



Ashburton Town Council

Communications and Social Media Policy

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Signed by Town Mayor:

Date:



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1. Policy Statement:

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 on electronic devices. 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
- Email

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

2. Definition of Social Media:

‘Websites and applications which enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.’ *Oxford Dictionary*

All laws, including the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 2018 that apply to publishing and broadcasting apply to social media i.e. libel, slander, copyright, and contempt of court.

3. Principle Use of Social Media:

Social Media shall be used to:

- To publish, promote and preserve the work of Ashburton Town Council to a wider audience.
- 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.
- To advertise and promote work of its partner agencies such as the Police, Fire and ambulance services, Teignbridge District Council or Devon County Council.
- To share community news of interest such as road closures, planning and licensing applications, events and so on.

Social Media Shall NOT be used for:

- Entering online debates or arguments about the Town Council's work.
- Recruitment process for employees or councillors - other than for the placing of Vacancy Advertisements.
- Canvassing, promoting or advertising any political ideological policy or decision of a councillor or political party.
- The promotion or advertising of any individual business or going concern.



4. Approved Social Media:

- Town Council Website
- Facebook Page
- Mayor's Facebook / Instagram page

The Clerk shall be the social media officer with the delegated authority to issue official postings via the approved social media accounts. No other member of staff/councillor; unless nominated to do so, 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.

Each elected Mayor will be given access to the mayor's account(s) for the period of their term. These accounts must adhere to the below guidelines and may be removed from use in the event of a breach.

5. Guidelines:

Social Media is a useful tool in sharing the way we work with the wider community. 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 before using social media, however these include:

- Stop and think before posting. Is the content informative, objective and impartial?
- 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.
- 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.
- Do not post comments when your judgment is impaired due to bias or pre-determination.



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.

6. Website and Social Media Statements:

The Council will present the following statement on their website and any social media pages.

‘Welcome to the Ashburton Town Council [Facebook profile / website]. The purpose of this page is to circulate and publish information relevant to Ashburton. It is not intended as a platform for debate or communicating with Councillors or staff. We advise that any clarification of information shared or questions are raised with the Town Clerk at townclerk@ashburtontowncouncil.gov.uk or our website contact us page.’

6. Email communications:

Members must have a separate email address which is used for the sole purpose of council business and correspondence. This email address must be surrendered at the end of the councillors office. This 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.