

Social Media Policy

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice, and to provide guidance to Tickhill Town Council (TTC), Councillors and staff in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites, which include (but are not limited to):

- Facebook, Instagram and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video hosting and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums

The principles of the Policy apply to TTC Councillors and Council staff. It is also intended to be a guidance for others communicating with the Council. The Policy does not seek to regulate Councillors and staff in their private capacity. No direct costs will be incurred by implementing it and a volunteer(s) will be required from the Council to update and monitor the social media sites. Tickhill Town Council's Facebook Page and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication; the use of social media is not intended to replace existing forms of communication which should continue as usual with social media being an additional option.

Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative, and accurate. Care should be taken to remember that what is written on the web is a permanent record. In the main, Councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. It should be noted that there are also some additional duties around using their online presence for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken when writing on planning matters.

Main Responsibilities

1. The Council will appoint a nominated person or persons as moderator(s). They will be responsible for the posting and monitoring of the content ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. In the event of a moderator ceasing to be a Councillor or employee, they must ensure that at least one administrator remains in place, before removing themselves from the profile. Moderators and administrators may only add or remove other moderators or administrators with the approval of the Council.

The moderator(s) will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from TTC social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libelous, or offensive nature, or otherwise in breach of Social Media Policy. Before deletion, screenshots of the offending content will be saved as evidence for future reference. Such posts will be reported to the Hosts.

2. The Council will appoint a nominated “Webmaster” to maintain and update the Council Website. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate Council and personal email addresses.

Social media may be used to:

- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories
- Sharing information from partners i.e., Police, Library and Health etc.
- Announce new information -
 - ❖ Anything published by either C.D.C. or TTC itself should be automatically posted. This would include planning applications.
 - ❖ Specific advisories would be the subject of a council discussion and would have to be agreed before posting.
 - ❖ Individual persons are responsible for what they post. The person nominated is personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for Council business. If there is any doubt in responding to a post, then advice should be sought. Any one of the Site Administrators should email all council members seeking advice, with a copy to the clerk.
 - ❖ Councillors should respond within 24 hours of posting. If there is an emergent clear consensus then a suitable response should be posted, again advising the clerk by email. If no clear consensus emerges, then a holding note should be posted by the administrators and the item discussed at the next council meeting.

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 Councillors and staff must:
- a. be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief, and transparent.
 - b. always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Council.
 - c. never make false or misleading statements.
 - d. not present yourself in a way that might cause embarrassment. The nominated person need to be mindful of the information they post on social media sites and ensure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council.
 - e. not bring the Council into disrepute; or publish material contrary to the Council’s Code of Conduct or any other policies, laws, or regulations.
 - f. never reveal matters of a confidential nature, or disclose fees, payments information relating to commercial arrangements or offers to tender.
 - g. when posting to a blog or social media site, refrain from writing about or potentially inflammatory subjects, including politics, sex, religion, or any other non-Council-related subjects.
 - h. keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or berating. Use sentence-case format, not capital letters. Stick to this maxim whenever you are contributing to any blogs or social and professional networks.

- i. avoid personal attacks, online fights, and hostile communications.
- j. never use an individual's or organisation's name in the context of Council business unless you have written permission to do so.
- k. always obtain permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites from individuals or organisations, prior to the video or photograph being uploaded. Respect the privacy of Councillors, staff, and residents.

5. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, regarding libel, copyright, data protection, bias and predetermination, obscene material, electoral periods, and the Council's legal position.

6. Residents, the nominated person and staff should note that not all communication requires a response. Where a response is required, the following will apply:

- a. there will not be immediate responses to communications as they may need to be discussed and agreed on by the Council.
- b. the Moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.
- c. if a matter needs further consideration by the Council, it may be raised in the public session 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 a Moderator feels unable to answer a post, for example of a contentious nature, this shall be referred to the Council. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond directly with the Council.
- e. some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a 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.

7. The nominated person, staff or residents 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.

8. At no time should information discussed in confidence be used or discussed on social media sites.

9. This Policy will be reviewed annually; the current version will be posted on the website, and in the profile of any social media account operated on behalf of the Tickhill Town Council.

Reviewed April 2024

Next Review April 2025