



Christchurch Town Council

Social Media and Online Presence Policy

Policy name	Version	Owner	Date Adopted	Review Date
Social Media & Online Presence Policy	V1.0	Clerk	December 2019	May 2023

1.0 Town Council Social Media Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a guidelines and principles to provide guidance to Town councillors, council staff and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet via use of: applications; software and hardware including smart-phones, tablets laptops and so on.

This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Town Council Website
- Facebook and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

2.0 Principles Guiding Use of Social Media

The principles of this policy apply to Town councillors and council staff and applies to others communicating with the Town Council. Social Media shall be used to:

- a) To publish, promote and preserve the work of Christchurch Town Council to a wider audience;
- b) To advertise and promote engagement in the democratic process and to widen participation across the community in the affairs of the Town Council and the community it represents;
- c) To advertise and promote work of its partner agencies such as the Police, Fire and ambulance services, BCP Council and other town/parish councils;
- d) To disseminate community news of interest such as road closures, planning and licensing applications, events and so on.

Social Media Shall NOT be used for:

- e) Entering online debates or arguments about the Town Council's work;
- f) Recruitment process for employees or councillors – other than for the placing of Vacancy Advertisements – as this could lead to potential discrimination and privacy claims;
- g) Canvassing, promoting or advertising any political ideological policy or decision of a councillor or political party.
- h) The promotion or advertising of any individual business or going concern.

3.0 Approved Social Media

- a) Town Council website
- b) Facebook page
- c) Twitter Account

The Clerk shall be the nominated social media officer with the delegated authority to issue official postings via the approved social media accounts. No other member of staff/councillor; other than the Administration Support Officer when directed to do so by the Clerk, has the authority to issue public statements on social media on behalf of the Council.

All public statements must be vetted by the Clerk before being posted to a social media account. If in the opinion of the Clerk the post is unsuitable for dissemination it must NOT be posted to any of the approved social media accounts. The Clerk shall have the final say in deciding the suitability of public postings to approved social media accounts.

4.0 Guidelines

Social Media is a fantastic tool in sharing the way we work with the wider community and world. However, social networking has its pitfalls and can attract negative comments or have an adverse impact upon the individual or Town council's reputation. Staff must be aware that they act as ambassadors of the Council and that Councillors must also be mindful of their obligations under the adopted Code of Conduct and law. These guidelines are not definitive and do not provide an exhaustive list of all the considerations to consider before using social media, however they aim to give a framework for pausing and reflecting before posting:

- Stop and think before posting and “sense-check” whether the content is informative, objective and impartial. The post may well be “shared”, “liked” or “retweeted” around the region, nation or world;
- Irony, Sarcasm and Comedy are all subjective notions. People may not perceive what you perhaps see as funny or ironic. Be mindful of being misinterpreted, misquoted or quoted out of context;
- Abide by the terms and conditions of the platform you are using and respect the community guidelines for each;
- Monitor and be prepared to remove posts from platforms/pages which do not adhere to this policy or meet a threshold of behaviour which is deemed acceptable;
- Do use privacy settings where necessary;
- Protect passwords and change regularly where necessary. Town Council; passwords shall only be in the knowledge of the Clerk and those authorised by the Clerk to post on his/her behalf;
- Always seek written permission when using any photos of individuals at community events or functions and be mindful of background identifiers such as faces and/or car registration plates etc;

- Be especially mindful of posting photographs of children or those who are vulnerable and seek explicit written consent of any parent/guardian who has responsibility. If in doubt always seek advice first before posting;
- Do not post or tweet comments when your judgment is impaired due to bias, or pre-disposition or pre-determination, or even when tired or otherwise;

Town councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms;
- present personal opinions as that of the council;
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council;
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the 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 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 other relevant protected characteristics;
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence;

Members have been provided with a separate email address which is only used for Council business and correspondence. The nominated account will be subject to any request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and/or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

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.

Individual Town councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

In the main, councillors and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings;
- Advertise events and activities;

- Good news stories linked website or press page;
- Vacancies;
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc;
- Announcing new information;
- Post or Share information from other Town related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities;
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillors.

5.0 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.

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 is 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 Pre-disposition, Pre-determination 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 Clerk of the Council.

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

The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature. Where appropriate the moderator will have the authority to report any such

posting to any other appropriate agency including the Police and BCP Council's Safeguarding Unit.

This policy will be reviewed annually.