



**TENTERDEN TOWN COUNCIL**

**SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

**DATED 4<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2018**

**REVIEW DATE: 8<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2018**

## **1. About this policy**

Communication both with each other and the public is key to what we do and to maintaining good relationships. However, the way in which we communicate is constantly changing and this is apparent from the development of social media at a faster rate than many of us are able to keep up with.

This policy is in place to minimise the risks to the council through use of social media.

It deals with the use of all forms of social media, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Whatsapp, Wikipedia, Instagram, Tumblr and all other social networking sites, internet postings and blogs. It applies to use of social media for council purposes as well as personal use that may affect the council in any way.

This policy covers all employees, contractors, volunteers ('Staff') as well as elected members (Councillors). For ease we have separated specific sections for the elected members and our staff.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and we may amend it at any time.

The policy has been approved by the Communications Team.

## **2. The Communications Team**

- 2.1 The Communications Team comprises of the Mayor; Town Clerk; and Deputy Town Clerk all of whom communicate with our Public Relations Consultants on issues affecting the reputation of the council.
- 2.2 The key role of the Communications Team is to protect and strengthen the council's reputation among residents, councillors and its own staff.
- 2.3 The team is there to help Staff and Councillors get their message across to the right audience at the right time.

## **3. Personnel responsible for implementing this policy**

- 3.1 The Communications Team has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy, but has delegated day-to-day responsibility for its operation to the Deputy Town Clerk.
- 3.2 Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for change to minimise risks lies with the Deputy Town Clerk.

3.3 Everyone is responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it.

#### **4. The law**

4.1 The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity which springs from s4 of the Local Government Act 1986 requires our communication to be:-

- Lawful;
- Cost effective;
- Objective;
- Even handed;
- Appropriate;
- Have regard to equality and diversity;
- Be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

4.2 Ensuring our official communications are appropriate means they are politically neutral, and should not directly rival operations of commercial news organisations, should be freely available and should be clear that they are generated by the council.

4.3 While most of the principles are self-explanatory, the Communications Team will be on hand to offer advice.

#### **5. Guidance for Councillors**

5.1 When using social media to communicate, Councillors must be aware of the legal and ethical pitfalls as well as the requirements of the Code of Conduct for Members, specifically those set out in the section entitled general obligations. They should avoid saying anything which might be interpreted as abusive, defamatory, in contempt of court or that endorses comments from others, for example, by liking or retweeting, that could be interpreted as such.

5.2 Officers, especially those in politically-restricted posts, should NOT communicate in a way that is party political or which could be perceived to be while acting on behalf of the council.

5.3 If Councillors communicate on any social media platforms on behalf of themselves or any other organisations with which they are affiliated with they should state on any such profile that any views expressed do not represent those of the council.

- 5.4 Councillors should be mindful of how they communicate in a private capacity, especially on social media. Postings on social media sites or comments on an online story places information into the public domain, even when the social media platform is limited to 'friends' or a small group of people. This is because anyone reading the post can forward it on and share the information. Councillors must, therefore, avoid criticising the council or their colleagues on any social media platform, even if they have made it clear that the views expressed are not necessarily those of the council.
- 5.5 Social media accounts on behalf of the council or the services it runs or appearing to represent the council should only be created with the approval of the Communications Team. Once an account is created, the Communications Team will retain password access in case the account is hacked. Or there is any other sort of issue out of hours. Existing accounts should also be managed in this way.
- 5.6 Councillors should alert the Communications Team to public criticism of the council whether in meetings, in the press, online or in social media.

## **6. Compliance with related policies and agreements – for Staff**

*This and all clauses below are intended for staff to include employees, workers, apprentices, contract, agency workers and volunteers.*

- 6.1 Social media should never be used in a way that breaches any of our other policies. If an internet post would breach any of our policies in another forum, it will also breach them in an online forum. For example, you are prohibited from using social media to:
- 6.1.1 breach our Equal Opportunities policy;
  - 6.1.2 breach our Disciplinary Policy or procedures;
  - 6.1.3 harass or bully other staff in any way;
  - 6.1.4 unlawfully discriminate against other staff or third parties breach our Data Protection Policy (for example, never disclose personal information about a colleague online); or
  - 6.1.5 breach any other laws or regulatory requirements.
- 6.2 Staff should never provide references for other individuals on social or professional networking sites, as such references, positive and negative, can be attributed to the council and create legal liability for both the author of the reference and the organisation.
- 6.3 Staff who breach any of the above policies will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

## **7. Personal use of social media**

- 7.1 Occasional personal use of social media during working hours is permitted so long as it is accessed on your own devices and it does not involve unprofessional or inappropriate content, does not interfere with your employment responsibilities or productivity and complies with this policy.
- 7.2 Private email accounts should not be accessed using the council's devices.

## **8. Prohibited use for Staff**

- 8.1 You must avoid making any social media communications that could damage our interests or reputation, even indirectly.
- 8.2 You must not use social media to defame or disparage us, our staff, the Councillors or any third party; to harass, bully or unlawfully discriminate against staff or third parties; to make false or misleading statements; or to impersonate colleagues or third parties.
- 8.3 You must not express opinions on our behalf via social media, unless expressly authorised to do so by the Communications Team.
- 8.4 Any misuse of social media should be reported to the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk.

## **9. Business use of social media**

- 9.1 If your duties require you to speak on behalf of the Council in a social media environment, you must still seek approval for such communication from the Communications Team, who may require you to undergo training before you do so and impose certain requirements and restrictions with regard to your activities.
- 9.2 Likewise, if you are contacted for comments about the organisation for publication anywhere, including in any social media outlet, direct the enquiry to the Communications Team and do not respond without written approval.
- 9.3 The use of social media for business purposes is subject to the remainder of this policy.

## **10. Guidelines for responsible use of social media**

- 10.1 You should make it clear in social media postings, or in your personal profile, that you are speaking on your own behalf. Write in the first person and use a personal email address.
- 10.2 Be respectful to others when making any statement on social media and be aware that you are personally responsible for all communications which will be published on the internet for anyone to see.

- 10.3 If you disclose your affiliation with us on your profile or in any social media postings, you must state that your views do not represent those of your employer (unless you are authorised to speak on our behalf). You should also ensure that your profile and any content you post are consistent with the professional image you present to the public and colleagues.
- 10.4 If you are uncertain or concerned about the appropriateness of any statement or posting, refrain from posting it until you have discussed it with your manager.
- 10.5 If you see social media content that disparages or reflects poorly on us, you should contact the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk.

## **11. Monitoring**

- 11.1 We reserve the right to monitor and review, without further notice, staff and Councillor activities, social media postings and activities, to ensure that our rules are being complied with and for legitimate business purposes and you consent to such monitoring by your use of such resources and systems.

## **12. Breach of this policy**

- 12.1 Breach of this policy by Staff may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
- 12.2 You may be required to remove any social media content that we consider to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.