



## **MALVERN TOWN COUNCIL**

# **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to cover the practicalities of using social media by employees of Malvern Town Council (hereafter known as 'the Council'). It covers the standards expected in relation to both work-related and personal use of social media.
- 1.2. Councillors' use of social media is governed by the Code of Conduct.

### 2. What is social media?

- 2.1. Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks.
- 2.2. Social media includes a range of networks such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Tumblr, Reddit, Skype, Pinterest, Flickr, Vimeo and more.

### 3. What are the risks?

- 3.1. The following risks are identified with the use of social media:
  - i. Damage to the Council's reputation
  - ii. Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation
  - iii. Disclosure of confidential information/breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal data
  - iv. Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection/social engineering attacks (sometimes known as 'phishing')
  - v. Potential effect on ICT network performance
  - vi. Bullying or witch-hunting
  - vii. Lost productivity as a result of personal use of social media during work time

### 4. Procedure points

- 4.1. Malvern Town Council employees are encouraged, where relevant, to use social media via established and authorised organisation accounts, as a means to inform the public and

foster openness and engagement with local communities, as well as to promote Malvern Town Council activities.

- 4.2. Employees are encouraged to use social media for work purposes in an open and honest way to engage with the public. Employees are reminded that action may be taken as a result of distasteful or offensive postings, slanderous or libellous posts or comments that are political in nature, or may damage the reputation of the Council or other employees.
- 4.3. Employees are permitted to use Council approved social media channels as part of their normal work duties with agreement from the employee's line manager.
- 4.4. During normal working hours, employees are permitted to access and use social media via Council ICT equipment only in their own time (eg in break periods), providing it does not interfere with their work and that it is not left running 'in the background', whilst at work.
- 4.5. Outside of normal working hours, the use of Council ICT equipment for personal use must only take place with prior approval from the line manager.
- 4.6. The Council recognises that many employees will also use personal devices (eg personal smartphones and tablets) for personal use of social media during break times in working hours.
- 4.7. The following applies to all employees regardless of whether Council or personal equipment is used or when social media is accessed or postings are made:
  - i. Any views stated are personal views.
  - ii. Ultimately, employees must comply with their responsibilities under the Council's Code of Conduct and may be required to remove social media postings that are deemed to be in breach of this policy.
  - iii. Discussing the Council, employee's work, clients, partner organisations or the people you work with on social networks should not be considered private, even in a forum with restricted access (such as on someone's Facebook wall). It is not the same as having an offline discussion among friends or a one-to-one email conversation. Social networks are designed to make sharing as easy as possible, so employees should be aware that anything they post or say, may be circulated to a wider audience and could be brought to the attention of Council colleagues, managers, councillors and customers.
  - iv. Employees are personally responsible for anything they post online.

- v. Employees should not do or say anything that may harm the reputation of the Council or undermine their role as a representative of the Council.
- vi. Employees should show proper consideration for the privacy of the people they work with.
- vii. Copyright rules mean that photos, films and other media can only be used with the permission of the person who created them. This applies even if the person is taking the photos on behalf of the Council, as a volunteer. However, if the person is a formal employee of the Council, and the photographs are taken as part of their job, the copyright belongs to the Council unless there is an agreement to the contrary.
- viii. Images featuring identifiable persons can only be used in social media posts when consent has been obtained beforehand and there is documented evidence of this.

4.8. Any communications that employees make through social media must not:

- i. Bring the organisation into disrepute, for example by criticising, disagreeing or arguing with customers, colleagues or managers; making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations/groups or posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content.
- ii. Breach confidentiality, for example by: referring to confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or service user) or the Council.
- iii. Do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual or group of individuals, and in contravention of the Council's procedures.
- iv. Contravene the Council's policies, for example: The Employee Code of Conduct, the Harassment and Bullying policy, or the Equality and Diversity policy.

4.9. The following specific guidance points are for employees approved to use social media as part of their job role. Employees should:

- i. Ensure Council social media accounts remain secure (eg by following normal data security and not sharing passwords).
- ii. Only log on and administer Malvern Town Council social media accounts using Council-provided equipment.

- iii. Be honest, courteous and professional at all times.
- iv. Avoid arguments, be positive and add something significant to the conversation.
- v. Only post facts that they are sure of and not do or say anything illegal.
- vi. Remain politically neutral.
- vii. Understand the situation and audience before they post.
- viii. Advise colleagues before posting something if it may affect them.
- ix. Get permission before they republish copyrighted material.
- x. Not share confidential or sensitive information, even in private forums.
- xi. Be aware that how they deal with a complaint is as important as the complaint itself.
- xii. Be aware that nothing they say can be 100% deleted, and therefore should always be sure before they post.
- xiii. Be mindful that journalists monitor social media and may quote what is posted.

4.10. The following are general guidance points for all employees regarding their use social media.

- i. Employees should be mindful that any online activities/comments made in a public domain must be compatible with their position within the Council and safeguard themselves in a professional capacity.
- ii. Employees should protect their own privacy and ensure that their social network accounts do not compromise their professional position, by using the correct privacy settings.
- iii. Employees should be mindful that comments made outside work, within the arena of social media, do not remain private and so can have work-related implications. Therefore, comments made through social media, which employees may intend to be “private” may still be in contravention of the Employee Code of Conduct, the Anti-harassment and Bullying Policy and/or the Disciplinary Policy. Once something is online, it can be copied and redistributed making it easy to lose control of the post. Employees should presume everything posted online will be permanent and can be shared.

- iv. Employees should not discuss work-related issues online, including conversations about service users, complaints, management or disparaging remarks about colleagues or the Council. Even when anonymised, these are likely to be inappropriate. In addition, doing this in the presence of others may be deemed as bullying and/or harassment.
- v. Employees should not, under any circumstances, accept friend requests from a person if they believe it may conflict with their employment.
- vi. Employees should be aware that other users may access their profile and if they find the information and/or images it contains offensive, make a complaint about the employee to the Council as their employer.
- vii. Employees should ensure that any comments and/or images cannot be deemed defamatory, libelous or in breach of copyright legislation.
- viii. If setting up a personal profile online, employees should consider whether it is appropriate, and prudent to include a photograph, or provide occupation, employer or work location details.
- ix. Employees should be aware that they can take action if they find themselves the target of complaints or abuse on social networking sites. Most sites will include mechanisms to report abusive activity and provide support for users who are subject to abuse by others.
- x. Employees should, if they do find inappropriate references and/or images of them posted by a 'friend' online, contact them and the site to have the material removed.
- xi. Employees should take steps to raise their concerns if they are very concerned about someone else's behaviour online. If these are work related, they should inform their manager.
- xii. Employees should also act in accordance with the Council's Employee Code of Conduct, IT Users Policy, and Anti-harassment and Bullying Policy.
- xiii. Employees should not access social media sites or leave these running in the background during working time for personal use, on any devices within their control.

## **5. Review and action**

- 5.1. The Council recognises that it is important to review regularly this policy to ensure that it reflects up to date equality legislation and best practice.
- 5.2. A review of the Social Media Policy will be carried out as least once every council term as a minimum and any necessary actions taken.