North Yorkshire County Council

Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee

10 September 2012

Update on social media

---

1   Purpose of Report

1.1   To provide Members with information on social media, specifically the activity currently undertaken by the council. In addition, the report considers opportunities for communication and engagement using social media, including democratic engagement.

---

2   Background

2.1   Social media refers to online technologies and practices used to share opinions and information, promote discussion and build relationships. The term describes a range of activities and channels. Social media is an area that continues to develop rapidly.

2.2   Many communities and networks make up social media. All effectively facilitate the sharing of content, thoughts and ideas, providing the means for rapid broadcast to vast audiences, stimulating discussion. The networks most people will be familiar with are Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Google+, but also Skype, LinkedIn, Wordpress, Yammer, Yatterbox, Audioboo, Storify, etc. This list continually changes and grows. (*Appendix 1 provides some statistics and usage guidance and a practical demonstration will also be provided.*)

2.3   This dynamic environment has changed the way people communicate and share information. This is already impacting on the council's residents, service users and staff. The development of this area provides great opportunity for communication and engagement, although there are risks, which exist whether the council takes a passive, reactive or proactive approach to social media. Developments will continue, and at a pace.

3   Current use of social media

3.1   The council already has an active presence on social media channels. This is predominantly through Twitter and Facebook, but there is increasing usage of other channels.

3.2   Twitter is used to provide news (press releases, consultation details), service information (for example around gritting), campaign information (e.g. apprenticeships, road safety) and more general information on the council. Recipients can comment on this information instantly and the council responds wherever appropriate. Responses must be quick to address criticism or highlight information. There are approximately 5,500 followers on Twitter, who have chosen to receive anything issued by the council. This number grows daily. The more active an organisation or individual on Twitter, the more interested people

become. Often our information is forwarded on to a much greater audience (re-tweets).

3.3   Facebook is effectively a publishing platform and is not as limited on space as Twitter. The council's pages include similar content, such as news, service and campaign information, but tailored to that medium. Anyone can view the council's content. In addition, viewers can choose to 'like' the council. They receive information automatically as it is added; the current numbers of 'likes' is relatively low at 185, but with the introduction of more bespoke content, is likely to increase.

3.4   Other social media used by the council includes Google+, a competitor to Facebook, and YouTube (the council has its own YouTube channel, currently featuring videos on the voting process, from a number of years ago, and updates from Management Board on One Council).

3.5   The corporate social media channels are used most frequently, with monitoring undertaken throughout the day and out of hours. Other services that have profiles on social media and these include:
- Libraries news and events on Twitter and Facebook;
- Roadworks updates by highways on Twitter
- Youth service Facebook pages (CultureShock and individual youth workers)

3.6   The council has social media monitoring in place. This lets it see who is saying what about the council, where and to whom and it identifies how successful the council's own social media activity is, as well as monitoring activity from other stakeholders, including public sector partners (local authorities, police, fire, ambulance, environment agency, etc.), national government, local MPs, local media, key individuals.

3.7   Consultations are communicated using social media (although the council has not yet undertaken a large scale engagement predominantly using this or online medium), jobs are advertised and services are requesting regular updates for their services, events and activities. During adverse weather and in other emergencies social media is now used significantly to reach people quickly and regularly. These activities are co-ordinated and managed through the communications unit since they were first started in 2010. There are now typically ten postings on social media each day from the council.

3.8   Social media by the council's own councillors is carried out by individual members and there are a small number of councillors who are active on different systems. This area is increasingly seen as a way of re-engaging key audiences in local democracy, but is very much driven by personal interest and skills and therefore is led by individual members and their role in their local communities.

3.9   A number of schools across the county have their own active social media accounts, targeting their students and parents, engaging them in discussions, developments and events. Our partners are active on social media to varying degrees, from very active individuals at the police, to no profiles existing in two district councils. There are now increasing examples from across the country of how the public sector is successfully using social media to engage with audiences, with direct benefits in evidence, as well as an increasing expectation from our residents that we will be using these channels.

4   Governance arrangements

4.1   Access to social media on council equipment is currently regulated by the use of the council's IT filtering system and anyone wishing to access social media must go through an authorisation process, requiring a business case for access, supported by an assistant director.

4.2   In addition, there is a social media policy which considers how an employee should use social media, how they should conduct themselves and what is expected of them (linked to the council's code of conduct). This applies not only to access when using council equipment but also when using it on their own equipment and in their own time. This policy also highlights the responsibility of members in relation to social media and the requirements of the ICT policy for members and code of conduct.

4.3   The wider issue of safety for children in relation to the internet and social media has been discussed through Children's Safeguarding Board, and the council's current policy on social media ensures that staff using it do so in their professional capacity.

4.4   Whilst these governance arrangements are in place, the increasing use of smart phones and other similar hand-held and portable devices, means that individuals can use their own devices to access social media, while they are travelling, at work or in their leisure time, which is part of the reason for success of social media.

5   Developments and future use of social media

5.1   The decisions taken on whether, or how, the council will deal with social media, (whether that's being passive, reactive or proactive), will not prevent others sharing, broadcasting or commenting on what the council does or says; the decision for the council is whether, and how, to join the conversation.

5.2   The monitoring of social media will continue to be essential. As the mainstream media are now all active on social media, as well as using it as a rich source of news content, monitoring is essential to effectively manage the council's reputation. Linked to this will be the use of social media in any emergencies; the county's wider resilience forum is already considering this issue, developing guidance and processes on responses across a number of partners. Experience across the world often highlights the most prolific use of social media comes in emergencies and incidents.

5.3   Activity through the corporate social media channels will continue, with an increase in the use of the medium for campaign and marketing activity. This will link to resources available nationally, as well as developing our own resources. The types of services where social media campaign activity is likely to develop is in libraries, highways, youth service, fostering and adoption, adult learning, waste, recruitment, road safety, countryside services, but demand across the council is increasing from a number of areas.

5.4   Whilst campaign activity will increase, social media will also be used as part of the support of shifting delivery of council services online. It has already been used to

highlight deadlines around school admissions, completing of online fault reporting in highways, promoting of downloadable books by libraries. Further opportunities will be include as channel shift activity increases. Direct service delivery is also an option for some services, such as the sale of photographic images from the council's archive using image sharing social media. Information provision will continue to be the widest use of social media be that the downloading of a bus timetable from a QR (quick response) code, registering for an event or finding out where you can buy compost bins.

5.5 Future developments may include selected members of staff post regularly on Twitter about their work and experiences, either on an ongoing basis or for a limited time (day, week, duration of a specific campaign or event). This is likely to be officers in a 'hands-on' role, which offer interesting valuable content, with limited risks, such as a trading standards officer or public rights of way officer, contributing to wider campaigns or information provision. In future this may be extended to include to include other roles and focus more broadly on customer service issues, highlighting issues that the council is dealing with, answering frequent and topical enquiries, linked to promoting the council's services (and linked back to channel shift). In any of these activities, there needs to be a clear purpose, for example increase service take-up, drive recruitment of volunteers, increase attendance, raise awareness or address questions or criticisms.

5.6 Consultation and engagement is seeing a growing use of social media and whilst the council continues to use online consultation, alongside more traditional channels, there are increasing opportunities to use social media to reach wider audiences. It is also increasingly the case that social media is used to mobilise and motivate people get involved in consultation and the council will explore these opportunities in the future.

5.7 In terms of democratic engagement, whilst individually there are significant opportunities for members on social media which they can explore, the council has the opportunity to raise awareness of social media with members. The council may, therefore, want to begin a programme for members to offer training and support in social media, with the aim of encouraging more engagement in local democracy.

6 **Recommendation**

6.1 That Members consider the report on the council's current use of social media and provide comments and feedback on the council's plans for the future.

Author and Presenter of Report:

Helen Edwards
Head of Communications

Tel: 01609 532104
E-mail: helen.edwards@northyorks.gov.uk

Justine Brooksbank
Assistant Chief Executive (HR & OD)

7 August 2012

Appendix 1

Social media statistics
In terms of facts and figures, it is estimated that there are:
- 24 million Facebook accounts in the UK
- 13 hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute
- 100 million YouTube videos viewed every day
- 13 million articles on Wikipedia
- 4 billion photos archived on Flickr
- 110 million tweets posted a day on Twitter
- Predicted number of smartphone owners by 2013 – 1 billion

However:
- Most blogs lie unread
- 10% of Twitter users generate 90% of the content
- Around 70% of people aged 65 or over in the UK have never been online and do not have access to a computer
- LGIU says "e-democracy can be unfocused, unaccountable and inconsistent".

Using social media
The traditional ways an organisation would expect to control what it says to staff, the media, customers and residents are not applicable to social media.

Guidance on using social media differs from that for other publications or channels. In general, the advice in relation to social media is;
- Understand the different social media channels and the appropriateness of material and contributions for each (such as brief comments, audio clips, video, pictures, etc.)
- Social media works best when there is a reliable, regular source of information and it is trusted.
- Social media is about interaction, not the publishing of media statements; organisations will be expected to interact, and in a timely manner (and therefore give up on the illusion of control).
- The speed of change on social media means that flexibility is key – planning ahead is challenging.
- People will communicate in may different ways (write, take pictures, make movies); others will just listen, view and make comment.
- Whilst those creating content may be few, many more will view it.
- Ensure there are resources dedicated to monitoring social media, across the many different channels.