

SIC twitter account

Conventions, procedures and protocols



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Glossary and abbreviations

Term used	Explanation
The Commissioner	The Scottish Information Commissioner
tweet	Content posted via twitter

Cross-referenced VC documents (for internal use)

VC No	VC name
60881	C2 Communication Strategy 2015-20 v01 CURRENT ISSUE
TBC	Communication Plan
44951	C2 Enquiries Guidance and Procedures v01 CURRENT ISSUE
45493	C2 Responding to Information Requests Guidance and Procedures

Introduction

1. twitter is an online social networking service that allows readers to send and read short text messages of up to 280 characters in length, called “tweets”. Tweets are shared instantaneously. Users select which content they want to receive in their twitter feeds by “following” other users and they share tweets with their own followers by “retweeting”. Hashtags (#) are used to link content according to themes or for specific events.
2. The Commissioner’s twitter account is @FOIScotland. It is one of the media we use to deliver our Communication Strategy. It is a powerful and efficient way to alert a wide range of stakeholders to news in real time, to generate interest in FOI issues, our own organisation and, particularly, our online content (website and blog).
3. twitter is more conversational than other media that we use. Users share views, ask questions and may even make information requests. Tweets are in the public domain and visible to followers.
4. The impact of using twitter is measurable. We can identify increased visitor numbers to content on our website as a result of tweets and retweets.
5. The Communication Strategy 2015 -20 sets out that we will use twitter to:
 - (i) Encourage readers to visit content on our blog and website.
 - (ii) Promote our publications and resources.
 - (iii) Share views on topical issues for example, the issue of consultation responses, highlights from keynote speeches.
 - (iv) Encourage readers to share our communications via “retweeting”, thus increasing our potential audience.
 - (v) Share news from authoritative sources e.g., Scottish Parliament, ICO, academics, where relevant to our role or remit.
6. Achieving the benefits of twitter is dependent on us:
 - (i) Posting regular and interesting tweets
 - (ii) Developing a list of followers who will retweet our content
7. This document sets out how we will achieve these two outputs through:
 - conventions (or principles) for the content, style and voice.
 - internal procedures for identifying, drafting and approving content.
 - a list of protocols to support staff managing the twitter account and responding to feedback.

Conventions

Frequency

8. We aim to provide a regular offering of tweets covering diverse and new content to appeal to different audiences (see **Editing and planning** below).
9. We aim to tweet at least two or three times a week, but only if we have relevant and valuable content to share with our users. It is better not to tweet, than to be seen to be tweeting out-of-date, low-value or irrelevant content.
10. We may tweet more frequently at events or to alert followers to breaking news.

Content

11. Our tweets are:
 - (i) accurate and factually based, even when sharing opinions
 - (ii) interesting to the audience
 - (iii) relevant to what we do
 - (iv) accessible (see **Tone** and **Style**)
 - (v) topical
12. We aim for tweets of 125 characters to support retweeting.
13. We provide links wherever possible so that readers can find out more.
14. The same consent rules apply to the use of photographs of people on twitter as in any other medium.

Tone

15. We're professional, approachable, helpful and friendly.
16. Our tweets reflect the Commissioner's impartiality and are in an "organisational" voice i.e., the author is not identifiable. We generally use the third person plural: "we", "us" or "our" unless referring to news about the Commissioner (or "SIC") e.g. "the SIC has published a special report".

Style

17. We use plain English and a conversational style.
18. We use acronyms that readers will understand.
19. We focus on what will be of interest to the reader, avoiding standardised, boring messages e.g., "Two great examples of advice and assistance [link]", rather than "read this week's key learning points [link]".

Procedures

20. The Policy and Information Team has responsibility for maintaining the twitter account. Tweets are planned through the Communication Plan and content is kept under continual review.

21. Three members of the Policy and Information Team:
 - (i) Monitor the twitter feed during office hours.
 - (ii) Post tweets to the twitter feed
 - (iii) Provide access to the account to other staff as required.
22. Most tweets are driven by the publication of new content on our website or blog. In these cases the text and timing of the tweet will be agreed when the content is approved.
23. Where tweets are not associated with publication of planned new content, the text is approved by the HOPI, HOE or SIC. They will consult relevant members of SMT as required.
24. Members of SMT and Policy and Information team may tweet breaking news or from live events. Such reactive tweets do not require prior authorisation.
25. The following are examples of content for our twitter feed

SIC GENERATED CONTENT	
Example	Guidance
Sign-posting to the weekly Decisions Round-up (DRU)	Promoting the content of the DRU, with a link.
Publication of new reports and briefings	Notification of publication, with a link.
News releases / press statements, as appropriate	Summarise the key message, with a link
SIC-supported events	Link to published programme info "There are still places at..." "Looking forward to today" "Great examples of FOI requests at Dumfries workshop"
"Live tweeting" from SIC-supported events	Key points made by speakers from SIC supported events with relevant hashtag (e.g. "#FOIScot2015" for the 2015 Holyrood Conference)
High profile decisions	Notification, with link to press statement or news release.
Job vacancies, invitations to tender	Notification of new recruitment or tendering opportunities.
Seeking views	From time to time, we may want to ask questions or solicit comments or views from our followers, with a link to web content or a survey.
Speeches and presentations	Message highlights or notification of event

Protocols

26. As explained earlier, twitter is both more conversational than other media we use. Interactions are in real time and it is important that when we respond, we do so quickly.
27. The following protocols guide our staff to respond appropriately.

Comments

28. We don't automatically respond to every comment which references us. Whether it's appropriate to respond depends on the subject and nature of the comment. Responses must be approved by the HOPI, HOE or SIC.

Enquiries

29. We respond to enquiries on twitter (through tweets or Direct Message) in the same way we respond to all other enquiries (see Enquiries Procedure VC44951). We respond quickly, but never at the expense of accuracy or good customer service principles.

Information Requests

30. Information requests via twitter are responded to in the usual way (see Responding to information requests VC45493).
31. It is challenging to make valid requests within the 280 character limit. We offer advice and assistance to the requesters to make a valid request.

Retweeting content

32. Retweets of third party content must be approved by the HOPI, HOE or SIC. Below are examples of the circumstances where we may retweet:

THIRD-PARTY CONTENT	
Example	Guidance
New publications, Bills, consultations, Codes, research	Factual notification or a retweet with a link.
Opinions, commentary	Rarely and only when covered on our blog or website (set in context)
Court rulings	Factual notification or retweet, with a link.
Third party events	Factual notification or retweet, with a link.
Third party requests to retweet	Only where relevant and agreed.

Using hashtags

33. We occasionally create hashtags to highlight content, encourage others to share and discuss our content, or to contribute to debate around a relevant issue or subject. Creation and use of hashtags should be discussed and agreed with the HOPI, HOE or SIC.
34. We use third party hashtags to participate in twitter conversations at conferences and events. In any other context we are more cautious about using third party hashtags in any other context to avoid any prejudice to the Commissioner's impartiality.

Following other twitter users

35. We follow twitter users interested in FOI law and access to information more generally.

36. When considering whether to follow any individual account, our main consideration is maintaining the Commissioner's impartiality. We also consider users' areas of interest and the content they post.

Document control sheet

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