



Whitland Town Council – Social media policy

Introduction.

Whitland Town Council recognises that social media is a growing and now essential part of communication between people and appreciates that the Council should make full use of it wherever possible. It also recognises that as a Council it must provide guidelines for both Councillors and staff in their use of it, because any posting connected to the Council could be taken to represent the views of the Council as a whole, rather than any individual.

The term ‘social media’ in this policy should be taken to include the full range of online multimedia tools that are used for creating content and providing two-way communication between groups and individuals, usually accessed via a smartphone, PC, laptop, tablet or smart TV. Current examples include blogs, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, for example, but it is a fast evolving medium.

1. Policy statement.

- 1.1. This policy is intended to help Councillors and staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as social networking websites, forums, message boards, blogs or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards the Council requires Councillors and staff to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which your use of social media will be monitored and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.
- 1.3. In general, the vast majority items posted on behalf of the Council should be factual in content. Opinions, where expressed, should be those of the whole Council (or Committee) and with prior agreement at a normal meeting.

2. The scope of the policy.

- 2.1. All Councillors and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council.
- 2.2. Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under Whitland Town Council's disciplinary procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.
- 2.3. Breach of this policy by Councillors will be dealt with under the Code of Conduct.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy.

- 3.1. The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 3.2. The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the Council's work.
- 3.3. All Councillors and staff should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk in the first instance, or to the Chair of the Council.
- 3.4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

4. Use of social media in the name of the Council.

- 4.1. Only the Clerk, or other staff as directed by her, should post material on a social media website in the name of the Council, or on its behalf. All postings will be in accordance with the rules and scope of this policy.
- 4.2. Any individual Councillor, any Council Committee, or full Council should refer information they wish to be posted to the Clerk in the first instance. It is the responsibility of the Clerk to direct the posting of items.

5. Use of social media by employees or Councillors as individuals.

- 5.1. The Council recognises the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about the Council and the support and services it provides to the community. It also recognises the importance of our Councillors and staff joining in and helping shape community conversations and direction through interaction in social media.
- 5.2. The Council is also aware that there needs to be clear delineation in the mind of the audience between comments and views expressed as an individual, and those expressed as a Councillor or staff member. Therefore, before using social media on

any matter which might affect the interests of the Council all Councillors and staff must have read and understood this policy.

- 5.3. Councillors should be wary of inadvertently breaching the Code of Conduct, for instance by bringing their office or authority into disrepute, through the contents or style of any personal emails, the contents of any standard signature that they use, or by their account name.
- 5.4. Both Councillors and staff should remember that once something is published it may be seen by millions, and can be read or passed on freely to friends, supporters, opponents and the press.

6. Rules for use of social media.

Whenever a Councillor or staff member is to use social media in accordance with this policy, they must adhere to the following general rules:

- 6.1. Do not upload, post or forward a link to or any content that is abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory.
- 6.2. Any Councillor or staff member who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website, should inform the Clerk in the first instance, or to the Chair of the Council.
- 6.3. Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Clerk in the first instance, or the Chair of the Council.
- 6.4. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- 6.5. Before you include a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- 6.6. When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- 6.7. Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council.
- 6.8. You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.

- 6.9. Do not escalate heated discussions. Try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- 6.10. Do not discuss colleagues without their prior approval.
- 6.11. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion. Remember that although it is acceptable to make political points or canvass votes via your own social media accounts, this will not be permissible if you are commenting on behalf of the Council.
- 6.12. Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.
- 6.13. Avoid publishing any private business links or details in correspondence that is directly related to a Council matter. This could be taken as Council endorsement or promotion of that business.
- 6.14. Be aware that whilst you may consider that you are posting as an individual on your personal social media accounts, you need to ensure that any posts by you cannot be taken as representing the views of the Council – any such posts could potentially lead to disciplinary action or a breach of the Code of Conduct.
- 6.15. Be aware that although social media is often considered an ephemeral means of communication, it is possible to retrieve posts months or years later. Once published, it is subject to all the laws that apply to any broadcast or publication.

7. Monitoring use of social media websites.

- 7.1. Councillors and staff should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for Council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against staff under our Disciplinary Procedure and Councillors under the Code of Conduct.
- 7.2. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and the Council.
- 7.3. In particular a serious case of uploading, posting, forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct/breach of the Code of Conduct (this list is not exhaustive):
- a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);

- b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
- c) material which is offensive, obscene, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, its councillors or employees;
- d) confidential information about the council or anyone else ;
- e) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, whether for you or the organisation);
- f) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Any such action will be addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure/Code of Conduct.

7.4. Where evidence of misuse is found the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

7.5. If a Councillor or member of staff becomes aware of any use of social media by another Councillor or member of staff that is in breach of this policy, they should report it to the Clerk in the first instance, or to the Chair of the Council.

8. Monitoring and review of this policy.

8.1. The Council shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

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