



Social Media Policy

Adopted on: 15th May 2018

Due for Review: April 2020

1. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- 1.1 SSTC understands that the widespread availability and use of social networking applications bring opportunities to understand, engage and communicate with our audiences in new ways. It is important that the Council is able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly. However, it is also important to ensure that the Council balance this with its duties to its service users and partners, its legal responsibilities and reputation.
- 1.2 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 employees, volunteers and members can make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as Social Networking websites e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other forums
 - That our users are able to clearly distinguish where information provided via social networking applications is legitimately representative of the Council.

2. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

- 2.1 This policy covers the use of social networking applications by council employees, Members, and by partners or other third parties (including contractors and volunteers) acting on behalf of the Council. These groups are collectively referred to as 'Council representatives' for brevity hereafter.
- 2.2 All Council representatives are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council.
- 2.3 The requirements of this policy apply to all uses of social networking applications which are used for any Council-related purpose and regardless of whether the applications are hosted corporately or not. They must also be considered where Council representatives are contributing in an official capacity to social networking applications provided by external organisations.
- 2.4 All Council representatives should bear in mind that information they share through social networking applications, even if they are on private spaces, are still subject to copyright, data protection legislation, Freedom of Information legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and other legislation. They must also operate in line with the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy.



3. POLICY

- 3.1 All proposals for using social networking applications a part of a Council service (whether they are hosted by the Council or by a third party) must be approved by the Town Clerk first
- 3.2 Use of social networking applications which are not related to any Council services does not need to be approved by the Clerk. However, Council representatives must still operate in line with the requirements set out in the 'Terms of Use.'
- 3.3 Where applications allow the posting of messages online, users must be mindful that the right to freedom of expression attaches only to lawful conduct. The Council expects that uses of social networking applications will always exercise the right of freedom of expression with due consideration for the Code of Conduct (adopted July 2012), rights of others and strictly in accordance with the Terms of Use.

4. TERMS OF USE

- 4.1 In accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, the Town Clerk is the Council's nominated Press Officer with the authority to issue official press releases. No other member of staff (other than the Deputy Town Clerk when deputising for the Clerk under delegation) has the authority to issue public statements on behalf of the Council.
- 4.2 The Information Officer is the member of staff responsible for general use of social media applications to inform the public of Council information, under the management of the Town Clerk.
- 4.3 Social Media applications;
 - a) Must not be used to publish any 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
 - b) Must not be used in an abusive or hateful manner or be used to make a person feel uncomfortable (*it is good to be authentic, develop a tone of voice and provide a hint of personality but continuously being grumpy or openly criticising people can put an audience off and deter them from engaging with an individual or organisation*)
 - c) Must not be used for actions that would put Council representatives in breach of Council codes of conduct e.g. by saying anything that might bring the Council into disrepute, or policies relating to Elected Members or staff.
- 4.4 Must not breach the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy Using Social media
 - a) Elected members MUST, when posting on social media applications add a 'views are my own' disclaimer. Only the relevant employees (Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk and Information Officer) are permitted to post material on a social media website in the Council's name and on our behalf.
 - b) Council representatives should avoid entering into arguments/escalate heated discussions about the Council's work. Try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.



- c) Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent. Everyone must be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.
- d) Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.
- e) Other organisations should not be referenced without their approval – when referencing, link back to the original source wherever possible.
- f) Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable. Council representatives must remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Council, and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.
- g) Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them.

5. RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

- 5.1 The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy
- 5.2 The Clerk, supported by the Information Officer, is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risk to our work.
- 5.3 All Council representatives should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Town Clerk (or in their absence, the Deputy Town Clerk or Chairman).
- 5.4 Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Town Clerk.

6. MONITORING OF SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES AND ENFORCEMENT

- 6.1 Council representatives should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not used for Council purposes may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found action may be taken against Employees (Disciplinary Procedure) or Members (Reporting to the Monitoring Officer)
- 6.2 Misuse of social media website can, in certain circumstances give rise to legal liability to you and/or the Council.

7. POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed on a two-year cycle, However the policy will also be examined when a formal complaint is made to identify any areas requiring improvement.