



WARWICK TOWN COUNCIL

Digital and Social Media Policy

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to staff and Town Councillors in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as digital and social media.

Digital and social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. The policy covers all forms of digital media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

Digital Media

- Town Council website
- Town Council emails

Social Media

Social Media applications include, but are not limited to:

- Social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn
- Microblogging applications, for example Twitter
- Image and video sharing sites, such as YouTube and Flickr
- Blogs, for example Blogger
- Video streaming services, such as Twitch
- Discussion forums, such as Reddit
- Instant Messaging services, such as Messenger, WhatsApp and Skype
- Reference sources such as Wikipedia

Who does it apply to?

The principles of the Policy apply to Town Councillors and all Council Staff.

It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Town Council.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

Use of Digital and Social Media channels owned by Warwick Town Council

The use of digital and social media does not replace existing forms of communication. The main media for the purpose of communicating information about the Town Council is our website. The website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore, existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

The Policy

1. The Council will appoint a nominated member of staff/ Councillor or Councillors as moderator(s) for Council-owned digital and social channels. They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring it complies with the Digital and Social Media Policy. The moderator will have

authority to remove any posts made by third parties from our social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libel nature. Such post will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the Town Clerk.

2. The Council will appoint a nominated “Webmaster” to maintain and update the Town Council Website.

Under the Transparency Code for Town/Parish Councils with an annual turnover less than £25K there are requirements for specified information and documents to be posted on a council’s website. There is a different requirement for a council with a turnover >£200,000, though at date of this note, no documents have been specified for councils with a turnover > £25K and under £200,000. As such we are required to list payments over £500

The Warwick Town Council website and email communications media may be used to –

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Post and communicate information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc.
- Announcing new information.
- Post and communicate information from other Parish related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillors

Social media channels, such as Facebook, will be used to share the website information above with links referring to the Warwick Town Council website.

Emails will be used to distribute information of council business.

Personal Guidance for Councillors using Digital and Social Media

Individual Town councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses, and adhere to **The Members’ Code of Conduct, see Guidance for Councillors at the end of this document. You should not advertise businesses using your Councillor name.**

3. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.

4. When participating in any online communication;

- a. Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- b. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Town Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
- c. All Town Councillors need to be mindful of the information they post and should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment.

Town Councillors must ensure personal opinions are not published as being representative of the Council, bring the Council into disrepute or are contrary to the Council’s Code of Conduct or any other Policies.

Where Councillors identify themselves as such on social media channels, it is recommended that, in the personal biography information on Twitter and similar channels, Councillors state "Opinions I express here are my personal views and not those of Warwick Town Council"

d. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or write in red to emphasis points.

e. 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.

f. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.

g. Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.

h. Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded. It is advised that if you wish to distribute an image or video from an external source, that this is done by sharing or linking to the external source's original post, image or video.

5. Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.

6. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, *see below libel and copyright.*

7. Residents and Councillors should note that not all communication requires a response.

a. There will not be immediate responses to communications as they may be discussed by the Town Council and all responses will be agreed by the Town Council.

b. The Town Clerk and the moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.

c. If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Again the poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.

d. If the moderator feels unable to answer a post for example of a contentious nature this shall be referred to the Town clerk. The poster will have informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Town Clerk directly.

e. Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Town Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.

8. Any member of staff making detrimental comments about Warwick Town Council or its Councillors will immediately be subject too disciplinary.

8. The nominated moderator or moderators shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libellous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.

a. Spell and grammar check everything.

b. Correct any errors promptly.

9. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

10. The Policy will be reviewed annually.

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