



GREAT TORRINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA and ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Social media is the term commonly given to websites, online tools such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on web articles such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn etc. which allows users to interact with each other in some way, by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.
- 1.2 The Council has a website and Facebook page and uses e-mail to communicate. The widespread availability and use of social media bring opportunities to understand, engage and communicate with the Council's audiences in new ways in addition to traditional methods of communication. It is important that these technologies and services are used effectively and flexibly. However, it is also important to ensure that this is balanced with our duties to our service users and partners, our legal responsibilities and our reputation.
- 1.3 The Policy requirements in this document aim to provide this balance to support innovation whilst providing a framework for good practice.

2. WHO IS COVERED BY THIS POLICY?

- 2.1 This policy covers the use of social media by Council employees, Councillors (in their official capacity), volunteers, contractors and any partners acting on behalf of the Town Council.

3. THE SCOPE OF THE POLICY

- 3.1 All Council employees, Councillors, volunteers, contractors and any partners acting on behalf of the Town Council are expected to comply with this policy at all times to ensure the protection, privacy, confidentiality and interest of the Town Council and our services, employees, partners, and customers.

4. USING SOCIAL MEDIA ON BEHALF OF THE COUNCIL

- 4.1 The Mayor, Town Clerk and Office Manager (Administrator) are the only ones permitted to post material on a social media website in the name and on the behalf of Great Torrington Town Council, unless authorised to do so.
- 4.2 All communications Great Torrington Town Council make using social media which promote the services, must be approved by the Mayor, Town Clerk or Office Manager.
- 4.3 Otherwise, you must not make any communication using social media which promotes our services. This means that broadly:

- (a) You must not recommend, advise, discuss, promote or mention any specific agenda.
- (b) You must not discuss or recommend Great Torrington Town Council; or
- (c) You must not invite or encourage any customer or potential customer to contact you in order to do either of the above.

4.4 If you are in any doubt as to what you can and cannot say using social media, then please contact Town Clerk.

5. RULES FOR USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Council recognises that individuals will also make use of social media in their personal lives. Users are asked to act professionally and with integrity and adhere to this Policy in all circumstances.

5.1 DO

Whenever you are permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, you must adhere to the following general rules; but in simple terms;

- Write in the first person, identify who you are and what your role is, and use the following disclaimer “The views expressed are my own and don’t reflect the views of the Town Council”
- Respect other users
- Avoid offensive language
- For any social media platform, read and comply with its terms of use.
- Be honest and open
- Be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people’s perceptions of us as a Council
- Admit and correct any mistakes made in a contribution
- Recognise that you are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools
- Be aware that what you publish will be public for many years
- Always consider others’ privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion
- Report any content posted on social media about the Town Council to the Town Clerk (whether complementary or critical)
- If you notice any content posted on social media about the Town Council please report it to Town Clerk

5.2 DO NOT

- Break the law
- Post content which will embarrass the Town Council or yourself
- Link to inappropriate sites
- Add commercial content

- Do not upload, post, forward or post a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content
- Ever disclose commercially sensitive, anti-competitive, 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 Town Clerk
- Upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent
- Upload, forward or post a link to chain mail, junk mail, cartoons, jokes or gossip
- Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations
- Ever contribute to a discussion if you are angry or upset, return to it later when you can contribute in a calm and rational manner
- Discuss colleagues, competitors, customers or suppliers without their prior approval
- Share your passwords with anyone
- Forget that social media is 24/7

5.3 IN ADDITION

- a. Any Councillor, officer, volunteer 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 Town Clerk.
- b. It is acceptable to quote a small excerpt from an article, particularly for the purpose of comment. Quote accurately, include references and when in doubt, link, don't copy.
- c. 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. All links must be done so that it is clear to the user that they have moved to the third party's website.
- d. If you feel even slightly uneasy about something you are about to publish, then you shouldn't do it. If in doubt, always discuss it with the Town Clerk.
- e. Before your first contribution on any social media site, observe the activity on the site for a while before posting to get a feel for the style of contributions, the nature of the content and any 'unwritten' rules that other contributors might follow.
- f. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us. It may also cause embarrassment to the Council.

- g. In particular 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 be deemed a serious misuse of social media. The list set out below 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 us, our clients or our staff;
 - (d) confidential information about Councillors, officers and/or volunteers, which you do not have express authority to disseminate;
 - (e) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the Council; or
 - (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/referred to Torridge District Council's Standards Committee.

Where evidence of misuse is found Great Torrington Town 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 regarding a criminal investigation.

6. MONITORING

Councillors, officer and volunteers should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether accessed for work purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found in reference to roles of Councillors, Officer and/or volunteers, action may be taken.

If you notice any use of social media by a Councillor, Officer or volunteer in breach of this policy please report it to Town Clerk.