



Ross-on-Wye Town Council

Social Media Policy

1. Policy statement

- 1.1. This policy is intended to inform and advise Councillors of good practice when engaging in social media activities such as emails, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, and other social media accounts. (Council staff have guidelines contained within the Employee Handbook).

The Council recognises the value of social media for the purposes of:

- providing and exchanging information about services;
 - supporting local democracy;
 - gathering citizen insights and managing citizen relationships;
 - promoting cultural events or tourism for the area;
 - supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience; and
 - creating internal communications and learning and development.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards the Council recommends Councillors to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.
- 1.3. This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by the Council, such as the Data Protection Policy, Members Code of Conduct and such like.
- 1.4. This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

2. Who is covered by this policy?

- 2.1. This policy covers all individuals working at all levels with the Council, including all elected and co-opted Councillors, volunteers (the Clerk to the Council and all other employees must comply with the Employee Handbook).

3. The scope of this policy

- 3.1. The Council has a corporate presence on the web and by use of email, which it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit the town. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. We may ask those who contact us for their preferred channel of communication when we deal with them.

Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur this Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

3.2 All Members are asked to refer to this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.

3.3 Serious breaches by employees may be dealt with under the Employee Disciplinary Procedure.

The Council may take action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments.

Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council reviewing their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.

Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the Code does not apply. Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the Internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained. It is recommended online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking.

It must be remembered that communications on the Internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group regard should be given to the possibility of comments becoming public and their impact on the Council.

4. Rules for using social media.

4.1 Councillors should be aware their interaction on any websites or blogs may affect their working relationships with others. They are strongly advised not to make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about staff, other Councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies the Council works with and serves.

4.2 It is necessary to make sure due regard is given to Data Protection so please make sure you have explicit consent from an individual before you share any personal information such as addresses or telephone numbers.

4.3 If Councillors blog or tweet personally, and not in their role as a Councillor, they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council.

4.4 All Councillors must ensure they use Council facilities appropriately. If using a Council-provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Do not use Council facilities for personal or political blogs.

4.5 The Tourism & Marketing Manager will be the nominated person to act as moderator. She/he will have 'admin' status for all Council social media pages and be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content, ensuring they comply with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the Council for its records.

- 4.6 The Clerk will appoint a nominated “Webmaster” to maintain and update the Council Website. The website may be used to:
- Post notices and minutes of meetings
 - Advertise events and activities
 - Post good news stories
 - Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council’s expectations of conduct
 - Advertise vacancies
 - Retweet or ‘share’ information from partners i. e. Police, Library, district council, etc.
 - Announce new information appropriate to the Council.
 - Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups
 - Post other items as the Council see fit
- Facebook and/or Twitter, etc, may be used to support the website and its information as above.
- 4.7 Individual Councillors are accountable for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address, which is used for Council business. Council business should only be carried out on the email account provided by the Council for those purposes, to ensure that Data Protection principles are met.
- 4.8 All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure the security settings are in place.
- 4.9 When participating in online communication Councillors are advised to;
- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent
 - Disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council if appropriate
 - Never make false or misleading statements
 - Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. They should give regard to protecting the good reputation of the Council
 - Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council
 - Never use language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or beliefs and these should not be published on any social media site
 - Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
 - Not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face
 - When appropriate, seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before they are uploaded. To always check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used
 - Respect the privacy of other Councillors, staff and residents
 - Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel and copyright
 - Spell and grammar check everything
- 4.10 Residents and councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

- 4.11 If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised at either the Public Question Time or as a Management Committee agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
 - 4.12 Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the Council as required.
- 5. The Policy will be reviewed periodically.**

Reviewed by Management Committee March 2023