

POLICY ON THE ACCEPTABLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This should be read in conjunction with the linked policies listed below:

Linked policies and procedures:

- Code of Conduct
- Disciplinary Procedure & Rules
- Equality & Diversity Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Use of IT Facilities

Social media is an online method to instantly communicate with others or to share data in a public forum. Examples include Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Social media also includes blogs, video and image sharing websites such as You Tube and Flickr. There are many more examples of social media than these; employees need to be aware that this is a constantly changing area.

The purpose of this policy is to set clear standards of behaviour and conduct in the use of social media and you should follow these guidelines in relation to any social media that you use. This policy also covers the use of social media in your personal life which may have an impact upon the reputation of Godalming Town Council (the Council).

This policy applies to all staff (whether full time, part time, casually employed or temporary workers), and agency workers working for or on behalf of the Council and anyone using the Council's information and communication technology equipment. Agency workers will not be treated less favourably than permanent staff, unless a legitimate reason exists.

This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Tumblr, Snapchat, Pinterest, all other social networking sites, and all other internet postings, including blogs.

It applies to the use of social media accessed for work or on behalf of the Town Council, whether during office hours or otherwise. The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using the Council's IT facilities and equipment or equipment belonging to members of staff. This policy equally applies to the use of personal social media if reference is made to Godalming Town Council or your employment thereof.

The Council recognises that the internet provides unique opportunities to participate in interactive discussions and share information on particular topics using a wide variety of social media. However, use of social media can pose risks to confidential information, and reputation, and can jeopardise the Council's compliance with legal obligations.

The Council may require staff to remove internet postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.

Any misuse of social media should be reported to the CEO.

References or endorsements for individuals or organisations on social or networking sites on behalf of Godalming Town Council are to be approved in advance by the CEO.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is part of the modern communication environment, staff are to keep use of social media during work hours to a reasonable level.

The use of Council computers, networks and IT resources for use of social media activities will be subject to monitoring as appropriate. All personal data relating to social media monitoring and investigations will be handled securely and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR.

Staff are to seek the approval of the CEO before responding to or posting comments on potentially controversial subjects/matters. Where duties require staff to represent the Council in a social media environment, they are to do so in a neutral and non-controversial manner. If doubt exists then they are to liaise with the CEO prior to posting.

Circulating chain letters, spam or political solicitations is never permitted. The approval of the CEO is required for the promotion on social media of commercial organisations, individuals or religious activities/events not associated with the Council. Such approval will be limited to individuals and organisations of merit and/or benefit to the Godalming community.

Likewise, staff who are contacted for comments about the Council for publication anywhere, including in any social media outlet, must direct the inquiry to the CEO. Staff are not to respond without clear approval.

3. THE DOS AND DON'TS WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA

The following section provides staff with common-sense guidelines and recommendations for using social media responsibly and safely whether inside or outside of work.

Protecting the Council's reputation

- Do not post disparaging or defamatory statements about the Council or its stakeholders.
- Avoid social media communications that might be misconstrued in a way that could damage the Council's reputation, even indirectly.
- Do not 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.
- Individuals are personally responsible for what they communicate in social media. Remember that what is published might be available to be read by a wide and diverse audience, including the Council itself, future employers and social acquaintances and may be visible for a long time. This should be borne in mind before posting content.
- If any uncertainty or concern about the appropriateness of any statement or posting exists then it is advised to refrain from making the communication until discussed with the CEO.
- Social media content that disparages or reflects poorly on the Council should be reported to the CEO. All staff are responsible for protecting the Council's reputation.

Respecting colleagues, stakeholders, partners and suppliers:

- Consider carefully whether your posts could be considered offensive by your colleagues, the Town Council or other stakeholders, partners or suppliers of the Town Council.
- You are reminded that the same laws, rules and regulations regarding discrimination, bullying and harassment apply equally to a social media environment as any other.

- The Council is committed to taking all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment and harassment by third parties, including via social media. This includes regular risk assessments, staff training, and clear reporting procedures, in line with the Employment Rights Act 2025.
- Employees are encouraged to raise concerns about harassment or discrimination in good faith, including via social media, and are protected from detriment or dismissal for doing so. No confidentiality clause will prevent disclosures about harassment or discrimination. See the Council's Whistleblowing Policy for further details.

4. RECRUITMENT

Depending upon the position, the Council may use internet searches to perform due diligence on candidates in the course of recruitment. Where this is done, the Council will act in accordance with its data protection and equal opportunities obligations. Candidates will be given the opportunity to comment upon any concerns.

5. DISCIPLINARY ACTION OVER SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Any breach of this policy may lead to disciplinary action. Serious breaches of this policy, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the Council, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal. Breaches of this policy will be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures, which include the right to be accompanied and to appeal.

This is a non-contractual policy, which will be reviewed from time to time