

Agenda Item FC46.3a

This Social Media Policy was first adopted by Council in 2020. Text in blue are changes recommended by the Finance and Strategy Committee.

Councillors are asked to approve this policy.

Looe Town Council

Social Media Policy

1. Purpose of the Policy

- 1.1 [The objective of this policy is to provide Councillors and staff with an overview of social media and the role it plays in various aspects of Looe Town Council. The policy includes guidelines on responsibilities when using such channels of communication.](#)
- 1.2 The policy relates to Councillors and staff whilst acting for/on behalf of the Council and/or in their official capacity.
- 1.3 This policy outlines the standards the Council requires Councillors and staff to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches to this policy.
- 1.4 This policy should be read in conjunction with [the Council's Media and Publicity Policy](#), Equal Opportunities Policy, Data Protection Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Employee and Councillors Code of Conduct.
- 1.5 This policy does not form part of any contract of employment, and it may be amended at any time.

2. The Scope of this Policy

- 2.1 The Council has a corporate presence on social media which it uses to communicate with people who live, work, or visit the town. The Council will always try to use the most effective channels for its communications. We may ask those who contact us for their preferred channel of communication when we deal with them. Over time the Town Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.
- 2.2 All Councillors and staff are always expected to comply with this policy to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.

- 2.3 Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Employee Disciplinary Procedure. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments by an employee.
- 2.4 Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.
- 2.5 Behaviour required by the Councillor’s Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Councillors will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Councillors must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a ‘private’ group it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

All posts including private posts are subject to Freedom of Information requests as are chat bar conversations and recordings of meetings.

3.1 Definition of Social Media

3.2 Social media is a collective term for websites and applications that facilitate the sharing of ideas and information among their users. This interaction may be through computers, mobile phones and tablet technology but may extend in the future.

3.3 Examples of Social media websites currently include:

- Social Networking (Facebook)
- Professional Networking (LinkedIn)
- Video Sharing (YouTube, TikTok)
- Blogs (WordPress)
- Micro-blogs (X-formally Twitter)
- External Messaging services (WhatsApp)

3.4 Social Media can be difficult to define but it is likely to have the following characteristics.

- Digital technology that accommodates the sharing of ideas and information via a variety of formats, including text, video, photographs, audio.
- Allows user generated content that creates engagement via likes, shares, comments and discussion.
- Allows messages to flow between many different types of devices, PC’s phones, tablets etc.
- Speeds and broadens the flow of information.
- Provides one-one, one-many and many-many communications.
- Allows communication to take place in real time or intermittently.

4. Principles of Use

4.1 Looe Town Council will encourage the use of social media for the purpose of:

- Providing and exchanging information about services supporting local democracy
- advertise elections and co options
- Gathering citizen insights and managing citizen relationships promoting cultural events or tourism for the area.
- To support community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
- To post minutes and dates of meetings
- Promoting local events and activities
- Surveying or asking opinion
- Sharing good news stories
- Job vacancies and opportunities for learning
- Communicating information from partners i.e. Police, East Looe Town Trust, Looe Harbour Commissioners, Library and Health etc.
- post and communicate information from other Parish related community organisations i.e. groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups
- Promoting best practice
- Post news stories
- Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct
- Announce new information appropriate to the Council
- Post other items as the Council see fit
- Promoting business forums (The Council should avoid giving the impression it is endorsing an individual business, all businesses should be treated equally.

5. Active Council Social Media Platforms

- [Looe Town Council Facebook Page](#)
- [Visit Looe](#)
- [Looe Library and Community Hub](#)
- [Looe Town Council Website](#)

5.1 The submission of any other social media websites may only be set-up with consent from the Town Clerk. Only authorised officers may use the accounts specified, this access is limited, and passwords should not be shared. The Town Council social media accounts are managed and monitored regularly by the Content and Communications Officer. It is exceptionally important that any Councillor or member of staff who becomes aware of inappropriate activity on these channels must report to the Content and Communications Officer or Town Clerk as soon as possible.

6. Guidance on use of Town Council social media

6.1 A consistent tone of voice helps to establish a positive image for Looe Town Council. Below are some guidelines on copywriting for Looe Town Council.

6.2 Do & Don'ts

Do:

- Be responsible and respectful, be direct, informative, brief and transparent
- Accentuate the positive
- Be mindful of information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council.
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or loud.
- Be mindful that information published is in the public domain indefinitely and there is a risk it may not be able to be retrieved or deleted.
- Fact check posts before publishing and reference original sources wherever possible.
- Use sentence case format not capital letters
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in videos or photographs before they are uploaded
- Attain parental guidance before submitting images of under 18s.
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors, staff and residents.
- Abide by laws and regulations, such as libel and copywrite including plagiarised material.
- Understand not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

Don't

- Make false and misleading statements
- Present in an unprofessional manner.
- Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.
- Use language that may be deemed as offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site
- Engage in online fights and hostile communications.
- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in a formal setting or face-face.
- Name an individual party without given consent.
- Report on private and internal discussions without permission.
- Use Council facilities for personal or political blogs

7. Council Responsibilities for Social Media

7.1 The Content and Communications Officer, Clerk and Deputy Clerk will be the appointed "Moderator". They will have overall responsibility for posting and monitoring of the content, ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The "Moderator" will have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such post will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and to the Clerk for Council records.

7.2 If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised as a question in the public participation element of a Council meeting or as an agenda item. The 'poster' of the issue shall be informed via a direct message and invited to

contact the Clerk or a senior manager direct. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

8. Guidance on Councillor and staff usage of third-party social media.

- 8.1 Councillors and staff have the right to engage in personal social media. In turn, an awareness of online presence is essential. Councillors and staff need to be clear whether they are acting in a private capacity or whether it could be conveyed they are acting on behalf of Looe Town Council.
- 8.2 If staff or Councillors blog or tweet personally, and not in their role as a Councillor, they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
- 8.3 There is always a risk that personal social media can have a negative impact on the individual and the Council. To avoid this impact the following guidelines have been set:
- Set appropriate privacy settings.
 - Avoid publishing any information that you could only have accessed in your position as Councillor.
 - Be conscious of making political points and avoid being specific or personal about individuals including other Councillors.
 - Remember that people classified as ‘friends’ have the ability to download and share your information with others.
 - Post only what you want the world to see and acknowledge the difficulty of ever entirely deleting a post.
- 8.4 As stated in the Council’s Media and Publicity Policy Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views on social media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made. While it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with a policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press or media.
- 8.5 If Councillors wish to create a ‘professional account’ for their role they should discuss this with the Town Clerk and the Content and Communications Officer before they set up an account. A ‘professional account’ must comply with this policy and the Council’s Code of Conduct.

9 Enforcement

The Council reserves the right to;

- Remove posts that violate this policy.
- Block people who do not adhere to this policy
- Close any applications necessary
- Act on misconduct via third party social media

10 Training

10.1 This social media policy will be explained to all staff and Councillors as part of their induction.

10.2 Social media training will be provided to Councillors every four years after an election and on request.

11 Review

11.1 This policy will be reviewed every two years.

11.2 The next date of review is July 2026.