

Social Media Policy

1 Introduction

The widespread availability and use of social networking applications brings opportunities to understand, engage and communicate with our audiences in new ways. It is important that the Council is able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly. However, it is also important to ensure that the Council balances this with its duties to its services users and partners, its legal responsibilities and its reputation.

The policy requirements in this document aim to provide this balance to support innovation whilst providing a framework of good practice. Social media must be used sensibly and responsibly, in line with Swanage Town Council's corporate policies.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure:

- that the Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks;
- that social media is used sensibly and responsibly by Council employees, in line with the Council's wider policy framework;
- that the reputation of the Council, Councillors, staff, partner organisations, and government agencies is not adversely affected;
- that our users are able to clearly distinguish where information provided via social networking applications is legitimately representative of the Council.

This policy is divided into two sections:

- Personal use of social media by Council employees
- Business use of social media by Authorised Officers of the Council

Best practice for Town Councillors in their use of Social Media is set out in a separate document, entitled Social Media Guidance for Councillors.

2 Scope

This policy encompasses all employees of the Council who use social media on a personal basis in their own time and use on behalf of the Council.

3 Risks

An employer may be liable for discriminatory acts carried out by their employees. This principle is set out in the Equality Act 2010 which provides that: 'an act carried out by a person "in the course of their employment" is treated as also having been done by their employer'.

Employees can also put themselves at risk if they misuse social media, either during the employment of the Council or whilst using social media in a personal capacity. The individual(s) concerned could be liable to disciplinary action, including dismissal.

The following risks have been identified with the use of social media. This is not an exhaustive list and is, therefore, for guidance only:

- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation or copyright.
- Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.
- Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection, this could be via shortened URLs which are commonly used in Tweets.
- Criminals hijacking valid user accounts by trying common passwords to gain access.
- Social engineering attacks (also known as ‘phishing’).
- Damage to user’s career and to the reputation of the Council by posting unguarded or inappropriate comments.
- Disclosure of confidential information.
- Bullying or harassment.

In light of these risks, the use of social media is regulated to ensure that such use does not damage the Council, its employees, Councillors, partners and the people it serves. As such, this policy aims to ensure that:

- a consistent and corporate approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media;
- Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media;
- users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation;
- the Council’s reputation is not damaged or affected adversely.

Personal use of social media by Swanage Town Council employees

This Policy applies to all Swanage Town Council employees (including temporary staff who work for the Town Council for any period of time) who use personal social media in their own time or who plan to use it in the future.

All employees are required to adhere to this policy and it should be noted that any breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action.

Swanage Town Council recognises that many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity outside of work and that they are responsible for their own activities and statements.

Although they are not acting on behalf of the Council, employees must be aware that their actions on their personal social media accounts could potentially damage the reputation of the Council, especially if they have specified their role and/or employer as part of their social media accounts.

This means that, when using social media in their personal life, an employee must:

- not engage in activities on the internet that might bring the Council, its employees or Councillors into disrepute;
- use caution if posting any comment regarding public policy or political party matters;
- consider whether a comment would make it difficult to fulfil their normal work duties (e.g. in respect of a political matter);
- be aware that matters become particularly sensitive during a pre-election period;

- not use social media to post critical comments about the Council, fellow employees or Town Councillors that could damage the reputation of the Town Council, any individual officer or a Councillor;
- not use information obtained in the course of Council employment, which is subject to a duty of trust and confidence, as the basis for any post;
- not use Swanage Town Council branding, graphics (including Swanage Town Council photographs) or literature on personal social media pages;
- be aware that any reports of inappropriate activity, linking them to the Council, will be investigated;
- be mindful of how comments and information may be perceived by others;
- adhere to the Council's Members' and Officers' Protocol when contacting a Councillor via Social Media and maintain professional standards of conduct at all times;
- not accept 'friend' requests from organisations which could be considered to compromise the independence of decisions made during the course of your work.

Business use of Council social media by Authorised Officers

The Council's use of social media will be managed by the Management Support Officer, in consultation with the Town Clerk.

The Visitor Services Manager will work with the Management Support Officer to ensure that their area's social media meets the requirements of this Policy. For the purposes of simplicity, in this document the Management Support Officer, the Town Clerk (or other officer deputising in his absence) and the Visitor Services Manager will be referred to as 'Authorised Officers'.

No other Council employees will be permitted to set up accounts, groups, pages or profiles on behalf of their service area, or the Council. Other Council employees can only engage in social media activity on behalf of Swanage Town Council with the express permission of an Authorised Officer, and they must also adhere to the contents of this policy.

When using Council social media, Authorised Officers should always be professional and remember that they are an ambassador for the Council

Any communications that Authorised Officers make through Council social media must not:

- Bring the organisation into disrepute, for example by:
 - criticising or arguing with customers, colleagues, Councillors, the Council or other organisations;
 - making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups;
 - posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content.
- Breach confidentiality, for example by:
 - giving away confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or customer contact) or an organisation;
 - discussing the organisation's internal workings or its future business plans that have not been communicated to the public.

- Breach copyright, for example by:
 - using someone else's images or written content without permission;
 - failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something.
- Be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, for example by making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, being married or in a civil partnership, religion or belief or age.
- Be used for political purposes or specific political campaigning purposes.
- Seek to promote Councillors' social media accounts during the pre-election period. The Council will continue to publish important service announcements using social media but reserves the right to remove responses if they are overtly party political.
- Compromise their own safety when placing information on the internet and must not publish information which could leave them vulnerable.

Employees should be aware that misconduct arising from the misuse of social media will be treated in the same way as any other form of misconduct and in line with the Council's disciplinary rules and procedure.

If an Authorised Officer receives any threats, abuse or harassment from members of the public through their use of social media as part of their work they must report such incidents immediately to their line manager. Employees should also refer to the Council's Staff Handbook.

Authorised Officers undertake training in the responsible use of social media.

This policy and guidelines are in addition to any professional standards that govern employees' area of work and all other Council policies which employees are expected to comply with.

Related policies

The Social Media Policy should be read in conjunction with:

- The policy & protocol on recording, photography & use of social media at meetings of the Council
- The Staff Handbook which includes
 - The Code of Conduct which provides a framework for all employees with regards to official conduct.
 - The Council's Disciplinary Procedure, which sets standards of conduct at work, provides procedures to ensure these standards are adhered to and provides a fair method of dealing with alleged failures to observe them.
 - The Council's Internet and E-mail policy.
 - The Data Protection Policy, which outlines the Council's adherence to the eight principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 with regards to the collection, storage and use of personal data.

Authorised Officers should also read the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. This code applies in relation to all decisions by local authorities relating to a range of publicity and includes 'the maintenance of websites – including the hosting of material which is created by third parties'.