



Social Media Policy

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Social Media

INTRODUCTION

To be effective, social media activity needs to be integrated into the general communications of the Council. Social media platforms can be used to increase reach and exposure for planned campaigns, promotions and activities. It provides a measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity.

The aim of this policy, which applies to all employees and elected Members, seeks to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of council-based services through the use of social media
- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained
- That Council information remains secure
- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation
- That the Council's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected

- That employees and elected Members have a clear understanding of what is acceptable use of social media, both in a personal and business capacity

Responsibilities of Members and Officers

- a) Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities
- b) Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media. It is advisable to use a disclaimer when using social media for personal purposes; you must not imply you are speaking for the Council.
- c) Be aware that posting information on social networking sites in a personal capacity cannot be entirely isolated from your working life or position within the Council.
- a) Never give out personal details such as home address and telephone numbers. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act.
- b) Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important to ensure that you are confident about the nature of the information you publish. Permission must be sought if you wish to publish or report on meetings or discussions that are meant to be private or internal to the Council. Don't reference customers, partners or suppliers without their approval.

- c) Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and its employees and show consideration for others' privacy.
- d) All comments made through social media must adhere to the relevant legislation and regulations, including the Town Council's policies and procedures.
- a) Do not download software of any type from social media sites unless prior approval has been sought from the Town Clerk and/or Town Council.

Failure to comply with the above could result in disciplinary action being taken.

Responsibilities of Officers

Officers using social media for business purposes must identify themselves as being part of Matlock Town Council and will be permitted to use only council email addresses and not personal ones.

If any threats, abuse or harassment from members of the public through their use of social media are received then they must report such incidents direct to the Town Clerk.

Be aware that you may be accountable for actions outside of work, including making comments on social media sites, if that is contrary to any of Council's policies and procedures or legislation, impacts on or compromises your ability to undertake your role, or undermines management decisions. Such behaviour could be investigated and may result in disciplinary action being taken, and ultimately could result in dismissal.

Use by elected Members

Members should ensure that they comply with all Council policies and practices, adhere to the guidance set out in this policy and ensure that their use of personal social media does not put the Council's security at risk or be damaging to its reputation.

Members should also be familiar with the Code of Conduct and Council confidentiality, taking care to consider responses carefully and should avoid the use of the Town Council email address, logos or other council identification. Appropriate privacy settings should be set.

Council facilities are not to be used for personal or political blogs and social networking. Members should be aware that the more they blog or network, the more likely it is that they will be seen as acting in their official capacity. Likewise, publishing information that you could not have accessed without your position as a councillor, will also be seen this way. Defamatory or obscene posts from others should be removed as soon as possible.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND MEETINGS

Councillors are encouraged to keep residents informed of issues in the Town and the use of social media can help with this. Council members will not be permitted to use social media in meetings.

OFFICIAL TOWN COUNCIL SITE MANAGEMENT

Matlock Town Council Social Media sites will be managed by the Town Clerk and designated office staff members who will ensure that any legal obligations or best practice guidelines are adhered to.

A statement will be placed on the Town Council's website which will explain how the Council's social media pages are administered (*see appendices*)

The Social Media accounts will be updated and monitored during working hours only and will be non-political. Political posts will be removed and the Town Council will not engage on issues of party politics at any time. Likewise, inappropriate language or anything that might contravene libel, defamation, copyright or data protection laws will be removed.

Inappropriate or excessive use of the Council's social media sites by administration staff will not be tolerated.

SUSTAINABILITY

Social Media is a cost-effective form of communication which can be engaged to tackle a wide variety of issues and be used to influence change. It is likely to become a valuable resource, developing relationships, sharing information and communicating council messages.

As well as the potential environmental and sustainability implications, it is recognised that there is scope for more open communication and the increased ability to share information and improve service delivery.

BREACHES OF POLICY

Any breaches may lead to access being withdrawn and disciplinary action being taken. Serious breaches of this policy by Council employees will amount to gross misconduct and may result in dismissal.

Other violations of the policy, such as breaching the Data Protection Act, could lead to fines being issued and possible criminal or civil action being taken against the Council or the individual(s) involved.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The following documents apply:

- General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Equalities Act 2010
- Code of Conduct

APPENDICES:

1. Facebook
2. Twitter
3. Website statement
4. Officer guidance on acceptable use of social media

FACEBOOK

Good Practice guidelines:

- As a Town Council we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image.
- Remember that people classified as 'friends' have the ability to download and share your information with others.
- Post only what you want the world to see.
- Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise council policies or personnel.
- Set your profile's security and privacy settings carefully.
- Do not post images that include people without their permission, or parental permission in the case of young people.
- Acknowledge queries posted to the Town Council publicly, but respond privately in message form.
- Weigh whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness at Matlock Town Council at risk.
- Be careful not to fall foul of any phishing scams that arrive via email or on your wall, providing a link for you to click.
- If you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines then you must report it as required by law.

TWITTER

Twitter is a 'microblogging' platform which allows users to post short messages and converse with other users. Unlike email or text messaging, these conversations take place in the open and engage audiences in discussions about services, products and issues connecting a vast amount of likeminded people in an often targeted and purposeful way.

Key questions when tweeting are:

- What do the readers really want to know?
- When do they need to know it?
- Why is the information you're sharing relevant?

Keep the content valuable!

Negative comments should only be responded to with factual information and on-line arguments must always be avoided.

WEBSITE STATEMENT re Social Media Use

Matlock Town Council uses Facebook and Twitter to help engage with residents and others who live and work in the area. We will try to respond to as many replies or comments as we can, however this isn't always possible. Our Social media sites are not constantly monitored so if you have a serious or more urgent enquiry, please use the 'Contact Us' link or get in touch via telephone or post.

Liking, following, sharing and blocking

Please don't be offended if we don't 'like' or 'follow' you on social media. This doesn't mean we are not interested; it's just that the numbers can get too high for us to manage.

When we like or follow someone it doesn't necessarily mean that we endorse them. Likewise, it is vitally important that as a trusted organisation we remain impartial and protect the Council's reputation, therefore sharing of information could be seen as an endorsement of a particular view, individual or organisation.

If we block your account, this will probably be because you've followed or liked the council purely to promote a product or service, or you've contravened the rules of a particular social media space. If for some reason we unfollow you, it might just be that we're having a sort out or cutting down on numbers, please don't take this as a sign of personal rejection.

Moderation

Most online communities have their own rules and guidelines, which we always follow. We also have some of our own and reserve the right to remove any contributions that break the rules. Please be civil, don't swear or post messages that are unlawful. Take care not to contravene copyright by posting content that you have copied from elsewhere or to publicise anyone's personal information (including your own). Advertising for products and services will be removed.

Pre-election period or 'Purdah'

All councillors and staff have to be very careful not to do or say anything that could be seen to support any political party or candidate in the six week run up to elections. Important information will continue to be published on social media but we may have to remove responses should they be political in any way.

OFFICER GUIDANCE ON ACCEPTABLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Officers must be mindful that any online activities/comments made in a public domain, must be compatible with their position within the Council, and safeguard themselves in a professional capacity.
- Protect your own privacy. To ensure that your social network account does not compromise your professional position, ensure that your privacy settings are set correctly.
- Comments made outside work, within the arena of social media, do not remain private and so can have an effect on or have work-related implications. Therefore, comments made through social media, which you may intend to be “private” may still be in contravention of the Staff Handbook, the Harassment and Bullying procedure and / or the Disciplinary procedure. Once something is online, it can be copied and redistributed making it easy to lose control of. Presume everything you post online will be permanent and can be shared.
- Do not discuss work-related issues online, including conversations about service users, complaints, management or disparaging remarks about colleagues or the Council. Even when anonymised, these are likely to be inappropriate. In addition doing this in the presence of others may be deemed as bullying and/or harassment.
- Do not under any circumstances accept friend requests from a person you believe may conflict with your employment.
- Be aware that other users may access your profile and if they find the information and/or images it contains offensive, make a complaint about you to the Council as your employer.
- Ensure that any comments and/or images cannot be deemed defamatory, libellous or in breach of copyright legislation.
- When setting up your profile online consider whether it is appropriate and prudent for you to include a photograph, or provide occupation, employer or work location details.
- You can take action if you find yourself the target of complaints or abuse on social networking sites. Most sites will include mechanisms to report abusive activity and provide support for users who are subject to abuse by others.
- If you do find inappropriate references and / or images of you posted by a ‘friend’ online you should contact them and the site to have the material removed.
- If you are very concerned about someone else's behaviour online, you should take steps to raise your concerns. If these are work related you should inform your manager.
- Officers should also act in accordance with the Council’s Staff Handbook, and all Council policies and procedures.

