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## Councillors praise power of the tweet

Cardiff councillors have spoken of the benefits of using Twitter but caution against too much use in council meetings



**JayneCowan** All Councillors will receive any amendments logged for Council this evening with a list of questions tabled.

about 4 hours ago via Twitter for BlackBerry®



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**JayneCowan** Reading Council Papers now.

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Some Cardiff councillors regularly use Twitter to update residents on their work and news from meetings

Cardiff councillors have spoken out about the benefits of using Twitter after a Merthyr Tydfil councillor was reprimanded for using the social networking site to send updates from council meetings.

Amy Kitcher was referred to the local ombudsman after sending tweets from her mobile in a Merthyr Tydfil council meeting last week. Cardiff council has said members are allowed to tweet during meetings since there is no policy against it and the meetings are also videocast live via the website. A council spokesperson said:

"The council does not have a specific policy on tweeting during council meetings, and councillors are not prevented from tweeting during council meetings. A social networking policy is being developed.

"The council, however, has codes of conduct, for both members and employees, which govern general issues of conduct."

Top Cardiff council Twitterers, Adrian Robson and Jayne Cowan for Rhwibina, Richard Cook and Cerys Furlong for Canton and executive members Nigel Howells and the famous tweeter John Dixon (who encountered a bit of a media furore concerning his "stupid scientology" tweets from last year) have all been tweeting from council meetings in the last year.

Out of 75 councillors in total they are still in the minority, but we asked them whether Twitter had been a benefit or a hindrance as a councillor.

## **The view from the chamber**

Cerys Furlong said the ease of speaking to some residents via Twitter far outweighed any pitfalls. She said:

"I was sceptical about the value of Twitter at first, but I now find it really useful for my council work. Because Twitter is so instant, it is often the first place for news stories. I also find it useful for engaging with residents, and I have had helpful feedback on planning applications from residents via Twitter.

"I have also been able to pick up cases via twitter, for example people often tweet when they are irritated by something- if that is a council service I have been able to contact them and help. While tweeters (people who tweet) will never be representative of the general public they are a unique community too important to ignore. For me Twitter does not replace any other form of communication, but is an additional tool that enables me to speak to people I might not otherwise engage with."

In terms of tweeting from the council chamber, Furlong added:

"In recent months I have noticed that people on Twitter are interested in following the proceedings from full council meetings. While very few people will watch the live stream of proceedings, many will be interested to know

what is on the agenda, and how the debate is going.

"With Twitter residents can follow it with small updates from councillors, this has to be a good thing. However, I am aware that Twitter is not for everyone (councillors or residents) and I wouldn't want to get to a position where all 75 councillors are stuck to their mobiles tweeting throughout meetings. It's important to engage fully in the debate going on in the chamber."

Canton councillor Richard Cook recently took up Twitter and he said councillors should use the social networking site with caution. He said:

"I think if you tweet in council meetings it can get obsessive. Occasional tweeting is acceptable but obsessive tweeting becomes inane. You risk missing something important happening and can give the impression you are not fully attentive to proceedings which with broadcasting of meetings does not look good to the electorate. I don't tweet in Council meetings.

"Benefits of tweeting are speed and getting information widely disseminated quickly. We have seen some of the pitfalls of Councillors tweeting in Cardiff already. Think twice and then again before you tweet is my motto. I tend not to tweet personal stuff."

Rhiwbina councillor Adrian Robson said Twitter had become a valuable tool and he didn't have a problem with tweeting from meetings. He said:

"It's great for getting out short bites of information very quickly to constituents, and for advertising events. It also allows you to keep up with the movers and shakers in Cardiff such as Peter Cox from Cardiff Civic Society.

"I'm reluctant to use Twitter during the council meetings but wouldn't stop others doing so."

Fellow ward councillor Jayne Cowan said she had had some good feedback from residents on her updates from council meetings.

"There are people bringing laptops and mobile phones into the chamber and it's live webcast as well.

"I've got constituents who say to me 'wow, it's so great to get it live' and they don't have the time to watch the webcasts always."

Cowan said she was intending to tweet from the full council meeting at County Hall tomorrow.

Councillor John Dixon said:

"The way I use Twitter is to provide spur-of-the-moment commentary about what's going on around me. That could be the council, my wife's continuing struggle to understand the sci-fi I watch and read, or my battles at work with Internet Explorer 6. I'd like to think I'm helping to show that politicians are about more than just politics.

"As for tweeting from council, I think it's no more disruptive or discourteous than turning to have a quiet word with your neighbour about something that's just happened or that someone's said. It's all about degree - a good councillor wouldn't talk to someone else all the way through a meeting, just as they wouldn't spend all the meeting tapping messages into a phone or laptop."

A Cardiff council spokesperson added:

"The council also has its own Twitter account and uses this medium, as well as other social networking channels and more traditional forms of communication, to provide citizens with information about council services and as a way of contacting the council."

See our list of Cardiff council tweeters [here](#).

**What do you think of Cardiff councillors using Twitter, and in meetings too? Leave your comments below.**

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