

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

APPROVED AT POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE 21 MARCH 2023

1. Background

- 1.1 It is important that a policy is in place to regulate the Council's social media presence. The policy will be enforceable as a professional standard for staff, through contracts with service delivery agents and through the Councillor Code of Conduct.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 This policy applies to all employees, contractors, agents and members of Hereford City Council, the parish council for the civil parish of the City of Hereford. It also applies to members of the Youth Council. All these groups are referred to collectively as "users" in this policy. The policy refers to all communication facilities and systems used by the Council.
- 2.2 The Council's current internet and communications facilities include, telephone, email, internet, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. However, this policy will apply to all future uses of social media not listed above.
- 2.3 This policy exists to address the use by users of all social media and is intended to minimise the risks presented to the Council of social media usage.
- 2.4 In addition to this policy users must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, General Data Protection Regulations 2016, all other relevant legislation and all other relevant Council policies.

3. General Principles

- 3.1 All users must use social media responsibly and professionally and at all times in accordance with their duties.
- 3.2 Users must understand and be mindful of what constitutes confidential, restricted or other proprietary information and ensure that such information is never disseminated over social media without express authority.
- 3.3 Users must understand and be mindful of what constitutes personal data and ensure that personal data relating to people who have communicated with the Council, people on mailing lists for specific purposes such as invitees to civic events, recipients of grants and community development advice and support, people who have communicated with the Council to request services, employees, members, contractors and agents of the Council is never disseminated over social media unless it is used in accordance with the Council's Privacy Policy and where necessary with the permission of the data subject or other express and valid authority.

- 3.4 Users must ensure that their use of social media does not breach any other policy of the Council, including, but not limited to, the Equality and Diversity Policy, the Privacy Policy, the Behaviour, Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, the Dignity at Work Policy, the Councillor Code of Conduct and any other relevant policies that may be introduced.
- 3.5 Users must ensure that their use of social media does not breach any laws, regulations or other requirements set out by statutory or regulatory bodies.
- 3.6 Users must ensure that their use of social media does not infringe copyright or other intellectual property rights.
- 3.7 Users must be aware that any communication through social media may be used in court as admissible evidence to the advantage or detriment of the Council and therefore must ensure that they use the media accordingly.
- 3.8 The viewing, transmitting, downloading, uploading or accessing in any way whether through social media or otherwise of any of the following material using the Council's internet and communications facilities will amount to gross misconduct for an employee or grounds for complaint under the Councillor Code of Conduct for a member:
- Material which is pornographic, sexist, racist, homophobic, or any other way discriminatory or otherwise obscene or offensive.
 - Illegal or criminal material, including material which constitutes a hate crime or incitement to hate crime, or which breaches intellectual or copyright protection.
 - Any material which has the effect of causing harassment or distress to the recipient, or which might reasonably have been expected to cause such harassment or distress.
 - Anything which the user knows, or reasonably ought to have known, is confidential, or restricted or otherwise proprietary information which they are not authorised to deal with.
 - Any website or other medium or source to which the Council has blocked access.

4. Personal Social Media Use

- 4.1 Users may not use the Council's social media for personal purposes. If someone sends an email which is personal to a work address the employee should ask them not to do so again and delete the item.
- 4.2 The storage of personal data on the Council's social media or IT facilities is also prohibited. Staff should delete any personal data held before this policy came into force.

5. Business Social Media Use

- 5.1 Certain users may be required from time to time to use social media on behalf of the Council. This applies to all staff and the Mayor and Deputy Mayor among elected members.
- 5.2 Use of social media for Council business must comply with the terms of this policy at all times.
- 5.3 Business users of social media may be required to interact with other users, for example to respond to queries, posts etc. Officers responding to posts must have the authorisation of the Town Clerk to do so, in an urgent case where a response is required the Administration and Events Manager may give authorisation in the Town Clerk's absence. The Mayor may respond

on behalf of the Council to civic issues such as expressions of condolence or congratulation in appropriate cases but should seek to clear their proposed response with the Town Clerk. The Deputy Mayor should only respond in the absence of the Mayor where a response is required before the Mayor is available.

- 5.4 The Town Clerk may authorise a standard response to be given to frequently raised questions or in the case of a major incident or issue where numerous similar queries are likely to arise.
- 5.5 In any event, no user should respond unless they are sure they fully understand the issues and have factual and accurate information to impart. Personal opinions should not be issued in such a way as to appear to be the policy of the Council.
- 5.6 Council officers must ensure that their use of social media does not indicate any political bias on any issue. Bias is defined as any statement that indicates support for, or opposition to, any political proposition or policy, or subject of debate, unless the Council has made a resolution in which case officers may communicate that resolution and the reasons for it.
- 5.7 Elected members must ensure that their use of Council social media is non-partisan between political parties or groups. Expressions of policy must be in accordance with the resolutions of the City Council and not those of an individual member or political grouping (this does not fetter the right of individual members to express their own opinions on personal social media platforms provided they are clearly identified as such and do not purport to be Council policy.)
- 5.8 Users who are not clear about the confidentiality, restricted or proprietary nature, or otherwise of the suitability of an item of information or any aspect of the operation of this policy must seek advice before disseminating any information.

6. Acceptable Use of Social Media

- 6.1 If a user makes any posting, contribution or creation or publishes any other content which identifies or could identify the user as an employee, contractor, agent or member of the Council or in which they discuss their work or any aspect of the Council's work they must ensure that at all times their conduct, language and demeanor is appropriate with their contract of employment, the Councillor Code of Conduct or the terms of their working agreement with the Council.
- 6.2 Users who can be identified as employees, contractors, agents or members of the Council must make it clear to all readers of their material that their posting on social media is as an individual and not as a representative or spokesperson for the Council.
- 6.3 The Council's social media addresses may not be used to sign up to any other social media platforms except for the business use for the Council and with the permission of the Town Clerk. The use of the Council's addresses to sign up to platforms or addresses for personal use is expressly prohibited.
- 6.4 Users should be respectful at all times to others in their use of social media and be mindful that their connection to the Council may well be known even if they have not declared it in the particular posting or contribution being read at any particular time. The conduct and standards of users may reflect on the Council, whether the use is in working hours, or Council business or otherwise.

7. Unacceptable and Prohibited Use of Social Media

- 7.1 Users must refrain from doing anything on social media or any other websites that defames, disparages or otherwise brings into disrepute, the Council including any members of staff, contractors, agents or elected members of the Council. This includes, but is not limited to, making false or misleading statements, unsubstantiated allegations or to raise matters which ought to be addressed through a formal procedure such as grievance, disciplinary or whistle blowing policies, or the procedure for complaining to the Monitoring Officer regarding the conduct of a member etc.
- 7.2 Users must ensure that their use of social media does not damage the Council's interests or its reputation whether directly or indirectly in any way.
- 7.3 Users must not falsely or misleadingly represent themselves as acting on behalf of the Council.
- 7.4 Users must not share on social media (unless expressly authorised by a competent authority to do so) the following:
- Confidential information including any reports or segments of reports to committees or Council marked as confidential within the terms of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.
 - Commercially sensitive information or other proprietary business information about the Council or its service partners or contractors.
 - Personal data held by the Council for its business purposes.
 - Users may not use intellectual property belonging to the Council on social media unless authorised to do so. This includes the use of the Council's logo, title, the title of the Youth Council or its logo or the City crest and coat of arms.
 - Users must not add contacts made during their business use of Council social media to their personal social media accounts without the permission of the data subject and must not conduct Council business on private social media platforms for systems in order to evade this policy.

8. Monitoring

- 8.1 To the extent permitted or required by law, the Council may monitor users' use of the Council's internet and social communications facilities including social media use as well as other forms of communication for its legitimate purposes which include but are not limited to:
- Ensuring that the Council policies and standards are being followed.
 - Compliance with any legal obligation and co-operation with any statutory investigative powers of an external body entitled by law to require the Council's cooperation.
 - Investigating suspected viewing or sending by users of offensive or illegal material or anything which is otherwise in violation of this policy.
 - Investigating a user suspected of spending an excessive amount of time using the Council's internet or communications facilities for personal purposes.

8.2 Users should be aware that all internet traffic data sent and received using the Council's facilities may be logged including websites visited, times of visits and duration of visits. Any personal use of the internet will necessarily therefore be logged also. Users who wish to avoid the Council becoming aware of any political or religious beliefs or affiliations should avoid visiting websites at work which might reveal such affiliations. By using the Council's internet or other facilities for permitted personal use users are taken to consent to personal communications being monitored and recorded by the Council. The Council will ensure that any monitoring of users' use of the Council's facilities complies with all relevant legislation including, but not necessarily limited to, the General Data Protection Regulations 2016 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

9. Recruitment

9.1 The Council may use internet searches to carry out due diligence as part of its requirement processes. In these circumstances the Council will act in accordance with its Equality and Diversity Policy and Information and Data Protection Policy obligations.

10. Misuse and Compliance

10.1 Misuse of the Council social media may constitute grounds for action under the Disciplinary Policy for staff or the Councillor Code of Conduct for members. In some cases such misuse may also amount to a cause for civil or criminal proceedings.

10.2 Where any investigation of possible misuse appears to show that a criminal offence has occurred the investigating officer will immediately alert the Police and make any information that has come to light available to them.

11. Review

11.1 This policy will be reviewed once during the term of each administration and more frequently if considered necessary through a change in circumstances or legislation. The next regular review is therefore expected to be in the Spring of 2027.

Steve Kerry
Town Clerk