



Penrith Town Council

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SOCIAL MEDIA & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Penrith Town Council is committed to making the best use of all available technology and innovation to improve the way we do business. This includes using all reasonable and cost-effective means to improve the way we communicate, reach out and interact with the different communities we serve. The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Penrith Town Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.
- 1.2** The Council has a website, Facebook pages, Twitter account and uses email to communicate. It will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. The 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 Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.
- 1.3** The Council Facebook pages and Twitter account intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within Penrith and promote the community positively.
- 1.4** 'Social media' is the term commonly given to web-based tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests online. As the name implies, social media involves the building of online communities or networks to encourage participation and engagement.
- 1.5** These platforms open many new and exciting opportunities. However, the practical application of such technology by the Council is continually developing and there are many potential issues to consider – both as individual employees and as a Council.
- 1.6** To avoid major mistakes which could result in reputational, legal and ethical issues, and misuse/abuse of a well-functioning social media relationship, it is important that we manage any potential risks through a common-sense approach and framework as well as proactively monitoring the development of such applications.

2. AIM

2.1 These guidelines aims to provide information concerning the use of, or the development of, any social media application, to help get the best out of the tools available whilst maintaining a safe professional environment and protecting the Council.

2.2 Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which the Council does not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information.
- If it is official Council business, it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk and senior officers of the Council;
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

2.3 To ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, these guidelines must be followed:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page or Twitter site for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

3. DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- 3.1** For the purposes of these guidelines, social media is a type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. This includes e-mail, online social forums, blogs, video- and image-sharing websites and similar facilities.
- 3.2** Employees and members should be aware that there are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. Employees and members should follow these guidelines in relation to any social media that they use.

4. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- 4.1** The sites are not monitored 24/7 and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, the Council will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to the Council.
- 4.2** Sending a message/post via Facebook or Twitter will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the council's Clerk, officers and/or members of the Council by emailing.
- 4.3** We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:
- Obscene or racist content
 - Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
 - Potentially libelous statements.
 - Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
 - Private, personal information published without consent
 - Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
 - Commercial promotions or spam
 - Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law

- 4.4** The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page.
- 4.5** The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.
- 4.6** Where the Council encourages employees and members to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites as part of their work, it is recognised that it is an important part of how the Council communicates with its audience and allows communication and networking between staff, members and partners.
- 4.7** Employees and members may contribute to the Council's social media activities, for example by writing for blogs, managing a social media account and running an official social communications account for the Council in accordance with the standards defined in the Communication Procedure.
- 4.8** The Council understands that employees and members may wish to use their own computers or devices, such as laptops, tablets and mobile telephones, to access social media websites. Such use should nonetheless be in accordance with these guidelines.
- 4.9** Employees and members must be aware that, while contributing to the Council's social media activities, they are representing the Council and must adhere to the following safeguards.
- 4.10** Employees and members should use the same safeguards as they would with any other form of communication about the Council in the public sphere. These safeguards include:
- making sure that the communication has a purpose and a benefit for the Council;
 - obtaining permission from the Chairman and Council before embarking on a public campaign using social media; and
 - getting a colleague to check the content before it is published.

4.11 Any communications that employees make in a professional capacity through social media must not:

- breach confidentiality, for example by:
 - revealing confidential intellectual property or information owned by the Council or;
 - giving away confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or partner contact) or organisation (such as a partner institution); or
 - discussing the Council's internal workings (such as agreements that it is reaching with partner institutions/customers or its future business plans that have not been communicated to the public) or;
- do anything that could 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, religion or belief or age or;
 - using social media to bully another individual (such as an employee of the Council); or
 - posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content or;
- bring The Council into disrepute, for example by:
 - criticising or arguing with members, colleagues, partners or competitors or;
 - making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups; or
 - posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content or;
- breach copyright, for example by:
 - using someone else's images or written content without permission; or
 - failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something.

5. EXCESSIVE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AT WORK

5.1 Employees can make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites from Penrith Town Council's computers or devices, if this does not interfere with their duties.

5.2 Employees should not spend an excessive amount of time while at work using social media websites and should ensure that use of social media does not interfere with their other duties. Council work will take priority over personal use of social media sites.

6. MONITORING USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING WORK TIME

- 6.1** The Council reserves the right to monitor employees' internet usage in accordance with the IT Policy. The Council considers that valid reasons for checking an employee's internet usage include suspicions that the employee has:
- been spending an excessive amount of time using social media websites for non-work-related activity; or
 - acted in a way that is in breach of the rules set out in these guidelines.
- 6.2** The Council reserves the right to monitor and, within specific guidelines as defined within the Information Policy and associated policies to retain information that it has gathered on employees' use of the internet.
- 6.3** Access to social media websites may be withdrawn in any case of misuse.

7. SOCIAL MEDIA IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE

- 7.1** The Council recognises that many employees and members make use of social media in a personal capacity. While they are not acting on behalf of the Council, employees and members must be aware that they can damage the Council if they are recognised as being one of our employees or members.
- 7.2** Employees and members can say that they work for/with the Council, which recognises that it is natural for its staff sometimes to want to discuss their work on social media. The employee's/member's online profile (for example, the name of a blog or a Twitter name) may contain the Council's name but should be focused to the area in which the employee/member works.
- 7.3** If employees/members discuss their work/role on social media (for example, giving opinions on their specialism or the sector in which The Council operates), they should include on their profile a statement along the following lines: "The views I express here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council."

7.4 Any communications that employees/Councillors make in a personal capacity through social media must not:

- breach confidentiality, for example by:
 - revealing confidential intellectual property or information owned by the Council;
 - giving away confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or partner contact) or organisation (such as a partner institution); or
 - discussing the Council's internal workings (such as agreements that it is reaching with partner institutions/customers or its future business plans that have not been communicated to the public) or;
- do anything that could 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, religion or belief or age or;
 - using social media to bully another individual (such as an employee of the Council) or;
 - posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content or;
- bring the Council into disrepute, for example by:
 - criticising or arguing with students, customers, colleagues partners or competitors or;
 - making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups or;
 - posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content or;
- breach copyright, for example by:
 - using someone else's images or written content without permission; or
 - failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something.

8. TOWN COUNCIL EMAIL

- 8.1** The Council email account, office@ is monitored only during office hours.
- 8.2** The officer email accounts are monitored when the officers are available. The Council aims to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message is used when appropriate.
- 8.3** The officers are responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action.
- 8.4** All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk or senior officers and will always be copied to the Clerk and services & Contracts Manager.
- 8.5** Individual Councillors have Town Council emails which they monitor when they are available. Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, and if appropriate, copy to the Clerk.
- 8.6** It is essential to note that members are required by the Code of Conduct to maintain confidentiality.
- 8.7** Members should be aware that any emails copied to the Clerk or any email from the Councillors official Council email or from a private email account used for Council business will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.
- 8.8** These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.
- 8.9** Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

9. SMS (TEXTING)

9.1 Councillors and officers may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. This policy also applies to such messages

10. VIDEO CONFERENCING E.G. SKYPE

10.1 If this medium is used to communicate please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

11. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL

11.1 Councillors and Officers are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council.

11.2 It is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely.

11.3 Councillors and officers are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone.

11.4 Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through prescribed procedures and may result in a criminal investigation.

11.5 Councillors and officers should only cc essential recipients on emails and therefore avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option.

11.6 Councillors and officers should only send emails to those individuals who need to know and ensure that email conversation trails have been removed.

12 TOWN COUNCIL WEBSITE

- 12.1** Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us via or about the website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.
- 12.2** The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have and maintain a presence via a link or a page on its website for presenting information about the group's activities. The local group would be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Council's 'rules and expectation' for the web site.
- 12.3** The Council reserves the right to remove any or all a local group's information from the web site if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website. Where content on the website is maintained by a local group it should be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Council.

13. DISCIPLINARY ACTION

- 13.1** All employees and Councillors are required to adhere to these guidelines. Employees and members should be aware that use of social media in a way that may be deemed as deliberate or inadvertent misuse which could be a breach of these guidelines, may lead to disciplinary action.
- 13.2** Serious breaches of these guidelines, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the Council, may constitute gross misconduct and may lead to action under the disciplinary procedure up to and including dismissal.

Originally Approved: November 2016
Reviewed and amended for GDPR: May 2018

Authorisation This policy has been authorised by:



Signature

Date 21 MAY 2018

Name: Cllr. Jackson

Position: **CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL**

DATA CONTACTS

DATA PROTECTION OFFICER:

Local Council Public Advisory Service
<http://www.lcpas.co.uk/contact-us.php>

Helpline: 01284 766885
Mobile: 07443009607

The Vision Centre, 5 Eastern Way,
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 7AB

DATA INFORMATION OFFICERS:

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