



**Devizes Town Council
Social Media Policy**

2017

June 2017

Review date June 2021

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Social Media Policy

1. Policy Intent

- 1.1. This policy is intended to help staff and elected Councillors make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn etc.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards the Council expects both staff and Councillors to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which posting will be brought into review and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.
- 1.3. This policy supplements our Social media, internet and Email policy.
- 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 the policy

- 2.1. This policy covers all individuals working at all levels and grades, including councillors, senior managers, officers and all other staff both full and part time.

3. The scope of the policy

- 3.1. All councillors and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners, customers, and stakeholders.
- 3.2. Breach of this policy may be dealt with under our disciplinary and grievance policy and may be considered to be Gross Misconduct or be referred to the standards board.

4. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

- 4.1. The Town Clerk, in conjunction with the mayor, is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the Council
- 4.2. All councillors and staff are responsible for their own compliance with this policy and for ensuring that it is consistently applied. All councillors and staff should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Town Clerk.

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- 4.3. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Town Clerk.

5. Using social media sites in the Councils name

- 5.1. Only the senior officers or those with specific authorisation are permitted to post material on the Town Councils social media pages or website.

6. Rules for use of social media

As a councillor or employee, whenever you use social media you must adhere to the following general rules:

- 6.1. Always write in the first person, identify who you are and what your role is when commenting about the council. Use the following disclaimer “ The views expressed are my own and don’t reflect the views of the Council”. Only when using the Town Council’s own social media sites should the third person be used.
- 6.2. Do not upload, post, forward or post a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing or defamatory content.
- 6.3. Any councillor or member of staff 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.
- 6.4. Never disclose exempt, commercially sensitive, private or items that are currently not in the public domain. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Town Clerk.
- 6.5. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- 6.6. It is acceptable to quote a small excerpt from an article, particularly for the purposes of commenting on it or criticising it. However, if you think an excerpt is too big, it probably is. Quote accurately, include references and when in doubt, link, don't copy.
- 6.7. 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.
- 6.8. When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- 6.9. Do not post, upload, forward or post a link to chain mail, junk mail, cartoons, jokes or gossip.

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- 6.10. Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council. If you make a mistake in a contribution, be prompt in admitting and correcting it.
- 6.11. You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools – be aware that what you publish will be public for many years.
- 6.12. Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations. Never contribute to a discussion if you are angry or upset, return to it later when you can contribute in a calm and rational manner.
- 6.13. 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, a colleague or a councillor first.
- 6.14. Don't discuss other councillors, staff, or stakeholders without their prior approval. Be mindful of data protection principles.
- 6.15. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory.
- 6.16. Before your first contribution on any social media site, observe the activity on the site for a while before launching in yourself to get a feel for the style of contributions, the nature of the content and any 'unwritten' rules that other contributors might follow.
- 6.17. For staff, the use of social media during officer hours must be work related.

10. Monitoring use of social media websites

- 10.1. Staff should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for work purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, disciplinary action may be taken and these may be considered to be gross misconduct.
- 10.3. 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. It may also cause embarrassment to the Council and a loss of credibility for the authority and its stakeholders.
- 10.4. 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,
 - a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
 - material which is offensive, obscene, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to us, our clients or our staff;

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- confidential information about the Council or any of our staff or clients (which you do not have express authority to disseminate);
- any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or us); or
- material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

10.5. Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with our Disciplinary Procedure. If relevant, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

10.6. If you notice any use of social media by councillors or members of staff in breach of this policy, it should be reported to the Town Clerk.

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