

Witney Town Council Social Media Policy

Statement of Purpose

There are far too many social media sites to list but some of the most popular examples are; Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube. The format and levels of interaction vary greatly from one to another. Whenever Council representatives use such sites they should familiarise themselves with the guidance that is set out in this policy.

It is important that social media sites are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that **their use does not expose the Council to security risks or reputational damage**.

Social media offers great potential for building relationships and improving the services that the town council provides. This policy will clearly set out how social media can be managed effectively and how any risks or pitfalls can be avoided or mitigated.

As with any online activity there are risks associated. The following types of risk have been identified with social media use:

- Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection from infected sites.
- Disclosure of confidential information.
- Damage to the reputation of the Council.
- Social engineering attacks (*this is the act of manipulating people into disclosing confidential material or carrying out certain actions. Social engineering is often conducted by individuals fraudulently claiming to be a business or client*).
- Civil or Criminal action relating to breaches of legislation.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure:

- that the Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks;
- that the reputation of the Council is not adversely affected;
- that our users are able to clearly distinguish where information provided via social networking applications is legitimately representative of the Council.

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Witney Town Council:

Responsibilities of Members

Councillors must remember that they are **personally** responsible for the content they publish on any form of social media.

It is good practice for councillors to clearly separate professional, personal, or political aspects of their communication.

Councillors must ensure that they are familiar with the guidance that is set out within this policy and that their use of social media is not damaging to the reputation of the authority.

Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important that councillors are confident about the nature of the information they publish. They must not publish or report on meetings or discussions that are meant to be private or internal to the Council.

Responsibilities of Officers

Officers using social media in a personal capacity must ensure that this use is **strictly personal**, and not professional or political.

As members of the public may nevertheless recognise officers as employees of the Council it is important that officers ensure that their personal use of social media is not damaging to the reputation of the Council.

If an officer receives any threats, abuse or harassment from members of the public through their use of social media then they must report such incidents to the Town Clerk.

Where officers use social media in a professional capacity to represent the town council, the town council's corporate identity will be used and not that of any individual officer. Town council email addresses will be used. The use will be non-party political.

Officers must not download any software, shareware or freeware, unless this has been approved and authorised by the Town Clerk.

Failure to comply with the guidelines could result in disciplinary action being taken

General Terms of Use (Applies to ALL COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES)

Social networking applications

1. must not be used to publish content which may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes but is not limited to material of an illegal, sexual, or offensive nature that may bring the Council into disrepute.
2. must not be used in an abusive or hateful manner.
3. must not be used for actions that would put Council representatives in breach of Council Codes of Conduct, or policies relating to Elected Members or staff.
4. must not breach the Council's Equal Opportunities or Bullying & Harassment policies.

5. official Council and Mayoral profiles and pages must not be used for party political purposes or specific campaigning purposes as the Council is not permitted to publish material which 'in whole or part appears to affect public support for a political party' (LGA 1986)
6. official Council and Mayoral profiles and pages must not be used for the promotion of personal financial interests or personal campaigns.
7. official Council profiles and pages must not be used for the promotion of commercial ventures – with the exception when a commercial venture has given sponsorship to a Council event of capital project – then its sponsorship will be acknowledge as the Town Clerk sees fit.