



WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN COUNCIL

Social Media Policy

History of Policy Changes

Date	Version	Author	Origin of change e.g. change in legislation	Changed by

This policy applies to Weston-super-Mare Town Council.

Date policy adopted	April 2025
Approved by	Finance & General Purposes Committee (14.04.2025)
Review cycle	Annually
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1.Overview

Weston-super-Mare Council recognises and embraces the use of Social Media. It is an important tool for advertising services, engaging and growing as an organisation. The Council understands the positive impact and promotional benefits that can be achieved through appropriate use of Social Media Platforms.

Please ensure you understand your responsibilities under this policy, and direct any questions or concerns to the CEO/ Town Clerk in the first instance.

All members of Staff, Councillors and Volunteers have a responsibility to use Social Media in a professional, lawful, and ethical manner. Deliberate abuse of Town Council Social Media Platforms may result in disciplinary action (including possible termination), and civil and/or criminal liability.

Employee-owned Mobile Devices (or BYOD - bring your own device) are an increasing trend within social media management and the need for instant access to multiple platforms whilst not in the workplace. Smartphones are the most common example, but employees also take their own tablets and laptops into the workplace. Securing mobile devices is an essential part of guarding the organisation against a variety of threats, many of which herald from the Internet.

Please note that use of the Council network is intended to be as permissive and flexible as possible under current UK legislation and the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR). This policy is not intended to arbitrarily limit the ways in which you can use the system, but to ensure compliance with the legal responsibilities of the Council and staff, to safeguard the reputation and Cyber Security of the Council, and to ensure the safety of all users. Please respect these guidelines and other Council policies, many of which are in place for your protection.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Council Staff, Councillors and Volunteers, as well as all Social Media Platforms of services and activities managed by Weston-super-Mare Town Council. The purpose of this policy is to establish the criteria of Social Media usage and it would be beneficial to be read this alongside or with an awareness of our IT Acceptable Use Policy.

3. Social Media Policy

a. Responsibility of Staff, Councillors and Volunteers

You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media on behalf of the Council.

Councillors, Staff and Volunteers should not post comments that they wouldn't be prepared to make in writing or verbally in conversations. Posting on Social Media still holds the same level of accountability.

Whilst Staff, Councillors and Volunteers may have their own personal Social Media Profiles, it is important that any online communication coming from you as an individual and not in the role of Staff, Councillor or Volunteer, is made clear. Do not leave it open to interpretation. For example, do not use Town Council Logos, Town Council email addresses or any other Council identification.

The Councillors Code of Conduct also applies to online communication. Councillors need to keep in mind that even when commenting as an individual, it is likely to be read by the public as acting on behalf of and in an official capacity of Town Councillor.

Staff, Councillors and Volunteers should be mindful of the following:

- Never give out personal details such as home address and telephone numbers. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act.
- Be aware of safeguarding issues, as Social Media sites can be misused. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility – if you have any concerns about other site users, you have a responsibility to report these to the Council.
- Respect copyright, fair-use and data protection laws.
- Social Media sites are in the public domain and it is important to ensure that you are confident about the nature of the information you publish. Please remember what is posted, is permanent.
- Do not use insulting, offensive or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace. Show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory.
- Don't get drawn into negative discussions on comments. If a question is asked or miss information expressed, feel free to engage. However, you only need to be factual not defend.
- If an officer receives any threats, abuse or harassment from members of the public through their use of Social Media then they must report such incidents to their Line Manager who will then follow this up with the Communication Team.

b. Content Management

The Town Council use of Social Media is for Council content only, not for political use. Examples of acceptable content are

- Consultation documents
- News feed & emergency information
- Event listings
- Key dates
- Short debates and comments on hot topics and relevant news associated with the Council and local community

- Polls and information gathering
- Useful links
- Promotion of Town Council Services
- Good News Community Stories which link into the Town Council Strategy or Service Areas

c. Guidance for using WSMTC Social Media

- Be responsible and respectful; be, informative, transparent and friendly.
- Never make false or misleading statements.
- Staff, Councillors and Volunteers need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other policies.
- Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." Use plain English in sentence case format, not capital letters, nor write in red to emphasis points.
- Individual Staff, Councillors and Volunteers are responsible for what they post.
- Councillors are strongly advised to adhere to The Members' Code of Conduct. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any Social Media site.
- Do not participate in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
- Permission to publish photographs or videos on Social Media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
- Respect the privacy of other Staff, Volunteers' Councillors and Residents.

- Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations
- Some communication from Residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Town Council or Committee 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.

d. Pre Election Period

In the six week run up to an election councils have to very careful not to do or say anything that could seen in any way to support any political party or candidate. The period is known as purdah. The Council will continue to publish important service announcements using social media but will monitor and remove responses if they are overtly party political.

e. Links and Affiliations

Permitted links include:

- Town Council website. Partner sites eg. Blakehay Theatre, Weston Museum, Visit Weston.
- 'Useful' links for example local transport sites etc.
- Links to other Facebook pages, such as local and national organisations which have a relevance to the Town Council.
- Feel free to add to an event co-hosts in order to spread the word more easily.
- We are aiming to make 'Visit Weston' the 'go to' site to find events in the Weston super Mare and surrounding area.

f. Dealing with inappropriate comments

We have no ability to control what people are going to write and respond to. All we can do is ensure our response is factual and stays professional. It is important to remember a response is not always required.

Inappropriate Comments can take the form of:

- Constructive Criticism – The Community is allowed to share their views on Social Media. We can acknowledge the comment by simply liking it or responding with a brief message of thanks.
- Complaints: Apologise and explain the process. Perhaps it will be passed onto the relevant team or does it need a more formal approach? In which case, direct them to the website and the steps they need to take to log a formal complaint if they would like to do so.

When dealing with complaints, the conversation does not need to take place in the comment thread for everyone to see and continue to comment on. Encourage people to email or private message the Facebook Page. This will help to manage public discussion and debate. It's important to follow up with the member of the public and ensure they know what steps have been taken.

- Trolls or Malicious Comments: Do not engage. If comments are using unacceptable language then hide the comment from view to avoid escalating the situation further.

By digitally accepting this document, you agree that you have read and understood the acceptable use policy and your responsibility of enforcing it, and other IT related policies.

4. Policy Review

The working of this policy will be reviewed by the Council bi -annually. As well as examining the specific review data, the policy statement will be checked for continuing relevance against any changed statutory requirements.