



Social Media Policy

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to staff and Town Councillors in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. This Policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Town Council Website
- Town Council Emails
- Facebook and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- Bloggs and discussion forums

Who does it apply to?

The principles of the Policy apply to Town Councillors and all Council Staff. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Town Council

Members are strongly advised to use only the official Sherburn in Elmet Town Council email address provided for Town Council business and correspondence. Any account used for Town Council business and correspondence will be subject to any request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Members are responsible for ensuring the security of devices, apps and packages used and all devices should be password protected.

The Policy sits alongside relevant existing Policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Use of social media

The use of social media will not replace existing forms of communication. The website and other forms of communication will be used to enhance communication.



Code of Practice

When using social media (including email) Town Councillors and Council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Town Councillors and Council 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 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
- Use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post any information that infringes copyright of others
- Post any information that may be deemed libel
- Post online activity that constitutes 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
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

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 libellous on your social media site. 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 will result in an award of damages against you.

Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation and an offence.

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



Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or committee meeting may constitute predisposition, predetermination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Town Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Town Clerk.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

Management

1. Town Council social media will be created and managed solely by the Town Council Office. Any accounts that are set up will be created for the Town Council. No council member will have access to the administration of the social media accounts.
2. The accounts will be set up using one of the office email addresses as necessary.
3. Only information regarding the Town Council will be entered. Other events taking place in the town may be promoted.
4. The accounts will only link to pages of a local government organisation or organisations / causes relating to the town.
5. No extreme religious or extreme political views will be expressed
6. With regard to Facebook; "Friends" will not be allowed to post new topics to the Facebook "wall". However, friends will be able to comment on wall topics created by the Town Council.
7. Posts on the Facebook page will be available for all users of Facebook to see.
8. The Town Council's emblem/logo or a picture of the town to promote the town will be the profile picture for everyone to see.
9. Photo Albums will be open for everyone to view.
10. Photographs uploaded will not have direct view of any child's face without the prior consent of their guardian.



11. The accounts will be maintained by the office staff who will remove any messages which include:

- Abusive language content
- Which may cause offence to a specific group of people e.g. comments on a person's sexuality, sexist comments, racial comments etc.
- Which contain potential libellous comments

Any other comment which may cause offence in any way.

12. If any matters raised are relevant and need to be discussed by the Town Council then further information will be sought and brought to the relevant council meeting/committee.

13. Event dates will be created for any Town Council event taking place. Other events taking place in the town may be promoted.

14. People will be encouraged to be "friends" of and "follow" the Town Council

15. If "friends" or "followers" are repeatedly abusing the Town Council's accounts then they will be removed from the friends/followers list and unable to post to the accounts. Instances which would involve removal include repeated:

- Posting with abusive language content
- Posting comments which may cause offence to a specific group of people e.g. comments of a person's sexuality, sexist comments, racial comments etc.
- Posting potential libellous comments

Any other comment which may cause offence in any way

16. The account will not be used for playing games, adding applications, or anything of a personal nature. Contravention of this rule could result in disciplinary procedures.

17. Private messages will be sent in response to anyone sending an initial private message to the Town Council accounts. If a "simple" response does not satisfy the enquiry then the person will be asked to email the Council with the request for comment and the office email will be provided. Any posts by "friends"/"followers" raising issues/questions/comments that cannot be answered "simply" will be dealt with separately via email. The Town Council email address will be provided.



Changes

21. This policy will be a living document and can be altered by the Town Council Office Staff, if necessary, to allow immediate action should the unexpected arise. This will be key to overcome teething problems that have not already been identified. Changes to the policy will be highlighted at the next Council meeting to keep members abreast of the changes for their approval. This policy will be kept under review by the Town Council.