

Meeting:	Executive Decision-Making Session
Meeting date:	23/04/25
Report of:	Chief Strategy Officer
Portfolio of:	Leader, Executive Member for Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

Decision Report: No longer using X (formerly known as Twitter)

Summary

This report sets out the case for reviewing the City of York Council's use of X (formerly known as Twitter), in response to significant changes to the platform's functionality, credibility, and reach. Since its takeover, X has removed independent fact-checking, amplified misinformation, and promoted divisive content. These changes are increasingly at odds with the Council's values of inclusion, trust, and respectful communication. At the same time, resident engagement with council content on X has sharply declined, limiting its effectiveness as a channel for public information. This report outlines the risks and opportunities of stepping away from routine use of X, while ensuring continued capacity to meet the Council's legal duty to communicate during emergencies. It invites the Leader to consider whether the council should formally end its regular presence on X and shift focus to more trusted, higher-performing channels.

Subject of Report

1. This report sets out the benefits and challenges of the council continuing to use X, formerly known as Twitter. It includes a plan to encourage residents to seek information from the remaining council channels and explains what will happen in the event of an incident, when the council has a duty to "warn and inform".
2. It invites the Leader to decide whether the council should continue to publish content and engage residents on X, in the context of X's decision to end independent fact checking, and declining

engagement following changes to the X algorithm that defines the content which is shared with resident accounts.

3. Elected members own X accounts are out-of-scope of this report, and it remains a matter of personal choice for members if they wish to continue using X.

Benefits and Challenges

4. There are several benefits related to no longer using X as the council's key channel to engage and communicate with residents:
 - a) **Reputation Management:** X can be unpredictable, and controversial and negative events can quickly escalate. Recently, X has been criticised for amplifying extreme views, exacerbating tensions in local communities across the UK. To avoid the risk of miscommunication or misinformation gathering momentum, the council could choose to no longer post content on its channels, especially as there are not the resources to properly monitor and manage council accounts out of hours.
 - b) **Misinformation:** The council regularly shares important updates, public service announcements, or crisis management information on X, together with other social media platforms. However, the fast-paced 24/7 nature of X contributes to the spread of misinformation or misinterpretations which is no longer independently fact-checked. This can make it challenging to ensure clear and accurate communication with residents, particularly out of hours.
 - c) **Declining engagement:** The council has noticed a sustained and continued drop in engagement in X posts, particularly since the change in algorithms. This negates any benefit from the large number of followers – i.e. followers are no longer being served the content.
5. The benefits of the council remaining on X are set out below. A plan has been prepared to manage these benefits:
 - a) **Incident communications:** X is an instant platform for sharing news, emergency alerts, and public service announcements. The City of York Council has a statutory

duty to “warn and inform” residents during emergencies as part of its duties under the Civil Contingencies Act. It can quickly inform residents about important issues, such as weather warnings, road closures, or local events causing traffic issues. To manage incident communications, it is recommended that the council retains **only** the corporate account, which is **only** used during incidents, following approval by Silver Command).

- b) **Broader engagement:** X provides access to over 49k followers on the corporate CYC account (and more from service accounts). This includes those who might not follow traditional council communications and the media. The plan to encourage the audience to follow other council channels is below.
- c) **Trusted source:** The @CityofYork account is a recognised, established and trusted source of accurate information. By closing the account, the account name would become available for anyone to adopt and could be used by people pretending to be the City of York Council, potentially for scams and monetary gain. To avoid this, the council will continue to own the account, although no longer use it, unless directed by Silver Command.

Policy Basis for Decision

- 6. Developing different ways for the council to engage local people is an action in the Council Plan 2023-2027.
- 7. By choosing to no longer routinely share information on X, the council is demonstrating how it values everyone in the city and making a clear statement it no longer tolerates the abuse, misinformation and extreme views that X has become synonymous with.

Financial Strategy Implications

- 8. There are no immediate financial impacts associated with no longer posting on X. However, for routine campaigns (i.e. non incident) there could be an expectation to increase communications spend to reach broader audiences currently

contacted via X. This will need to be carefully managed, with free of charge channels used instead.

Recommendation and Reasons

9. The Leader is invited to consider the content of this report and:
 - a) Approve the Council no longer shares information on its corporate X (formerly known as Twitter) account @CityofYork, unless directed by Silver Command.
 - b) If approval is received for point 9a, approve the plan (**Annex A**) to encourage residents to register for information or follow other council social media channels, whilst closing all council X accounts that do not respond to an incident.

Background

10. X, formerly known as Twitter, is the most prolific of all social media platforms, partially driven by the reputation of its owner Elon Musk. X currently has 611 million global active users, although this has declined by 33m since Musk acquired X for £44bn. Over the past few years, Musk has reorganised how the platform functions, with sweeping changes including stopping independent fact checking and changing the algorithm that serves content to accounts.
11. There are several high-profile examples of where X has deliberately interfered in right wing/extreme views, exacerbating and fuelling community tensions. This includes amplifying polarising views through the algorithm (which has created an echo chamber), sharing false narratives, becoming a battleground for political controversy, particularly during elections, public shaming through the cancel culture, escalating conflict during crises, and echoing extremist views.
12. X's lack of moderation and anonymity has **been linked** to harmful content proliferation. High profile examples include allowing Andrew Tate to return to the platform, with extremist accounts¹

¹ [Far-Right Extremist Accounts Surging on Mainstream Platforms - Global Project Against Hate and Extremism](#)

surging and Anonymous² now attempting to reduce extremism by shutting down 5k accounts.

13. In the UK, the top six social media channels ranked by popularity (measured by active accounts) are below:

Ranking	Platform	General audience summary (unable to verify York audience)	CYC followers
1	Facebook	Broad demographic, popular with adults aged 25-54	19k
2	Instagram	Popular with younger audiences (18-34 years old), especially for visual content.	4.7k
3	X	Attracts people aged 18-49, with a heavy presence of public figures, journalists, and those involved in current affairs	49k
4	YouTube	Broad demographic, especially 18-49-year-olds.	1.5k subscribers
5	TikTok	Primarily younger audiences (16-24 years old).	The council does not have an account
6	Linked-in	Professionals, business owners, and organisations.	15.8k

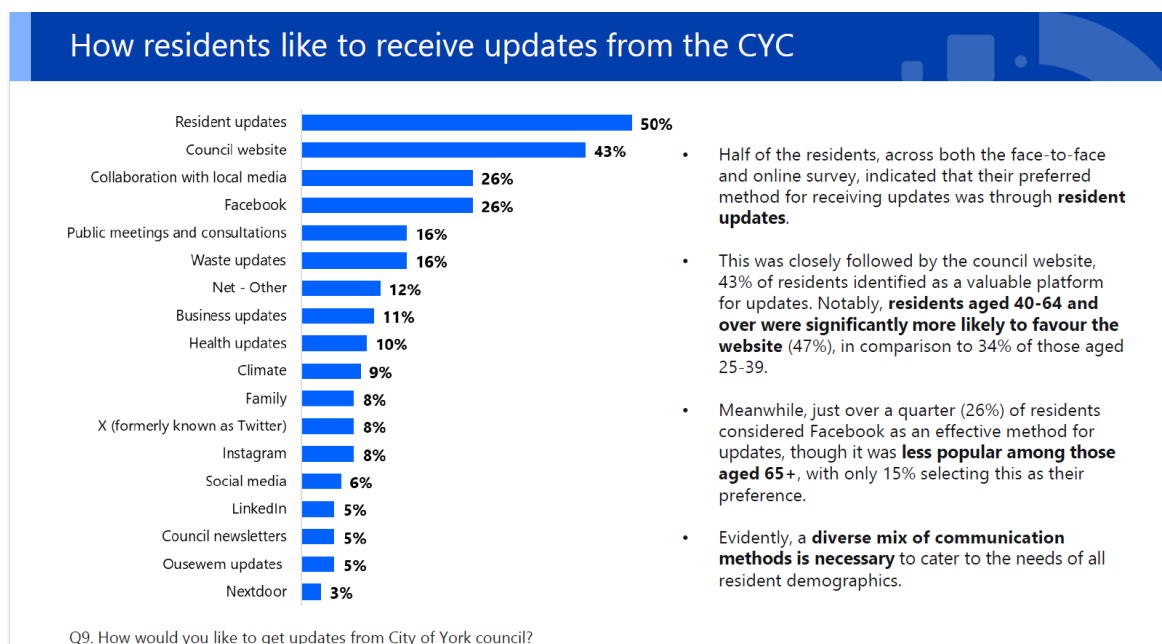
14. This information was partially sourced from Chat GPT who combined information from Statista, Ofcom and the Pew Research Centre
15. There are challenges with all social media accounts, with Facebook / Instagram and TikTok all in the top six of social media platforms and all having issues ranging from security to reputation and creating echo chambers through different algorithms. The challenges set out above for social media could equally apply to these social media platforms, however, currently, they do not have the same profile or damaging reputation.

² [Anonymous aims to reduce extremism by shutting down 5,000 Twitter accounts - UMA Technology](#)

16. The council is currently undertaking a channel review of the different channels different services use and will continue to maintain a watching brief on all social media platforms as it takes every opportunity to engage with residents in as meaningful and cost-effective way as possible.

Preferred council channels

17. The budget consultation³ asked residents to confirm how they would like to receive updates from the council. Only 8% of residents indicated X, with 50% preferring the resident update (e-newsletter). Over the next few months, the council will encourage more residents to register for updates from the e-newsletter.



18. In addition to promoting sign-ups to the council's e-newsletter, a six-month research period will be undertaken to explore alternative channels that could help fill the gap left by X, as outlined in this report. This review will include, but not be limited to, emerging social platforms such as BlueSky, and established broadcast tools like WhatsApp, to assess their potential for reaching and engaging residents effectively.

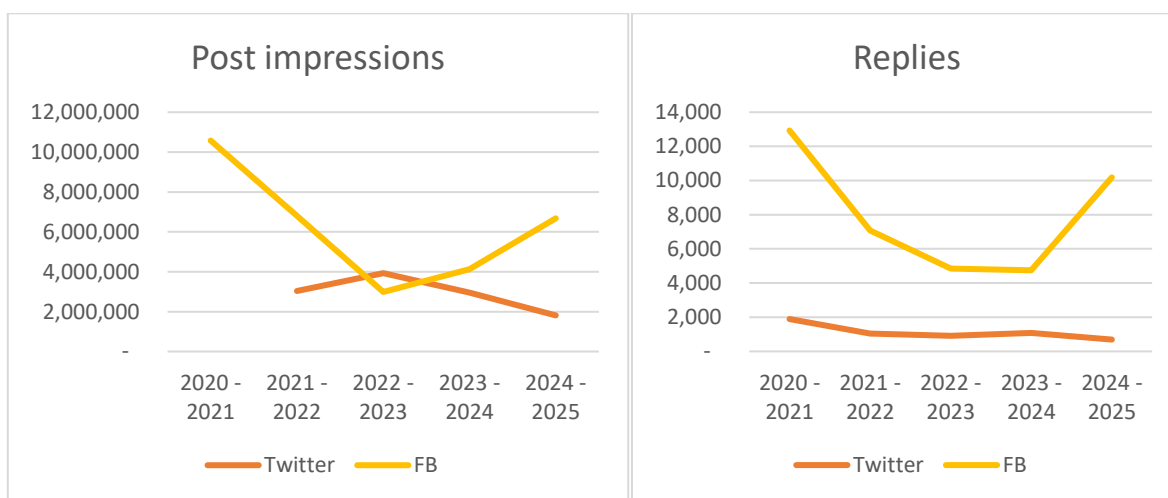
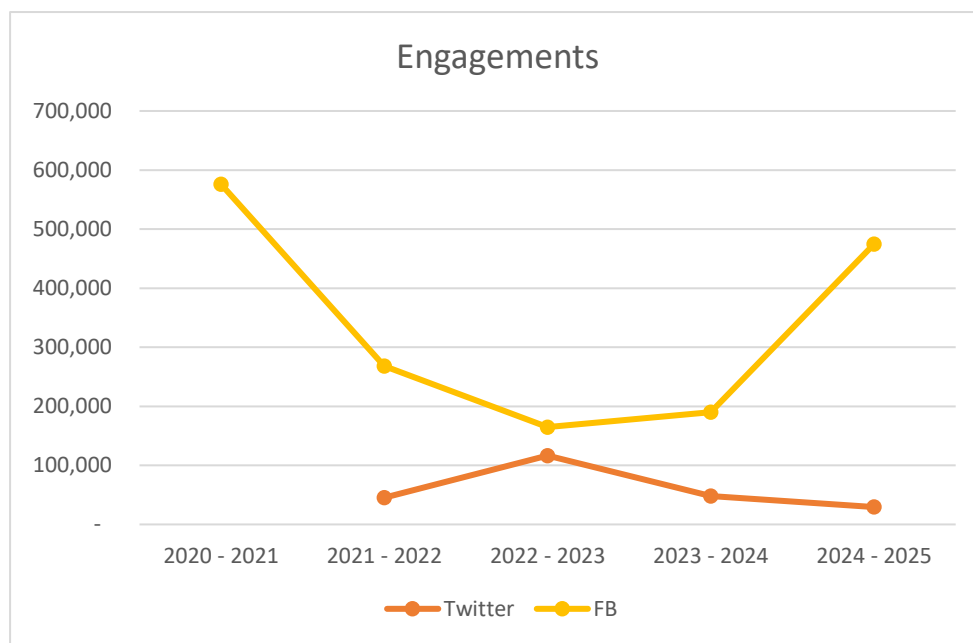
Performance of @CityofYork / X account

19. An analysis of how the council's corporate X account, compared with the corporate Facebook (FB) account has performed over the

³ <https://data.yorkopendata.org/dataset/budget-consultation/resource/c996e8d0-bd46-4dee-a9ed-cd03cc575ae3>

last 5 years is below. This clearly shows when the algorithm changed and the decline in engagement since then, which has continued.

20. Residents are no longer engaging in X content in the way they did, for many because the content is no longer served to them, and instead residents are engaging much more in the corporate Facebook (FB) account.



Other public bodies

21. An analysis of whether other councils and public bodies have made similar moves away from X, and if so, what their approach has been, is set out below. This has helped inform the plan in Annex A:

Organisation	Account still 'live'	Pinned post informing followers	Explain in bio	Media release Sent?
Devon County Council	Yes but no recent posts	Yes- "This account is not monitored. Our website is full of useful information: http://devon.gov.uk . Or if you need to get in touch, contact us ..."	Yes	unknown
North Wales Police	Yes but no recent posts	No	No	media statement
Southampton City Council	Yes but no recent posts	Yes- "Due to recent changes on X, Southampton City Council no longer uses this platform, and our accounts are not monitored. Click the LinkTree in our bio to engage with us on other platforms and to the read the Leader's full statement about this change. Thank you for your support."	Yes	Yes
NHS confederation	Yes but no recent posts	Yes- "As of 27 January, we will no longer be posting on X. To keep up to date with our work, follow us on Bluesky, connect with us on LinkedIn and bookmark our website."	Yes	unknown
South Lanarkshire Council	Yes and post alerts and updates	Yes- "South Lanarkshire Council will now only use X for emergency alerts and other urgent information. Read more in the View https://orlo.uk/RYfma ."	Yes	Yes
Renfrewshire Council	Yes but no recent posts	Yes- "We are moving to Bluesky and will no longer use this X account. Follow our new channel to keep up to date with the latest news and updates from Renfrewshire Council."	Yes	Yes
Mid Yorks NHS	Yes no recent posts (other than answering one question)	Yes- "After careful consideration, we have made the decision to step away from actively posting on X. You can read more in our statement below, or by visiting our website https://bit.ly/3ZQaAPv "	No	Yes

The Local Government Association

22. The LGA shared their latest position at a recent webinar about crisis communications and tackling misinformation, learning from last summer's riots. Their position has helped inform the plan to manage a move away from X for the City of York Council, which ultimately is a decision for its Executive:
23. *"While it's true that there are significant concerns about governance, misinformation, and the platform's direction under its current ownership, X still remains one of the most effective platforms for reaching a broad and diverse audience as part of a mix of channels. Despite the exodus of some organisations, X still maintains a substantial user base in the UK, which cannot be easily replicated on other platforms. I am sure members will agree this reach is crucial for public sector communications, ensuring that our messages can be disseminated widely and quickly especially at times of crisis.*
24. *Reducing our presence or completely withdrawing could mean we miss out on key interactions and feedback from the public. Instead of an either/or approach, a strategy of coexistence where we continue to use X alongside exploring and increasing our presence on other platforms would be beneficial. We have recently opened up profiles on BlueSky and WhatsApp. This approach allows us to keep our established audience while expanding our reach on emerging platforms.*
25. *We should monitor the situation closely, particularly concerning misinformation and platform governance.*
26. *However, pulling out entirely might not be the best strategy given the current landscape. Instead, enhancing our content moderation practices and adapting our communication strategies to address these issues could be more effective.*
27. *We should also listen to our audiences – if there was an overwhelming and representative call for us to review our presence on any platform then of course we should consider their views. So, for now the LGA's position is to maintain a presence on X while also diversifying our social media strategy. This allows us to continue engaging with the public while we explore the benefits of other platforms."*

Plan to cease sharing information on X

28. The plan to cease sharing information on X is in **Annex A** and has been developed to support the council move away from X, and no longer post content or engage with residents, unless directed by Silver Command.
29. On 25/06/25, all council X accounts will be removed from the website and other digital communications, so it is clear it no longer is an option for residents to hear from, or engage with, the council.
30. The corporate X account (@CityofYork) will remain open, with a message in the bio noting it will no longer be actively used unless during an incident.

Consultation Analysis

31. City partners and the LGA have been approached for their views about using X as a channel to share council information. Some city partners have reported that although they have continued to maintain a presence, they are no longer active – retaining the account to prevent others from using the account name for their own gain.
32. Some residents have contacted the Council through other existing channels to raise their concerns about City of York Council's continued presence on X, and how this doesn't match the Council's values.
33. A channel review about how residents get and engage with information about the council is underway. This review will further inform the plan in Annex A.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

34. *The options to no longer continuing to post information on X are*
 1. **Full withdrawal.** Cease posting and deactivate all council X accounts including the corporate @CityofYork handle. This would entirely remove the council's presence on the platform.

2. **Partial withdrawal.** Cease posting content on all council X accounts but retain ownership of the corporate account. Use only during incident response as directed by Silver Command. Display an informative pinned post and updated bio.
3. **Continue limited engagement.** Continue using the X platform for major announcements and crisis communications but reduce routine campaign use through service accounts. This maintains a “light touch” presence.
4. **Status quo.** Continue full use of X across corporate and service accounts.

The recommended option for the Leader to consider is 2.

Rationale

35. The decision to no longer post content or engage on X is in response to changes to the algorithm, which drives council information to residents account feeds, and the end of independent fact-checking. This has led to a significant drop in engagement in council communications on the platform over the past year.
36. Despite having 49,000 followers on the X account, impressions from X are now less than a fifth of City of York Council's Facebook impressions with less than a tenth of engagement compared to Facebook, a significant decline since 2022.

Organisational Impact and Implications

- **Financial,** *There are no direct financial implications arising from this decision. Future campaigns may require adjusted targeting to ensure reach, but existing free channels (e.g., e-newsletter, Facebook) will be prioritised. Any additional spend will be managed within existing budgets.*
- **Human Resources (HR),** *There are no direct HR implications. However, internal guidance will be provided to services operating X accounts to support a smooth transition and ensure clarity around usage protocols.*
- **Legal:** In order to discharge its duty to warn and inform in an emergency situation, the Council should keep effective methods of citizen engagement under review. There is broad

discretion to use or not use different methods of communication including social media platforms provided that such decisions are based on sound evidence as to effectiveness and reach.

- **Procurement, contact:** *No implications identified.*
- **Health and Wellbeing:** Disinformation has a negative effect on health and wellbeing, with specific examples from the recent past being reducing vaccination uptake and reducing engagement with public health measures around infection control. These proposals are positive from a health and wellbeing perspective.
- **Environment and Climate action,** *No direct implications. The proposals support a more sustainable approach by focusing on digital channels already widely used by residents.*
- **Affordability,** *By consolidating digital engagement onto higher-performing, cost-effective platforms, the approach may improve value for money and reduce reliance on underperforming channels.*
- **Equalities and Human Rights,** *The data protection impact assessment (DPIAs) screening questions were completed for the recommendations and options in this report and as there is no personal, special categories or criminal offence data being processed to set these out, there is no requirement to complete a DPIA at this time. However, this will be reviewed following the approved recommendations and options from this report and a DPIA completed, if required.*
- **Data Protection and Privacy:** The data protection impact assessment (DPIAs) screening questions were completed for the recommendations and options in this report and as there is no personal, special categories or criminal offence data being processed to set these out, there is no requirement to complete a DPIA at this time. However, this will be reviewed following the approved recommendations and options from this report and a DPIA completed, if required.
- **Communications:** This decision will require clear and proactive communication with residents, partners, and internal stakeholders. A communications plan is in place (see Annex A), including a public announcement, signposting to alternative channels, and internal briefings to support the transition. The shift also aligns with the Council's commitment to inclusive, respectful, and trusted

engagement. The communications team will lead on implementation, supported by service leads.

- **Economy**, *No direct economic implications arise from the decision. Indirectly, maintaining clear and trusted communication supports business confidence and public trust in civic operations.*

Risks and Mitigations

37.

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Loss of access to established audience on X (49k followers)	Reduced reach for some audiences, particularly during urgent communications	Retain corporate X account for emergency use only, promoted through pinned message and bio; increase promotion of alternative channels such as the resident e-newsletter
Potential reputational criticism for leaving a major platform	Public perception that the Council is avoiding scrutiny or abandoning transparency	Clear messaging strategy to explain rationale, align decision with Council values of inclusion and trust
Impersonation or misuse of dormant account	Residents misled by unofficial accounts posing as the Council	Maintain ownership of @CityofYork handle, keep it verified and include a pinned message clarifying status
Increased workload during transition	Need to redirect followers and answer queries on other platforms	Implement staged communications plan (Annex A), FAQs, and promote alternatives across all touchpoints
Risk of over-reliance on fewer platforms	Vulnerability if other platforms also become problematic	Channel review will inform a more resilient and diversified digital comms strategy

Wards Impacted

38. All

Contact details

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Background papers

[Social media policy and process – City of York Council](#)

Annexes

Annex A – Plan to cease using X, formerly known as Twitter

Annex B – Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)