



Pershore Town Council

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR COUNCILLORS

What is social media?

Social media is a term commonly given to online tools, channels and interactive media which allow people to interact with individuals, groups or organisations by sharing information, opinions, knowledge, interests and asking questions or participating in online discussion and conversations. Social media includes a range of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, blogs and forums etc. There are many social media platforms and the landscape changes all the time, so this is not intended to be an exclusive list.

Purpose

Social media can be an effective way for councillors to interact with residents and support local democracy. Used effectively, you can engage those who would not normally have access to local politics. We encourage councillors to engage in using it as a two-way communications tool.

That said, it is felt that some additional guidance is needed in support of the member code of conduct to protect both councils and its councillors. In particular regarding standards, libel, copyright, data protection, bias and pre-determination, as well as encouraging good online etiquette.

Use of social media by councillors

Councillors are required to act in accordance with the member code of conduct whilst conducting the business of the council or acting, claiming to act or giving the impression you are acting as a representative of the council.

Councillors should be aware that anything published on social media can be accessed by anybody with an internet connection and, once it has been posted, it will be a permanent online record.

A common sense approach should be adopted by all councillors. When using social media, councillors should:

1. Have particular regard to the member code of conduct and ensure that, when online, you treat others with respect and conduct yourself in a manner that will not bring your council into disrepute
2. Think before you publish – even if a post is deleted hastily it could have been read several times and may have been indexed and

duplicated online beyond reach. It could also potentially have already had a screenshot taken and saved as a permanent record

3. Be aware of your blurred personality online. Even if posting online in a personal capacity it is likely that you will be seen as acting as a representative of your council
4. Consider whether there are appropriate privacy settings in place for your social media accounts especially those that you use as personal accounts
5. When setting up a social media account, we recommend you post a short statement disclosing your identity as a councillor. You may wish to consider having separate accounts for your councillor posts to your personal ones
6. Be aware that, by publishing information obtained through your position as councillor, you will be seen as acting as a representative of your council. Councillors should never publish anything online taken from a private meeting or private e-mails unless first discussed and agreed with the Town Clerk
7. Be aware of misinterpretation – few writers are able to communicate sarcasm or irony through short online messages. Even if the intention was clear, the message may be misinterpreted
8. Do not be drawn into an online argument with someone clearly trying to provoke you or openly criticise your council, partners or residents. Simply do not respond. If the content may be considered defamatory, illegal or could damage reputation and relationships you can gain advice from the Town Clerk
9. Avoid publishing information regarding a forthcoming or ongoing matter/hearing yet to be determined Any indication of bias or pre-determination could result in the decision being challenged
10. Be aware that sharing someone else's post, e.g. 're-tweeting' on twitter or sharing on Facebook, may be interpreted as the councillor agreeing, endorsing or supporting its content
11. Be aware that stating that the views posted or shared on social media are not your own, will not exonerate you from potential sanctions under the standards regime. A lot of reporters take stories and comments directly from social media these days and it is unlikely you will know they are doing it
12. Avoid anything which could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of any individual(s) for example by:

- i) Making offensive or derogatory comments related to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, or age;
- ii) Using social media to bully or harass another individual;
- iii) Posting images that are discriminatory or offensive, or providing links to such content

13. Be aware that anything you say online could appear in the papers and create media interest which the council will have to deal with and could damage reputation.

14. Be particularly aware of your online presence during election periods. Councillors should note that legislation relating to electoral periods (e.g. the Representation of the People Act 1983) will also apply to the online publication of electoral material/statements relating to the election.

Councillors' use of social media statement

Councillors will be personally responsible for their social media presence. The council takes no responsibility for social media content or maintenance on behalf of individual councillors.

Councillors need to be aware that if you engage with social media you may be held personally liable for copyright and trademark breaches, defamation, contempt of court and privacy infringements on their online presence. This may be the case even if a councillor does not produce the offending content.

Where to get advice?

If you require further advice or support with social media please talk to the Town Clerk

townclerk@pershire-tc.gov.uk

01386 561561