

Amesbury Town Council

Social Media Policy

1. Amesbury Town Council Social Media Policy

2. The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Town Councillors, Council staff and others who engage with the Council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media. The Council will ensure that training is provided for members and officers in connection with this policy.
3. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.
4. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):
 - a. Amesbury Town Council's website
 - b. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social networking sites
 - c. YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
 - d. LinkedIn
 - e. Blogs and discussion forums
 - f. Email
5. The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.
6. The principles of this policy apply to Town Councillors and Council staff and also applies to others communicating with the Town Council.
7. Members are strongly advised to use only the official Amesbury Town Council email address provided for Town Council business and correspondence. Any account used for Town Council business and correspondence will be subject to any request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Members are responsible for ensuring the security of devices, apps and packages used and all devices should be password protected.
8. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.
9. The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.
10. Individual Town Councillors and Council staff are responsible for what they post in a Council and personal capacity.
11. In the main, Councillors and Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.
12. Social media may be used to:

- a. Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- b. Advertise events and activities
- c. Promote good news stories with a linked website or press page
- d. Advertise job vacancies
- e. Retweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- f. Announce new information
- g. Post or share information from other Town Council related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- h. Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other Councillors
- i. Share any other information that is relevant to the community

13. Code of Practice

14. When using social media (including email) Town Councillors and Council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

15. Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

16. Town Councillors and Council staff must not:

- a. Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- b. Present personal opinions as that of the Town Council
- c. Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council
- d. Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Town Council
- e. Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- f. Engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- g. Use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- h. Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- i. Post any information that infringes copyright of others
- j. Post any information that may be deemed libel
- k. Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- l. Bring the Town Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- m. Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- n. Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

17. Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages.

18. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

19. Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

20. Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation and an offence.

21. Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.
22. Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or committee meeting may constitute predisposition, predetermination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.
23. Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Town Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Town Clerk.
24. Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.
25. The Town Clerk acts as the moderator of Town Council's social media output and is responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.
26. The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from Council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature. Where appropriate, the moderator will have the authority to report any such posting to any other appropriate agency including The Police and Wiltshire Council.

27. Monitoring and responding

28. The council's social media accounts are generally monitored Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays and public holidays) from 9am to 4pm. There may be other times when the accounts are monitored, but this will be variable. During periods of staff absence, or for operational reasons, there may be periods of normal working hours where the councils social media accounts are not monitored.
29. The council will respond to comments, replies and direct messages as soon as possible. Sometimes it will be necessary to find out information before a reply can be given.
30. The council reserves the right to block an account if a user is promoting a product or service, if the user has infringed the rules of the social media space, or if the user's interactions are offensive.
31. The council will rely on the measures of protection and intervention which the social networking site already has in place, e.g. against illegal, harmful or offensive comment, for example by reporting posts to the site operator.
32. The council reserves the right to delete any posts that breach the rules of the community or the council's own terms of use. This includes:
 - a. Posts that are unlawful, harassing, defamatory, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive
 - b. Swearing
 - c. Content copied from elsewhere, for which the poster does not own the copyright
 - d. The same or similar messages posted more than once. It will be considered spam'
 - e. Publicising personal information, such as contact details

- f. Advertisements for products or services
 - g. A user impersonating someone else
 - h. Political comments
 - i. Libellous statements
 - j. Controversial, irrelevant and off topic messages, otherwise known as trolling'
33. Social media is not the appropriate avenue for raising an official complaint, serious issues or urgent requests. Council social media accounts are not monitored out of hours and be unmonitored during normal working hours for operational reasons. Complaints should be made in accordance with the council's Complaints Policy and Procedure. Serious issues or urgent requests should be referred directly to the council office, councillor or relevant staff member.

34. Personal use of social media

35. As the use and popularity of social media grows, the lines between what is public and private, personal and professional have blurred. The council respects employees' and councillors' right to personal use of social media.
36. Councillors and employees not bring the reputation of the council or colleagues into disrepute. Actions which adversely affect the council's reputation may become a matter for the council.
37. If councillors and employees already use social networks or blogs for personal use, any comments or images should not reflect on the council in a negative manner.
38. When using social media for personal purposes, councillors and employees must not imply they are speaking for the council. The use of the council email address, council logos or other council identification should be avoided and it should be made clear that what is said is not representative of the views and opinions of the council.
39. A clear distinction should be made between profiles/postings as an individual or those as a councillor or member of staff. Profiles/postings in relation to council business should be transparent and respectful.
40. Councillors and employees should comply with other council policies when using social media. For example, do not breach council confidentiality, or the code of conduct. If in doubt, don't post it.
41. Councillors and employees should be mindful of their privacy settings.
42. This policy will be reviewed annually.

Date approved
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