

Report title	Social Media Work Plan 2024-26
Report author	Peter Le Riche, Head of Public Relations and Marketing
Department	Chief Executive's Office
Exempt?	No

Purpose of report:

To resolve

Synopsis of report:

The Council's use of social media has increased substantially during the last two years, and its audiences have grown as a result.

The time is now right to implement a work plan which has as its objectives to:

- 1. codify how different social media platforms will be used,**
- 2. create a structure which will guide continued growth and engagement, and**
- 3. demonstrate how the use of social media contributes to supporting the Council's reputation overall.**

This report sets out the approach which will be taken in each area including to pause the use of X / Twitter for six months during 2024 to create capacity within the Communications Team to trial the use of Instagram.

Recommendation(s):

Members are recommended to adopt the Social Media Work Plan 2024-26 and give authority to the Head of Public Relations and Marketing to pause the use of X / Twitter for six months during 2024 to trial the use of Instagram.

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 The Council has operated multiple social media platforms since around 2015 with follower numbers and engagement increasing throughout that time but particularly so during the last two years.
- 1.2 The platforms which the Council has corporate accounts on, and which therefore have the largest audience, are Facebook, X / Twitter, Nextdoor and LinkedIn.
- 1.3 In addition to corporate use, a small number of service areas also have 'sub accounts' on social media, these exist on Facebook, X / Twitter and Instagram.
- 1.4 A Youtube account also exists, although this is used as a video hosting platform rather than as a social media channel. It is not actively promoted.

- 1.5 The corporate accounts are controlled by the Communications Team and they have been operated based on the experience of the Head of Service and other members of staff. A guiding approach to content, management and quality has existed informally which has delivered good results to date.
- 1.6 As the platforms have grown in audiences, volume of content shared and relative importance to the Council as a way to share information with the public, a work plan to drive and structure future use is now required.

2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended

- 2.1 Social media is constantly 'on' and needs a regular flow of content and engagement with audiences in order to be properly managed, to present the Council in a positive light and to explain services.
- 2.2 For the last four years, the Council's Communications Team has delivered this work successfully through its experience, skill and judgement, and a rise in audience and engagement levels has been observed.
- 2.3 To continue to drive further growth and to better define how social media is used, a structured approach is now needed. The proposed Social Media Work Plan 2024-26 sets out to do this by codifying how different social media platforms will be used, creating a structure which will guide continued growth and engagement, and demonstrates how the use of social media contributes to supporting the Council's reputation overall.

Codifying the Council's approach to and use of social media

- 2.4 The Council will be structured in its use of social media and focus its limited resources to spend time and effort on the areas which best help the authority to meet the Corporate Business Plan and its underpinning strategies. The work plan also explicitly sets out the benefits of using social media and the governance, management and ownership arrangements in place

Increasing audience and engagement rates

- 2.5 Increasing audience and engagement rates will be achieved by
 1. Define use of each platform and actions involved.
 2. Moving towards a social first approach. This means that more of the Council's messaging will appear on social media first, instead of in news stories. This allows for a faster turnaround of information, making it more timely and relevant.
 3. Greater focus on a smaller number of key topics. This is intended to drive home the most information and messaging by repeated publication. To manage this there will be a reduction in one off posts, which do not tend to achieve the desired result.
 4. Increasing visual content.
 5. Embedding house rules.
 6. Careful and targeted spending on promotion of specific types of content, primarily where the Council is asking people to do something, rather than just to be aware.
 7. Focus on existing platforms over new. In general, the Council will continue to prioritise Facebook, Nextdoor and LinkedIn.

Instagram trial

- 2.6 Related to 2.5.7 above, the Council's engagement rate and reach on X / Twitter has declined in recent months. The Council will pause activity on this platform in order to

create capacity to launch an Instagram account. A six month trial will be planned to measure follower numbers, whether it is possible to gather broad location information to demonstrate that the audience built lives in or near Runnymede, the ability of the Council to provide content which engages audiences on Instagram, and the volume of material available which is specific to under 25s.

Using social media to improve the Council's reputation

- 2.7 Posts across social media reach a large number of people on a daily basis. The type and quality of material posted, the language used, imagery chosen and the way people are engaged with when they comment plays a huge role in the Council's reputation. Our reputation can be supported via social media in terms of having a strong and well run presence on each platform, building trust and openness in what we say and post about and by promoting positive news and successes to demonstrate the Council provides value for money and is an organization which residents and stakeholders should be happy with. Furthermore, it can be used to facilitate dialogue with the community, to share timely and relevant information, and to manage and explain issues which arise.

Feedback from relevant Member Working Party

- 2.8 Councillors attending the Communications and Service Transformation Member Working Party on 23 October 2023 discussed the work plan with the lead officer. A summary of their comments which impact the work plan are as follows:

Comment	Response from Head of Service
Would different social media platforms allow the Council to reach a younger audience?	Potentially yes, but younger people do use all social media platforms. The question is whether they are engaging with local authority content whatever social media platform they use. The proposed Instagram trial is intended to examine this issue.
Keep close control of advertising costs.	The work plan has been updated to provide greater clarity in this area. Advertising will only be considered where the Council is specifically asking followers to take action, rather than to be aware of a topic. Spending will be agreed with Corporate Heads of Services and will only be on an occasional basis.
Investigate how other councils use social media.	Research has been carried out on this topic and is listed below:

- 2.9 North Surrey area borough councils' use of social media

Council	Followers	Number of posts	Average number of likes in past 10 posts
Spelthorne	2,028	6,033	1.1 (one post received 32 likes, taking this into account, the average was 4)
Elmbridge	2,639	2,401	4.8
Woking	3,151	1,057	8.9 (One post unrelated to Council activity received 109 likes. Including this, the average was 19.8)

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 The Social Media Work Plan is intended to improve the way in which the Council communicates about its core themes as set out in the Corporate Business Plan and its five underpinning strategies.

4 Resource implications/Value for Money

- 4.1 The work plan does not require any extra budget, over and above very small levels of spending on carefully targeted advertising, and occasional staff training, which is already budgeted for.
- 4.2 The work plan does not require any extra staffing resource, it sets out a different way of working, rather than extra work.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 None.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 None.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 None

8. Risk implications

- 8.1 The risk of not implementing a work plan is that use and management of social media platforms would be less structured and may be less effective at supporting communication of the Council's priorities, work and successes.

9. Timetable for Implementation

- 9.1 The work plan will cover the period January 2024 to December 2026

10. Background papers

- 10.1 Social Media Work Plan document.

11. Appendices

- Appendix A – Social Media Work Plan