

## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

### 1. Introduction

This policy supports Council's aim to improve the communication with residents (including harder to reach groups) through the effective use of social media. This Policy must be read and applied in conjunction with the Council's Communications and Media Communications Policies. This policy applies to employees of the Council who are authorised to access the council's social media platforms and to Councillors.

Authorised users of the Official Honiton Town Council social media sites will be limited to the Town Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Clerk's Assistants in order to provide Council information, maintain and publicise events and Decisions of the Town Council.

#### Code of Conduct

The Town Council has adopted a Code of Conduct and all matters relating to media communications should be conducted in line with the principles of this Code. See Appendix C for further information.

- 1.1 The policy aims to:
- i. respond to the increasing public use of social media as a way to communicate;
  - ii. establish a corporate approach, standards and guidance on the use of social media;
  - iii. further the council's aims and objectives including promotion of key campaigns, projects and events;
  - iv. oversee how the council communicates messages to the public, while maintaining its public duties;
  - v. uphold the reputation of the council and enhance the image of Honiton Town Council;
  - vi. provide an appropriate level of awareness, knowledge and skill to properly manage the use of social media and minimise the risks to the council;
  - vii. help employees to distinguish between the use of social media in their work and personal lives;
  - viii. provide clarity to employees in understanding the behaviour expected for functioning in an electronic world are no different from those expected of employees on a daily basis in other methods of communication; and
  - ix. to ensure that the public are clear at all times about whether the employee, councillor or third party contractor is communicating on behalf of the Council or as an individual.
- 1.2 Councils can use social media in many ways, including:
- Providing information about services
  - Supporting local democracy
  - Gathering customer insight and managing customer relationships
  - Promoting cultural and leisure events
  - Supporting local communities and developing a neighbourly approach.

The Council's Social media accounts may not be used to receive comments, enter dialogue/respond to comments or be a channel to request services from the Council.

The Town Clerk (or Council staff) will post on the Council's social media sites. If Councillors or specialists need to post on the Council's social media sites, such information must be provided to the Town Clerk for assessment of its compliance with this Policy and for posting on behalf of the Council.

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- 1.3 Councils that wish to help build a sense of belonging in a neighbourhood, increase resident satisfaction levels and reduce social problems can do much with social media as it is a way of connecting people, providing information and building trust.
- 1.4 Social media includes (but is not limited to) social networking sites (such as Facebook and LinkedIn); video and photo sharing websites (such as Flickr, YouTube and Instagram); blogs and microblogs (such as Twitter); 'wiki' sites that can be edited by the public (such as Wikipedia) and forums or discussion boards.
- 1.5 This policy aims to make sure that employees, councillors and third party contractors can actively take part in social networks so that local government keeps pace with the ways in which people like to receive information.
- 1.6 This policy will help ensure that employees, councillors and third parties understand and comply with all relevant legislation and Council policies which are relevant to the use of social media - whether the use is for official council business or personal.
- 1.7 Contractors are required to comply with this policy in the same way as employees and Members of the Council and this requirement will form part of contractual agreements.
- 1.8 The Council is keen to maximise its use of social media wherever this is helpful to our customers and residents as a communication channel.
- 1.9 The reputation and/or business of the Council, service users, partners or others connected with the council must not be brought into disrepute through use of social media sites.
- 1.10 The Council will accept no liability for an individuals' participation on social media sites. Participants are personally accountable for any contributions they make.
- 1.11 Any retweets, follows, or likes are not an endorsement of a service, individual or organisation. The council does not take responsibility for any content on pages or profiles it has shared.
- 1.12 When participating in social networking or while using social media, common sense and good judgment must be used when posting or sharing material. If not, consequences can include, among other issues, negative publicity, regulatory attention and confidentiality or copyright concerns.
- 1.13 If material posted by an employee breaches Council policy, they may be subject to disciplinary action; similarly Councillors may be in breach of the Code of Conduct.
- 1.14 Material published by the Council will not contain party political material and will not persuade the public to a particular political view, promote the personal image of a particular councillor, promote a particular councillor's proposals, decisions or recommendations or personalise issues.
- 1.15 The Town Clerk will manage the implementation of this policy and the Council Office staff will manage the Council's corporate social media site and oversee other official sites which are

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service specific. Other methods of communication, such as press releases and the Council's website will continue to be used as appropriate.

- 1.16 Service specific social media sites may only be created if agreed by Full Council to ensure that sites are consistent and to confirm whether or not the sites are actually required or whether the Council's corporate site should be used.
- 1.17 The Town Clerk will maintain a register of all Council social media sites and their users and will have access and administration rights to these.
- 1.18 The Council has a Facebook page (in use) and dormant Twitter and LinkedIn accounts.
- 1.19 Official Sites may only be accessed and edited by those officers who have been authorised to do so.
- 1.20 Those accessing and editing sites must attend Social Media training organised by the Council.

## **2 Monitoring**

- 2.1 The Council's social media accounts are monitored Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays and public holidays) from 10am to 2pm. There may be other times when the accounts are monitored, but this will be variable.
- 2.2 This Policy does not provide for the public to comment on the Council's social media posts or communicate via the Council's social media presence. Nevertheless, the Council may 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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: posts that are unlawful, harassing, defamatory, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive; swearing; content copied from elsewhere, for which the poster does not own the copyright; the same or similar messages posted more than once. It will be considered spam; publicising personal information, such as contact details; advertisements for products or services; a user impersonating someone else; political comments; libellous statements; controversial, irrelevant and off topic messages, otherwise known as trolling'.

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- 2.6** Social media is not the appropriate avenue for raising an official complaint, serious issues or urgent requests. 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.
- 3 Legal considerations – staying out of trouble online**
- 3.1** Any form of communication is rife with the possibility of misunderstandings. Social media is perhaps no more or less vulnerable to this but there are some new ways to misfire with your message!
- 3.2** The council will abide by any relevant or applicable laws, terms, and conditions to ensure the organisation is not exposed to risks. This includes, but is not exclusively limited to, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the GDPR.
- 3.3** Council use of social media must be undertaken in accordance with the council's policies and procedures. This includes, but is not exclusively limited to, the Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedure, Equality and Diversity Policy, Media Communications Policy and Procedure, Complaints Policy and Procedure, Health and Safety Policy, and Data Protection Policy. These policies will be reviewed in the fullness of time and it will be the most up to date policy that is in force at any given time.
- 3.4** Employees using social media sites for business purposes must maintain political neutrality and not indicate individual political opinions.
- 3.5** In the six-week run up to a local, general or European election (also known as the pre-election period) the council must not do or say anything that could be seen in any way to support any political party or candidate. The council will continue to publish important service announcements using social media.
- 3.6** A statement will be published on all council social media to set out the policy on acceptable use of these platforms by the public.
- 3.7** Although use of social media can be conversational in tone, publishing on the web is still publishing. It is important to remember that you are responsible for what you publish on social media. Authorised Users need to be acutely aware that anything on an Official Site, published on behalf of the Council, reflects upon the Council and its reputation.
- 3.8** In general terms, content must not be published which may result in actions which may be discriminatory, defamatory, breach copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes (but is not limited to) material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature. Any such content published by a third party must be evidenced (through a screenshot or other robust method) and retained separately before it is removed.
- 3.9** If responding to negative content posted by third parties, it is important to acknowledge their view in a neutral way, state what will be done regarding their comment and if necessary, evidence their comment before removing it. Please refer to 4.2 and Appendix D (of the Media

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Communications Policy) for further guidance. Users should not make statements which affirm or support the comments and should avoid inviting further responses/dialogue on the matter.

- 3.10 Content for the promotion of personal financial interests, personal commercial ventures or personal campaigns must not be published on corporate accounts.
- 3.11 Use of social media sites will at all times be consistent with the Council's duty to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults, in accordance with relevant statutory requirements. Authorised Users must never publish pictures of children or young people aged under-18 on social media unless they have express written parental permission as part of a signed official permission form. This form is available from the Town Clerk.

### **4 General application of this policy**

- 4.1 All employees, whether Authorised Users or not, are required to adhere to this policy and guidance which forms part of the policy even when they are using social media for personal use. Employees should note that any breaches of the policy and guidance, for example, bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the organisation, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.
- 4.2 If you discover defamatory, confidential, obscene or otherwise unlawful material that you consider affects the Council or any of its employees (whether in a public forum or via direct message) you should draw it to the attention of the of the Town Clerk or in the case of the Town Clerk to the Chair of the Council immediately. You must take their advice [and that of the Council's legal team where necessary] before taking any action on the social media site in question.
- 4.3 Where a mistake is made in a posting, it should be publicly corrected at the earliest opportunity.

### **5 Personal use of social media**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 Councillors and employees not to 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.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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.

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- 5.5** 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.
- 5.6** 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.
- 5.7** Councillors and employees should be mindful of their correct privacy settings.

**6. Appendices and other relevant information**

Appendix A Official Council Social Media Sites  
Appendix B Guidance for Officers  
Appendix C Guidance for Councillors

## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

### Appendix A

#### Official Social Media Sites



Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com))

Corporate

@Honitontowncouncil



Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com))

Corporate:

/Honitontowncouncil



Flickr ([www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com))

Corporate:

/photos/honitontc/

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### Appendix B

#### Guidance for officers (this guidance forms part of the Council's Social Media Policy)

#### 1 What to bear in mind to keep you protected online either at work or at home

- 1.1 When you engage online it is important to use your common sense. The things that can get you into hot water anywhere else are just the same things to avoid in social media.
- 1.3 You are personally responsible for what you publish on social media. It is important that you think before you publish as words can't be unspoken. Even if you delete a hastily fired off blog or tweet, it will probably already have been read and will be indexed or duplicated in places beyond your reach.
- 1.4 Remember that the laws of defamation and harassment apply to social media in the same way as written or spoken communication and people can sue you personally for damages if they consider their reputation has been or may be harmed, or if your posts constitute harassment.
- 1.5 Use of social media (whether personal or corporate account use) to bully or harass customers or colleagues will not be tolerated.

#### 2 Use of Social Media at work

- 2.1 When using any Official Site in relation to your role at work, **Authorised Users must:**
  - Clearly identify yourself as a Council employee and either include your name or job title as and are making comments on a social media site not specifically branded as belonging to the Council;
  - Make sure all content published is accurate, not misleading and complies with any relevant Council policy and is in keeping with your job role;
  - Comply with the terms and conditions of the social media site being used;
  - Be polite and treat other users of the social media site with respect;
  - Use the flowchart at the end of this guide to decide how and if to respond to customer comments, particularly negative ones;
  - Remember to keep the Town Clerk (or Chairman of the Council) updated on your work and to flag inappropriate content.
- 2.2 When using any Official Site, **Authorised Users must not:**
  - Make any comment or post any material that may cause damage to the Council's reputation or bring it into disrepute. This includes making negative or disparaging comments about the Council or its employees, and ensuring you do not agree with or affirm content posted by third parties which is inappropriate (derogatory/offensive etc. see final point below), particularly where the accuracy of comments stated as factual cannot be verified ;
  - Make any political comment; state any political preference or make any kind of partisan comment (e.g. show support/sympathy for) that may compromise the reputation of the Council or appear to put the Council in a conflict of interest;
  - Post, publish or respond to any material that is defamatory, offensive, obscene, harassing or bullying; racist, sexist or otherwise discriminatory; infringes copyright or any person's right to privacy; constitutes contempt of court or is otherwise unlawful.

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### **3 Monitoring use of social media at work**

- 3.1 Authorised Users should not spend more time using social media sites in the course of their employment than is necessary for the purposes of Council public communication. Priority should be given to sites which are widely read by the general public and communicate information about services or service changes that relate to key Council proposals or affect significant numbers of residents.
- 3.2 They should ensure that the use of social media does not interfere with their other duties. Authorised Users spending an unnecessary or excessive amount of time using social media sites may be subject to disciplinary action.

### **4 Open Access Editable “Wiki” Sites Such As Wikipedia**

- 4.1 Most wiki sites record the IP address of the editing computer. Alterations to such wiki sites may appear as if they have come from the Council itself. Officers should not act in a manner that may bring the Council into disrepute and should not post derogatory or offensive comments on any online wiki sites.
- 4.2 Prior to altering any wiki site entry about the Council or any entry which might be deemed a conflict of interest, employees should read the terms and conditions of the site concerned and, if necessary, ask permission from the relevant wiki editor.

### **5 Personal use of social media**

- 5.1 Access to social media sites for personal use using the Council's IT systems is not allowed.
- 5.2 Employees should be aware and recognise that there is a risk of damage being caused to the Council through their personal use of social media when they can be identified as an employee of the Council. This may be by direct identification (because a profile or content expressly states a Council association) or indirect identification (because friends, family or others know the user works for the Council).
- 5.3 If in respect of any personal use of social media an employee can be identified as associated with the Council by the profile or content then the following guidance should be complied with:

#### **You should:**

- Expressly state (through a disclaimer) on any profile or content that identifies you as an employee (or otherwise refers to or implies a relationship with the Council) that the stated views are your own personal views and are not those of the Council. You can use something like ‘the views I express here are mine alone and do not reflect the views of my employer’ or ‘all tweets personal’;
- Ensure that readers are not misled into believing that any material published by you is on behalf of the Council, authorised by the Council or official Council policy if it is not;
- Ensure all content that relates to the Council or Council business is accurate, fairly balanced, not misleading and complies with any relevant Council policy;
- Comply with the terms and conditions of the social media site being used;
- Be polite and treat other users of the social media site with respect;
- Tell the Town Clerk (or the Chairman of the Council) if you discover defamatory, confidential, obscene or otherwise unlawful material that you consider affects the Council or any of its employees.

#### **In addition you must not:**

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- Publish content using an affiliation with the Council for the promotion of personal financial interests, personal commercial ventures or personal campaigns;
- Publish content in an abusive manner or in a way that contravenes the Council's Acceptable Behaviour Policy;
- Publish content in a way which appears as if the Council has endorsed it;
- Share sensitive or confidential information about the Council or its employees or councillors nor upload any photos or videos of colleagues without their express permission;
- Use your Council email address or any Council logos or copyright material for personal use.

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### Appendix C

#### Guidance for Councillors (this guidance forms part of the Council's Social Media Policy)

#### 1 What to bear in mind

- 1.1 When you engage online it is important to use your common sense. The things that can get you into hot water anywhere else are just the same things to avoid in social media.
- 1.2 You are personally responsible for what you publish on social media as well as in public statements. It is important that you think before you publish as words can't be unspoken. Even if you delete a hastily fired off blog or tweet, it will probably already have been read and will be indexed or duplicated in places beyond your reach.
- 1.3 Remember that the law of defamation applies to social media in the same way as written or spoken communication and people can sue you for damages if they consider their reputation has been or may be harmed.
- 1.4 Be mindful if using social media during an official Council meeting or event that the use does not negatively impact on the proceedings or contravene the Council's protocol.
- 1.5 At all times, whether posting in a personal or professional capacity, councillors must be clear whether they are writing as an elected member or private individual. Including 'Cllr' or 'Councillor' in a name is taken to mean that the councillor is writing in the capacity as an elected member. Councillor profiles, websites and use of social media should clearly be either 1) private and personal or 2) in their capacity as a councillor. This is particularly important as mixing these uses is likely to cause confusion to the electorate.

#### 2 Members' Code of Conduct

- 2.1 This applies to your online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. You should comply with the general principles of the Code in what you publish and what you allow others to publish.
- 2.2 You will need to be particularly aware of the following sections of the code and their practical application:
  - Treat others with respect. Avoid personal attacks and disrespectful, rude or offensive comments;
  - Avoid conducting yourself in a manner or behaving in such a way so as to give a reasonable person the impression you have brought your office or the Council into disrepute.
  - Comply with equality laws. Take care not to publish anything that might be considered as sexist, racist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith;
  - Refrain from publishing anything which is confidential or breaches the Data Protection Act;
  - Ensure that readers are not misled into believing that any material published by you is on behalf of the Council, authorised by the Council or official Council policy if it is not;
  - Ensure all content that relates to the Council or Council business is accurate, fairly balanced, not misleading and complies with any relevant Council policy;
  - Comply with the terms and conditions of the social media site being used.

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- 2.3 Members of the public (or other members or officers) may make a complaint about you if you contravene the Code of Conduct. You should also follow the guidance in the Protocol for Members and Officers Relationships.
- 2.4 Members should be aware that during the election process in order to comply with legislation they must not promote themselves

### 3 Personal use of social media

- 3.1 Councillors should be aware and recognise that there is a risk of damage being caused to the Council via their personal use of social media when they can be identified as an elected Councillor. This may be by direct identification (because a profile or content expressly states a Council association) or indirect identification (because friends, family or others know the user works for the Council).
- 3.2 If in respect of any personal use of social media a Councillor can be identified as associated with the Council by the profile or content then the following guidance should be complied with:

#### **You should:**

- Expressly state (through a prominent disclaimer) on any profile or content that identifies you as a Councillor (or otherwise refers to or implies a relationship with the Council) that the stated views are your own personal views and are not those of the Council;
- Ensure that readers are not misled into believing that any material published by you is on behalf of the Council, authorised by the Council or official Council policy if it is not;
- Ensure all content that relates to the Council or Council business is accurate, fairly balanced, not misleading and complies with any relevant Council policy;
- Comply with the terms and conditions of the social media site being used.

#### **In addition you must not:**

- Make any comment or post material so as to give a reasonable person the impression that you have brought your office as Councillor or the Council into disrepute;
- Present political or personal opinion as fact or as representative of the Council;
- Imply that you are authorised to speak as a representative of the Council nor give the impression that the views you express are those of the Council;
- Post or publish any material that is harassing or bullying. Harassment may include personal attacks on officers;
- Publish content that promotes personal/family interests, personal financial interests or any personal commercial ventures.
- Publish content in a way which appears as if the Council has endorsed it;
- Publish content in an abusive manner or contravenes the Council's Standing Orders and Code of Conduct;
- Disclose confidential information, including matters considered under Part B of any Council meeting. If you are in any doubt about this you should first speak to the Town Clerk.

### 4 Open Access Editable "Wiki" Sites Such As Wikipedia

- 4.1 Most wiki sites record the IP address of the editing computer. Alterations to such wiki sites may appear as if they have come from the Council itself. You should not act in a manner that

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may bring the Council into disrepute and should not post derogatory or offensive comments on any online wiki sites.

- 4.2 Prior to altering any wiki site entry about the Council or any entry which might be deemed a conflict of interest, you should read the terms and conditions of the site concerned and, if necessary, ask permission from the relevant wiki editor.