

Woodstock Town Council Social Media Policy

1. Policy statement

1.1 This policy is intended to help Councillors make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as (but not limited to) emails, blogs, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other relevant social media websites. (Council staff have guidelines contained within employment policies).

1.2 This policy outlines the standards the Council requires Councillors to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

1.3 This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by the Council, such as the Equal Opportunities Policy, Data Protection Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Members Code of Conduct and such like.

1.4 This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

2. Who is covered by this policy?

This policy covers all individuals working at all levels with the Council, including all elected and co-opted Councillors, volunteers (the Town Clerk and all other employees must comply with employment policies).

3. The scope of this policy

3.1 The council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy. All Members are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.

3.2 Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the Code does not apply. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or social networking.

It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the Council would be

content with the statement should it be made public. Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.

3.3. All volunteers and members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. You are personally responsible for content you publish. Any breach should be reported to the Town Clerk.

3.4 Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Town Clerk.

4. Rules for using social media.

4.1 Councillors must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others.

Do not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory, abusive, obscene or offensive comments.

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council.
- Never make false or misleading statements.
- Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. They must protect the good reputation of the Council.
- Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council.
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." Use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Do not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face.
- Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so.
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used.
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors, staff and residents.
- Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel and copyright.
- Spell and grammar check everything.

4.2 Anyone who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by elected and co-opted Councillors, volunteers or officers should inform the Town Clerk.

4.3 Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. Never publish anyone else's contact details. If you are unsure whether the information you

wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Town Clerk

4.4 Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.

4.5 If Councillors blog or tweet personally, and not in their role as a Councillor, they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.

4.6 The Town Clerk will be the nominated person to act as moderator. She/he will be responsible for monitoring of the content on council pages, ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The Town Clerk will have authority to instruct officers to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such post will may also be reported to the hosts and also the Council for its records.

4.7 The Town Clerk will appoint a nominated "Webmaster" to maintain and update the Council Website. The website may be used to:

- Post notices and minutes of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Post good news stories
- Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct provided that their terms and conditions of that website permit it
- Advertise vacancies
- 'share' information from partners i. e. Police, Library, district or county council, etc. if permitted to do so.
- Announce new information appropriate to the Council.
- Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups
- Post other items as the Council see fit.
- Facebook, etc, may be used to support the website and its information as above.

4.8 Individual Councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address, which is used for Council business. Councillors are required to use their council email for council business and not personal email addresses.

4.9 All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure the security settings are in place.

5. Monitoring use of social media websites.

5.1 You should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken

5.2 Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give risk to legal liability against you and the Council.

5.3 Residents and councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

5.4 If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised at either the Public Question Time or as a full agenda item for consideration by the Council. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

5.5 Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Town Clerk for referral to the Council as required.

6. The Policy will be reviewed periodically, at least during every electoral cycle.

ADOPTED: 12/4/22

Next Review: not later than April 2026