provide analytics
- Provide a bi-monthly social media report to the Planning, Leisure & Environment Committee

Our aim of the actions above will be to achieve:

- Production of good quality visual material that is accessible and tells a story and invites interactions
- Have a consistent positive output across a range of social media channels

- Residents feel more informed on local projects, updates, information and news
- Resident engagement with a positive image of West Swindon and the work of the Parish Council
- An improved local understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Parish Council alongside its constraints
- Informal education on residents taking responsibility for behavioural problems such as littering and flytipping

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