



Social Media Policy

1. POLICY AIM

1.1 To establish the principles of use of Social Media by Ashington Town Council Elected Members, Employees, Working Party Representatives and Volunteers and to provide guidance on the use of Social Media.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 What is Social Media?

‘Social media’ is the term commonly given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction may be through computers, mobile phones and tablet technology, but may extend in the future.

Examples of social media websites include:

- Social networking – (e.g. Facebook)
- Professional networking (e.g. LinkedIn)
- Video sharing – (e.g. YouTube)
- Blogs (e.g. Wordpress)
- Micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter)
- Message boards (e.g. BBC Messageboard)
- Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)

3. LEGAL AND STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 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 Data Protection Act 1998.

3.2 Council use of social media must be undertaken in accordance with the council’s policies and procedures.

3.3 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.

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 (“Purdah”) 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 but may have to remove responses if they are deemed overtly party political.

4. PRINCIPLES

- 4.1** To publish information about the work and activities of Ashington Town Council to a wider general audience.
- 4.2** To avoid entering into online debates or arguments about the Council's work. Social Media must NOT be used in the recruitment process for employees or new councillors - other than for the sole purpose of placing vacancy advertisements - as this could lead to potential discrimination and privacy actions, as well as breach of data protection issues.

5. USERS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- 5.1** In accordance with the Council's Communications Protocol, the Town Clerk is the Council's nominated Press Officer with the authority to issue official press releases. No other member of staff has the authority to issue public statements on behalf of the Council.

1. Guidance for Council Officers on the use of Council Social Media

- Officers should be familiar with the terms of use on third party websites – e.g. Facebook - and adhere to these at all times
- No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain – i.e. available on the Council's website, contained in minutes of meetings, stated in Council publicised policies and procedures, or approved by the Town Clerk (or officer under delegation).
- 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.
- Copyright laws must be respected.
- Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.
- Other organisations should not be referenced without their approval – when referencing, link back to the original source wherever possible.
- Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.
- Staff must remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Council, and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.

2. Third party Social Media and Individual Councillor Usage

- Councillors need to think about whether they are acting in a private capacity, or whether any impression might be conveyed that they are acting for and on behalf of Ashington Town Council.

- The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct which is binding on all members. If you use Social Media in your official capacity as a councillor, you should always be mindful of the Code and of the principles applicable to holding public office – selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

Do:

- Set appropriate privacy settings for any networking site
- Watch out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on any blog or page you manage and remove them as soon as possible to avoid any perception that you condone such posts
- Be aware that the higher your profile as a councillor, the more likely it is that you may be seen as acting in an official capacity when you blog or network
- Ensure any Council facilities are used appropriate – if using a Council-provided site or social networking area, any posts that you make are extremely likely to be viewed as being made in your official capacity
- Avoid publishing any information that you could only have accessed in your position as a councillor
- Be careful if making ‘political’ points, and avoid being specific or personal about individuals including other Councillors.

Don’t:

- Comment in haste
- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or in face-to-face contact
- Use Council facilities for personal or political purposes

Never:

- Post comments that are in breach of the Council’s Equality and Diversity Policy or that incite violence or hatred.

IMPLEMENTATION

All Councillors and Staff have responsibility to ensure this policy is implemented and followed. Failure to do so may result in Disciplinary Action being taken against staff or Councillors being reported to the Northumberland County Council Monitoring Officer under the code of conduct.