

# Wimborne Minster Town Council Social Media Policy

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of this Policy is to set out a code of practice to provide guidance to the councillors and employees of Wimborne Minster Town Council (the Council) who engage with the Council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

The Council will provide training in connection with this policy.

This Policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

## 2. Matters to be considered in the use of social media:

Publishing untrue statements about a person, which is damaging to their reputation, is libel and can result in a court action and a fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on a social media site. A successful libel claim could result in an award of damages.

- Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright could result in an award of damages.
- Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of data protection legislation and an offence.
- Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.
- Computer, mobile or other devices used to communicate should be secured using a strong password – this includes any online accounts such as social media account passwords (mixture of letters, number and punctuation and should not contain names or words associated with the user).
- Council email account users' use of the Council's systems may be monitored on the basis set out in relevant policy and where breaches of policy or legislation are found to have taken place, action may be taken under the Council's Disciplinary Policy, Code of Conduct or any such legal mechanism as is deemed appropriate.

## 3. Council's use of social media accounts

The Council currently maintains one social media account – Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/wimbornetc>). The Council may join new networks moving forward to diversify engagement with other groups within the community (e.g. YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat).

Council/s use of social media may be used to:

- distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- advertise and promote events and activities
- promote good news stories with a linked website or press release
- advertise councillor / employee vacancies
- share information from partner agencies such as principal authorities, police, library, health etc.
- announce new information

- share formal consultations or gather informal views
- post or share information from other Council related community groups and partners such as charities and voluntary groups
- refer resident queries to the Town Clerk and councillors
- share any other information that is relevant to the community.

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

The Community Events and Liaison Officer (the Officer) manages Council's social media accounts under the direction of the Town Clerk. The Officer works Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 1pm (excluding public holidays) and any responses to social media replies, comments and direct messages depend on the individual service. Even if we do not reply, we are listening and will act on or pass on your comments as appropriate. You are also advised to contact us directly Monday to Friday 9.30am to 1pm by visiting the Council offices at the Town Hall, 37 West Borough, Wimborne Minster BH21 1LT or calling on 01202 881655 or emailing [office@winborne.gov.uk](mailto:office@winborne.gov.uk).

#### 4. Standards for conduct on social media

We request that those using our social media channels to contact us are civil, tasteful and relevant.

We reserve the right to remove, without notice, any disruptive, offensive, abusive or defamatory post or comment. We also reserve the right to block a user if their interactions are offensive.

#### 5. Complaints

Social media is not the appropriate avenue for raising an official complaint with the Council. Please see our complaints information or contact us directly.

#### 6. Approach to connections on social media

Any retweets, follows, or likes are not an endorsement of a service, individual or organisation. We do not take responsibility for any content on pages or profiles we have shared. There is no fixed approach on who we will have in our network.

#### 7. Moderation

The Officer monitors Council's social media accounts under the direction of the Town Clerk and is responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with this Policy.

The Officer will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from official Council social media pages which are deemed to be of a threatening, defamatory or libellous nature.

Where appropriate, the Officer will have the authority to report any such posting to any other appropriate agency including Dorset Police and Dorset Council's Safeguarding Unit.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on Council's official social media page that denigrates our councillors, employees or residents should report them to the Town Clerk.

#### 8. Council employees and councillors

Employees should not:

- present personal opinions as that of the Council

- post any paper/information which the Council has deemed confidential
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council or bring the Council into disrepute
- undermine the Council's democratic processes
- post politically controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- post any information that may be deemed libellous or that constitutes bullying or harassment
- post offensive language relating to any protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010, including race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in disciplinary action being taken.

Councillors are reminded that anything you post online will likely be visible forever. You should generally not post any comment or opinion online, that you would not say to someone face-to-face.

Councillors may publicly post from a personal account, an individual "councillor page", or a group/page representing a group of councillors. This Policy applies to any post/comment made publicly where you are recognisable as a member of the Council.

Councillors are reminded that Council's Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Councillors should not:

- present personal opinions as that of the Council, unless authorised to
- post any paper/information which the Council has deemed confidential
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council or bring the Council into disrepute
- undermine the Council's democratic processes
- post any information that may be deemed libellous or that constitutes bullying or harassment
- post offensive language relating to any protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010, including race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

This Policy does not remove a councillor's right to personally disagree with a Council / committee decision, it is acceptable to constructively say why you disagreed, whilst accepting that the Council's / committee's majority decision stands.

When using social media (including email) councillors should be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and councillor capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

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