



# DOWNTON PARISH COUNCIL

## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

This Policy provides guidance to Councillors on the use of Social Media, both for business and personal purposes and sets clear expectations of conduct.

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(Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer)

Signed: Cllr Jane Brentor (Chair)

Date: 10 June 2024

This Policy provides guidance to Councillors and members of staff on the use of Social Media, both for business and personal purposes and sets clear expectations of conduct.

As the use and popularity of Social Media grows, the line between what is public and private; personal and professional, can become blurred. It is important that Councillors and staff are held accountable and adopt the behaviours and responsibilities associated with the role (for Councillor's, as set out in The Local Government Association's Code of Conduct 2020). At the same time, Councillors and staff have the right to a private life and express personal opinion (provided it is not threatening, discriminatory, or unlawful in any way) without fear of reproach or intimidation.

It is important therefore that Councillors and staff are aware that their personal digital activity could have an adverse impact on their professional role or the Council's image and reputation.

Councillors and staff are responsible for their own compliance with this Policy and for ensuring it is consistently applied to protect the privacy, confidentiality, reputation, and interests of the Council.

### **Purpose**

Social Media is an increasingly popular means of communication that allows people greater freedom in how they express themselves both socially and for business purposes.

Engaging with people through Social Media can give us, as a Council, connection and dialogue with residents we may not reach through other channels.

This Policy will help Councillors and staff make the right decisions about Social Media, outlining the standards we expect when they engage in Social Media, in both a business and personal capacity.

### **Scope**

For the purposes of this Policy, Social Media is any type of online media that allows discussion and interaction, including but not limited to:-

- Social Networking (Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Microblogging (Twitter)
- Photo Sharing (Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest)
- Video Sharing (YouTube, Facebook Live)
- Private Messaging (Facebook, Whatsapp)

## Business Use of Social Media

Social Media for business purposes is in the context of:

- promote and publicise activities that will enhance the reputation of the Council, the services it provides, and the wider community of organisations with which it works in partnership
- respond to specific questions from the public, businesses, and partners
- clarify or correct any unclear or incorrect statements or views
- provide information, advice, and guidance (particularly in emergency situations)
- initiate and participate in dialogue with the public relating to Council services

Councillors and staff are responsible for anything that they say online. All information and responses they post are public statements, count as a Council record, and are evidence of the Council's work. They may be used as reference at any time in the future.

Councillors and staff must never:-

- use any information that they obtain in the course of their work for the Council for personal gain or pass it on to others who may use it in such a way
- disclose any sensitive information. Sensitive includes, but is not restricted to, matters that are being considered or debated, or are due to be considered or debated, by the Council or one of its committees (or are awaiting a decision as a result of such consideration/debate). It also includes subject matters which are known to be, or could reasonably be considered likely to be, controversial
- publish confidential information through Social Media that they may have learned or have access to as part of their job. This includes personal information about service users, their families or friends or others e.g. contractors, elected members, council employees as well as Council related information. This requirement continues after they have left the Council.

## Personal Use of Social Media

Social Media for personal use is in the context of:

- private Social Media accounts only available to be viewed by their friends and family
- owner and/or Moderator of Social Media accounts set-up for the benefit the local community for the sole purposes of posting news, ideas, events, items for sale, and seeking recommendations for services

A Councillor or member of staff must never publish Council business or political material on their personal Social Media.

Councillors and staff must consider carefully whether they accept 'friend requests' from service users, their families, friends, or others e.g. contractors and they are quite sure it will not put themselves in the position of having a real or apparent conflict of interest.

The Council will not tolerate any of the following activity on personal use of Social Media if it can be connected to a Councillor or member of staff:-

- abusive or threatening behaviour
- inappropriate comments or material that may be regarded as discriminatory
- false or misleading statements that could have a negative effect on the Council's reputation
- inciting or supporting somebody to commit a crime or other unlawful acts.

This includes Social Media content shared or liked as this could suggest approval of that content.

### What happens if it goes wrong?

If a Councillor or member of staff's activities are considered to breach this Social Media Policy, the Council may require that Councillor or member of staff to remove content that, in the reasonable opinion of the Council, breaches this Policy.

If a member of the public considers a Councillor or member of staff's activities have breached this Social Media Policy, they are encouraged to speak directly to that person to seek remedy. Alternatively, they may report their concern directly to the Clerk for investigation [clerk@downtonparishcouncil.org.uk](mailto:clerk@downtonparishcouncil.org.uk)

Code of Conduct Complaints on Councillors may be made to Wiltshire Council's Monitoring Officer. See link for details [About the council - Wiltshire Council](#)

Councillors and staff should be able to undertake their role without being intimidated, abused, bullied, or threatened by anyone, including the general public. The Council will not tolerate any form of cyber-bullying or online harassment towards its Councillors and staff, which constitute a criminal offence, including:-

- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- The Malicious Communications Act 1988
- The Communications Act 2003 (s127)
- The Defamation Act 2013