

**FERRYHILL TOWN COUNCIL**



**POLICY**

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

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### **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The objective of this policy is to provide councillors and staff with an overview of social media, and outline the Council's position on various aspects of its use. It also includes guidelines on councillor and staff responsibilities when using such means of communication in their official capacity.

1.2 It aims to ensure that:

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

1.3 Social media can provide a useful and often more far-reaching alternative to official means of communication. However, the use of social media will not replace existing forms of communication. Instead, the website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication, and existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

#### **2. Definition**

2.1 Social media is the term commonly given to website and online tools that allow users to interact with each other in some way e.g by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction can be through computers, mobile phones and new generation technology, including tablet devices. Examples of popular social media tools include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and blogs, although new platforms are emerging regularly and therefore this policy is not intended to apply to any specific social media model.

#### **3. Town Council Use of Social Media**

3.1 Online and social media should be used primarily for the following purposes:

- To share information relating to the official business of the parish council, e.g. posting dates of meetings, minutes and agendas;
- To advertise events and activities of potential interest to those who live in, work in, or visit the community;
- To promote newsworthy stories of potential interest;
- To alert the public to vacancies on the council;

- To support local individuals or community groups by sharing information that may be of benefit or interest;
- To announce new information that may be of relevance in relation to the work of the council;
- To function as an alternative platform for residents to express their views or queries to the clerk or councillors, although this will not be treated as being in an official capacity.

#### **4. GUIDANCE ON USING SOCIAL MEDIA**

4.1 Individual Town 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 strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses, and ensure that they adhere to the Members' Code of Conduct.**

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

**4.3 Councillors must not post any Council information of a confidential nature, or any other information which may adversely affect the ability of staff to successfully carry out their duties.**

**4.4 Councillors must not post any criticism of Council policies, performance or personnel.**

4.5 If councillors wish to create their own personal accounts on any platform to facilitate discussion on issues relevant to Ferryhill and its people, they must avoid using any wording or image, for example the Council logo or town hall photograph, which may give the impression it is officially recognised by or representative of Ferryhill Town Council.

4.6 When participating in any online communication, Councillors must:

- i) Be responsible and respectful, direct, informative, brief and transparent;
- ii) Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Town Council;
- iii) Never make false or misleading statements;
- iv) Do not present yourself in a way that might cause embarrassment;
- v) Be mindful of the information you post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or are contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies;

- vi) 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 emphasise points;
- vii) Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive, and potentially illegal, relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief should not be published on any social media site;
- viii) Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications;
- ix) Never use an individual’s name or other personal information unless you have written permission to do so;
- x) Never publish photographs or videos on social media sites without the permission from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.

4.7 Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.

4.8 Residents and councillors should note that not all communications require a response or will be responded to. If a matter is intended to be brought officially to the Council’s attention then it may be raised at a Council meeting. The response will then be communicated via the minutes of the meeting.

4.9 Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, including laws covering libel, defamation and data protection.

4.10 Posts will be monitored regularly. The Town Clerk has the authority to remove posts from Council sites which may contain personal or inflammatory remarks or which may be deemed to be inappropriate. Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Town Clerk.

4.11 Views expressed by others that remain on the website or social media platform are not necessarily endorsed by the Town Council. The Town Council is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by others, nor does it accept any responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of reliance upon information posted online.

4.12 Any breach of this Policy by councillors may be considered a breach of the Members Code of Conduct.