



TENTERDEN TOWN COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Reviewed	Adopted
Reviewed by Policy and Procedure sub-committee	16/11/2023
Revised and adopted by Finance & General Purposes Committee	11/12/2023
Policy version reference	Version 2
Next review	November 2025

1. About this policy

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

It deals with the use of all forms of social media, including Facebook, LinkedIn, X (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 is in place to minimise the risks to the council through the use of social media. Social media content that is contentious, which disparages or reflects poorly on the town council should not be responded to, but instead reported to the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk.

This policy covers all councillors, employees, contractors and volunteers of the town council, all of whom have a responsibility to ensure the success of this policy.

2. Principles Guiding Use of Social Media

Social Media will be used as follows.

- a) To inform the community and to promote to a variety of audiences, the work of Tenterden Town Council; through promotion of its actions, decisions and the services and facilities it provides.
- 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 the work of its partner agencies such as the borough and county councils, Police, and other local service providers.
- d) To disseminate community news of interest such as road closures, planning and licensing applications, events and so on.
- e) To listen to conversations and issues relevant to the local area.

Social Media will not be used as follows.

- a) To enter or participate in, online debates or arguments about the Town Council's work or activities.
- b) Bring the council into disrepute, or post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council.
- c) Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks; engage in personal attacks, online fights or hostile communications
- d) To canvas, promote or advertise any political ideological policy or any political party or the decisions or actions of any individual councillor.
- e) Social media should never be used in a way that breaches any other town council policy.

- f) Saying anything which might be interpreted as abusive, defamatory, in contempt of court or that could be interpreted as such, or by endorsing comments from others, for example, by liking or reposting.
- g) To make false or misleading statements; or to impersonate colleagues or third parties.
- h) to defame or disparage the council's, staff, councillors or any third party;
- i) to harass, bully or unlawfully discriminate against staff or third parties; to make false or misleading statements; or to impersonate colleagues or third parties.
- j) Social media will not be used to:
 - i. harass or bully in any way;
 - ii. unlawfully discriminate against others;
 - iii. breach the council's GDPR policies;
 - iv. breach any other laws or regulatory requirements.

3. Guidance for councillors

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. Councillors should not present personal opinions as that of the council or present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council.

Councillors should be mindful of how they communicate in a private capacity, especially on social media. Postings on social media sites, 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.

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 Town Council Officers.

Should guidance be needed, advice should be sought from Town Council's Officers.

4. Guidance for employees, volunteers and contractors

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

Individuals should make it clear in social media postings, or in their personal profile, that they are speaking on their own behalf.

Individuals must be respectful to others when making any statement on social media and be aware that they are personally responsible for all communications which will

be published on the internet for anyone to see.

If an individual discloses their affiliation with the town council on their profile or in any social media postings, they must state that their views do not represent those of the council, (unless authorised to speak on the council's behalf). They should also ensure that their profile and any content posted is consistent with the professional image that is presented to the public and colleagues.

Should guidance be needed, advice should be sought from the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk.

Personal use of social media during working hours

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

Prohibited use for Staff

Staff must avoid making any social media communications that could damage the town council's interests or reputation, even indirectly and should not express opinions on the council's behalf via social media, unless expressly authorised to do so by the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk. Any staff member who is contacted for comments about the organisation for publication anywhere, including in any social media outlet, should direct the enquiry to the Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk and should not respond without their written approval.

Staff may be required to undergo training before posting on the council's behalf, the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk may impose certain requirements and restrictions with regard to staff activities.

Any misuse of social media should be reported to the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk.

5. Social media and public comments

In order to ensure that comments posted on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, the public are asked to adhere to the following guidelines.

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but
- personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.

- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Council's social media accounts for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

Messages sent via social media will not be considered as contacting the town council for official purposes and therefore the council, is not obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the Town Clerk and/or members of the council by emailing.

The town council retains the right to remove comments or content that includes any of the following.

- Obscene or racist content.
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language.
- Potentially libellous statements.
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright.
- Private, personal information published without consent.
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum.
- Commercial promotions or spam.
- Material which alleges a breach of the council's policy or the law.

The council's response to any communication which fails to meet the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available. Any comments posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page. The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a council policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

6. Monitoring

The town council reserves the right to monitor and review, without further notice, staff and Councillor activities, social media postings and activities, to ensure that its rules are being complied with and used for legitimate business purposes.

Day-to-day responsibility for the operation of this policy will be undertaken by the Deputy Town Clerk/Town Clerk.

7. Breach of this policy

Breach of the policy by a councillor

Any breach of this Social Media policy, by a councillor, may constitute a breach of the council's Code of Conduct. The council's Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way that it does to written or verbal communication.

Breach of this policy by a Staff Member/Volunteer

Breach of this policy by a staff member or volunteer may result in invocation of the council's Disciplinary Procedure.

Breach of this policy by a Contractor

Any breach of this policy by a contractor will be handled under the terms of their contract.

Any breach of this policy may lead to a requirement to remove any social media content considered to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in subsequent action such as recourse to disciplinary procedure or action as a potential Code of Conduct breach.