



Yateley Town Council Social Media & Virtual Meetings Policy 2020

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The objective of this policy is to inform and guide Council officers and Members on the use of social media including the Town Council website. This policy provides clarification on the definitions of social media and outlines the Council's aims for social media usage. Furthermore, the policy will include guidelines for all actions concerning the use of social media as a method of communication for both Council officers and Members who need to be aware of the separate factors affecting appropriate usage.

2.0 Purpose of the Policy

2.1 The purpose of this policy document is to:

- Ensure there is a common strategy on social media usage among all those associated with the Council;
- Ensure that the Council and its Members are not subject to legal risks and action;
- Maintain the good reputation of the Council where forms of communication utilise social media;
- Ensure a clear separation between Council social media and Members social media accounts;
- Provide clear guidelines on the use of social media in a professional capacity.

3.0 Definitions of Social Media

3.1 Social media is a term for web-based communications tools that enables interactions between multiple users including information, knowledge and opinion sharing as well as media distribution and event planning. This includes social networking sites and other internet based sites that allow for user interaction.

3.2 Common features of social media include, but are not limited to:

- A user account which allows visitors to create their own secure account they can use to interact with other visitors;
- A profile that represents the individual, group or company using the site. This details information about the user such as name, pictures, and activity;
- The use of a wide range of devices; computers, mobile phones and tablets etc.;
- Allows for instant or sporadic communication with other users;
- Provides communication between individuals, groups of individuals and organisations;
- Allows for the sharing of images or videos to other users.

4.0 Benefits of Social Media

- Engagement: Social media allows for a wider engagement with the public in real-time;
- Communication: Contact with the public can be increased and greater engagement can help inform decision making;
- Insight: Contact and information exchange through social media allows the Council and its Members to be aware of public opinion and provides a larger arena for public consultation;
- Transparency: An increased presence in the local community can ensure citizens know what is happening and increase the Council's transparency;
- Promotion: Communication with the local community allows for the promotion of Town Council run community events and other work.

5.0 Risks of Social Media

- Public Criticism: As with any form of contact with the public there may be criticism concerning social media usage. These can be managed by a social media policy available for public viewing;
- Legal issues: There can be legal difficulties with copyright infringement;
- Cyber-security: The possibility of an outside individual gaining access to social media should be considered. Protecting passwords and limiting the number of team members with access to accounts can reduce this risk;
- The audience of social media can be diverse and difficult to limit;
- Data protection: There can be difficulties with sharing information or images if they are not in line with GDPR.

6.0 Using Social Media

6.1 Management of the Council's social media will only be undertaken by individuals with express permission from the Town Clerk.

6.2 All accounts which identify and represent the Council, the Mayor and Councillor positions (e.g. Chairs of Committees) will be the property of the Council. Access to these accounts can be given to the appropriate Member/s however they will be monitored by the Council who will retain authority over their usage. These accounts will represent the position and the work done by the individual but not necessarily the individual's personal and political views.

6.3 Members may set up and manage personal social media accounts in their own name to reflect their work as a Councillor these should state, within the header of the account profile, that "the views expressed are personal views and not necessarily the views of Yateley Town Council."

6.4 Members may also set up personal accounts not connected to their work as a Councillor, in this case there is no need to include the above disclaimer. However, Members should remain aware of the possible negative impacts of statements made on a personal account, even if they are not identified as a Councillor.

6.5 All Members and Officers who use social media should maintain a professional but friendly tone to encourage interaction from members of the community.

6.6 For all Members who wish to use social media, training sessions can be provided to ensure a sound understanding of the Council's social media policy and the mechanics of different types of social media including:

- How different social media works;
- The varying styles of social media available;
- What style of social media is suited to different forms of communication.

7.0 Conduct

7.1 All conduct using any forum of social media or during virtual Council meetings should comply with the policy set out in this document alongside existing policies including the Bullying and Whistleblowing Policy, Equalities Policy and Member/Officer Relations Policy.

7.2 When using Social media remember:

- To use common sense – social media can be used to reach out to a large section of the community so be aware of your audience;
- To ensure a clear divide between work and personal life;
- Permanency – once something is stated via social media it is almost impossible to remove;
- If you have doubts, do not post;
- There is no need to respond to every post.

8.0 Officers

8.1 The Council itself, as opposed to its political administration, must be politically neutral on any social media. Therefore, any pages must not be used to promote party political messages or other content with a political affiliation.

8.2 Rude, disrespectful or derogatory language will not be tolerated.

8.3 No posts should be made that include personal information of a Member of the Council, any local resident, or an employee at the Council.

8.4 All minutes or agendas relating to private meetings should not be published on social media, and no comments regarding the meeting should be made.

9.0 Members

9.1 Members who identify themselves as Members in any biography or description on a personal social media account should make it clear that the views expressed are those of the individual and may not represent those of the Council or any other Members.

9.2 All Members with access to accounts representing Council positions should refrain from making posts which include personal values, ideas and ideologies.

9.3 Members should make use of appropriate privacy settings depending on their willingness to be contacted by the public and the press.

9.4 The name of the Town Council, and any associated logos, should not be used without express permission of the Town Clerk.

9.5 Members should be respectful of other users and avoid personal attacks with rude and derogatory language.

9.6 Members will be personally responsible for the content of their personal social media accounts and any content published, or allowed to be published, that may amount to libel, or any other legal infringements.

10.0 Virtual Council Meetings

10.1 When taking part in a virtual Council meeting remember:

- That the meeting is being watched by members of the public;
- To behave in the same way that you would in a face-to-face meeting;
- To ensure that you adhere to standard codes of conduct that normally apply;
- To use common sense – virtual meetings can reach a large section of the community so be aware of your audience;
- To promote and support high standards of conduct during meetings and beyond;
- To ensure that your appearance and setting are appropriate for a Council meeting.

10.2 Before recording or live streaming the meeting, Councillors should be reminded of the above points.

Amendment Record

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