

# VENTNOR TOWN COUNCIL



**Ventnor Town Council, Salisbury Gardens, Ventnor**

Health and safety

## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR COUNCILLORS**

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## **Social Media Policy for Councillors – Revised 2022**

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### **1 INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1**

Social media is the term for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge, and interests.

#### **1.2**

For the purposes of this policy, the term “social media” covers websites and applications including but not restricted to Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, blogs, and any similar sites which develop after the creation of this policy. It also includes comments on online newspaper articles.

## 2 BENEFITS AND RISKS

**2.1** The following potential benefits have been identified with the use of social media:

- 2.1.1 Ability to connect with harder-to-reach groups;
- 2.1.2 Real-time updates on emerging situations (i.e. as they happen);
- 2.1.3 Heightened level of interactivity;
- 2.1.4 Low cost in comparison with traditional forms of media;
- 2.1.5 Enhanced transparency;
- 2.1.6 Building a sense of belonging in a neighbourhood;
- 2.1.7 Increased resident satisfaction levels;
- 2.1.8 Help to reduce social problems like vandalism or racism.

**2.2** The following risks have been identified with the use of social media:

- 2.2.1 Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection from infected sites;
- 2.2.2 Disclosure of confidential information;
- 2.2.3 Damage to the reputation of the Council;
- 2.2.4 Social engineering attacks or “phishing”. This is the act of manipulating people into disclosing confidential material or carrying out certain actions. Social engineering is often conducted by individuals fraudulently claiming to be a business or client;
- 2.2.5 Bullying or witch-hunting;
- 2.2.6 Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation;
- 2.2.7 Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals

## 3 WHO THIS POLICY COVERS

- 3.1 This policy covers all Councillors. It should be considered in conjunction with the Council’s Code of Conduct for Councillors.
- 3.2 Councillors are encouraged to use all forms of media to build relationships with the community, to promote council activities or to assist with understanding the views of the community in order that they may represent the community’s views at council meetings. Councillors must comply with the Council’s Code of Conduct at all times. No individual Councillor may represent the Council. Members must take care to avoid giving readers the impression that they are representing Ventnor Town Council

when publishing any content. Councillors may use their individual and, if applicable, any party social media accounts or properties, provided that it is clear that opinions expressed in these channels do not represent the views of the council. Disclaimers should be used if the content is a personal opinion.

#### 4 USERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1 Councillors may use social media during meetings, with handheld devices and laptops permitted (indeed encouraged) for use during meetings to allow environmentally friendly and effective communication. The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings - not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part. Ensure the volume on all electronic devices is turned to 'mute'. Councillors' tweets or blog posts during council meetings should refer to the discussions which are taking place at the meeting - tweeting/blogging about other subjects will show the public and other attendees that you are not engaging properly in the meeting. Councillors have a responsibility to take council business seriously and it is not appropriate for members to use social media to tease or insult other members. Residents expect debate and to be informed about council business, but not to witness petty arguments.
- 4.2 Councillors using social media should make use of stringent privacy settings if they do not wish them to be accessed by the press and public.
- 4.3 In any biography where the Councillor is identified as a Councillor, the account should state that the views are those of the Councillor in question and may not represent the views of the Council. Use of the Council's logo on a personal account or website should only occur with the written permission of the Town Clerk.
- 4.4 Councillors are personally responsible for the content which they publish on any form of social media. Publishing – or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) – an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may amount to libel.
- 4.5 Councillors must treat others with respect, avoid personal attacks and not make disrespectful, rude, or offensive comments.
- 4.6 Councillors must comply with equality laws contained within the Equality Act 2010 and associated legislation. They must not publish anything that might be considered sexist, racist, ageist, discriminatory against sexual orientation, or religious beliefs.

## 5 SAFETY

- 5.1 Councillors must be aware of their own safety when placing information on the Internet and should not publish information which could give details which could leave them vulnerable.
- 5.2 Any Councillor receiving threats, abuse, or harassment via their use of social media should report it to the Town Clerk or the Police.
- 5.3 They should use a secure password (generally more than eight characters long and using a mixture of letters and numbers) and never share their password with anyone.

## 6 INFORMATION PROTECTION

- 6.1 Councillors should not cite or reference customers, partners, or suppliers without their prior written consent.
- 6.2 They must handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's data protection policies.
- 6.3 Social media sites are in the public domain, and it is important that Councillors ensure that they are confident of the nature of the information they publish. Comments posted online are permanently available and can be used by media such as newspapers.
- 6.4 Councillors must not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal or publish exempt committee reports or private papers.
- 6.5 Copyright laws still apply online. Councillors must not use images to which they do not hold the copyright. Information shared should be attributed to the source (i.e. via web link). Councillors must respect fair-use and financial disclosure laws.

## 7 BEST PRACTICE

- 7.1 Councillors are reminded that they should uphold the Seven Principles of Public Life. **The Nolan Principles.**
- 7.2 All Councillors are able to set up their own social media accounts, for which they will be responsible. It is recommended that in the case of Facebook and similar sites, Councillors wishing to keep their personal life and official capacities separate should create a Facebook “Page” rather than using their personal profiles.
- 7.3 The Council logo should not be used on sites or applications which are unrelated to or not representative of the Council’s official position. If in doubt, contact the Town Clerk.
- 7.4 Councillors who fail to identify themselves as a Councillor in breach of this obligation will be deemed to be acting in their official capacity for the purposes of the Code of Conduct and such failure will itself be a breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

## 8 BREACHES OF THIS POLICY

- 8.1 Failure to comply with any mandatory elements within this policy may result in a formal complaint being made to the Monitoring Officer within the Isle of Wight Council to be dealt with under the Councillor Code of Conduct process.
- 8.2 Other violations of this policy, such as breaching data protection legislation, could lead to criminal or civil action being taken against the individual(s) involved.

### Monitoring and review of this policy

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Town Clerk and the Assistant Town Clerk in consultation with the Business Development Officer to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects good practice.