



Digital and Social Media Policy

Approved by The Town Council 27 November 2023

This policy sets out the way in which the Town Council (Councillors and Employees) will use social media and liaise media and news organisations with the aim of full compliance with legislation, accuracy, consistency, continuity, fairness and equity.

This policy complements, and should be read in conjunction with, all other policies and procedures adopted by the Council and relevant legislation including copyright, data protection, freedom of information and safeguarding legislation.

1. Policy Aims

- 1.1** The aim of this policy is to set out guidelines and principles for Town Councillors and Town Council employees for using the online communications tools / platforms collectively referred to as social media.
- 1.2** The term social media, as used in this policy, is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet via use of applications, software, and hardware such as smart phones, tablet, laptops etc.
- 1.3** This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to)
 - The Town Council Website
 - Facebook and similar social networking sites
 - Twitter and similar sites
 - Instagram and similar sites
 - Youtube and similar video and podcast sites
 - LinkedIn
 - Blogs and Discussion Forums

2. Principles for the use of Social Media

2.1 Social media may be used to:

- Publish and promote the work of North Petherton Town Council
- Advertise and promote engagement in the democratic process and to widen participation across the community in the affairs of North Petherton Town Council
- Advertise and promote the work of the Town Council's partner agencies such as Police, Fire and Ambulance services, Somerset Council and other town / parish councils
- To disseminate community news of interest such as road closures, events

2.2 Social media shall **not be used to:**

- Enter on-line debates or arguments about the Town Council's work
- As part of a recruitment process for employees or councillors other than for the placing of vacancy advertisements
- Canvassing, promoting or advertising any political ideology or decisions of an individual councillor or political party
- The promotion of any individual business or going concern.

3. The Town Council's approved Social media

- a) The Town Council website
- b) The Town Council's Facebook page

The Town Clerk is the nominated social media officer with the delegated authority to issue official postings on the Town Council website and Facebook page. No other

member of staff /Councillor, other than when directed to do so by the Town Clerk, has the authority to issue public statements on social media on behalf of the Town Council.

All public statements must be vetted by the Town Clerk before being posted to a Town Council social media account, the Town Clerk's decision as to the suitability of postings is final.

4. General Guidelines

Town Council employees must be aware that they act as ambassadors of the Town Council and Councillors should also be aware of their obligations under the Code of Conduct and the law. These guidelines are not definitive and do not provide an exhaustive list of all the considerations that should be thought about before using social media, however they aim to provide a framework for reflection before a post is made.

- Stop and think before posting and “sense check” whether content is accurate, informative and objective
- Remember posts may be seen locally, nationally and around the world
- Irony, sarcasm and comedy are all subjective; be mindful of being misinterpreted, misquoted or quoted out of context
- Abide by the terms and conditions of the social media platform you are using and respect any guidelines the platform has – be prepared to remove any posts that fail to meet the set standards
- Use privacy settings
- Protect your passwords and change them regularly
- Always seek written permission when using photos of individuals taken at community events or functions and be mindful of background images such as faces, house signs, car registrations - these may need to be removed. This especially applies to photographs of children or vulnerable adults.
- Do not post when your judgement may be impaired for any reason
- Remember the need to be objective and open minded – be aware of the dangers of bias, pre-disposition and pre-determination.

Town Council employees and staff must not;

- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Present personal opinions as that of the Town Council
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Town Council
- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Town Council
- Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- Refer to an individual by name / job role unless you have written permission to do so

- Publish photos or videos without permission of anyone in them or their guardian in the case of minors
- Post any information that infringes copyright
- Post any information that may be deemed as libel
- Make any posts that could be perceived as bullying or harassment
- Bring the Town Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age religion or belief or any other protected characteristic
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.

5. Reminders for Town Councillors

- Town Councillors are provided with a specific town council email address which must only be used for Town Council business including correspondence; the email account is subject to any request made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and /or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.
- The Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other forms of written or oral communication.
- Individual Town Councillors are responsible for what they post on social media in both a Town Council and a personal capacity.
- Town Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Town Council at a Town council or Committee meeting may constitute pre-disposition, pre-determination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at the meeting and take the appropriate action – including withdrawing from the meeting

6. General Reminders For Employees and Town Councillors

- Be mindful of the information posted in both a personal and a Town council capacity and keep the tone of comments respectful and informative
- Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative
- Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages; this also applies if someone else publishes something libelous on your social media account; a successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you
- Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright result in an award of damages against you
- Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data protection legislation and is an offence

- Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence

Agreed