

Social Media Policy

Key Points:

- Councillors personally responsible for the content they publish on any form of social media.
- Care with language used when posting both in a personal or professional capacity. Adhere to the code of conduct.
- Use of the Town Council social media will be nonpolitical. Councillors must not cite or reference customers, partners, or suppliers without their approval.
- Moderation is the responsibility of Council Officers during office hours.

Social Media Policy Aim:

To establish the principles of the use of social media by Somerton Town Council (STC) employees, councillors, representatives, and volunteers, and to provide guidance on the use of social media.

Policy Statement

The use of social media continues to grow, including among the older population. There are many social media sites available and Somerton Town Council intends to use all forms deemed to be appropriate to communicate effectively with the community. The Council has currently approved the use of:

Facebook
Instagram
YouTube

The Council will encourage the increased use social media for the purposes of:

Providing and enhancing information about services.
Supporting local democracy
Gathering citizen insights
Managing citizen relationships
Promoting events or tourism
Supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness, and resilience



working with the community

The format and levels of interaction vary greatly from one site to another. Whenever council representatives use such sites, they should familiarise themselves with the guidance that is set out in this policy.

Social media offers great potential for building relationships and improving the services that Somerton Town Council provides. This policy clearly sets out how social media can be managed effectively and how any risks or pitfalls can be avoided or mitigated. Somerton Town Council will not lose sight of the fact that many citizens, including hard to reach groups who may not have easy access to technology, would prefer more traditional forms of communication. It is important that social media sites are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix that includes print publications.

Importantly the use of social media must not expose the council to security risks or damage to its reputation. As with any online activity there can be risks associated with the use of social media such as the following:

- Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection from infected sites.
- Disclosure of confidential information.
- Damage to the reputation of the Council.
- Social engineering attacks (*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*).
- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation.
- Somerton Town Council will manage and monitor the growth in audience and provide data and reports when required.

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected from representatives of Somerton Town Council:

Responsibilities of councillors when posting as a councillor or on behalf of the council

The Somerton Town Council stance is to use social media as set out in the policy statement and the Council will not become involved in any discussion. Not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate. Should a member of the public require more information the response should be: "Please contact the town clerk for further information." or words to that effect.



Councillors must remember that they are personally responsible for the content they publish on any form of social media.

It is good practice for councillors to separate with clarity the professional, personal, or political aspects of their communication. Councillors are reminded that when using personal social media accounts, they may still be viewed as councillors and should consider this when commenting.

Councillors must ensure that they are familiar with the guidance that is set out within this policy and that their use of social media is not damaging to the reputation of the council.

Councillors must adhere to the Members' Code of Conduct and be aware of the risks of action for defamation and the need to respect copyright, data protection, freedom of information and other laws.

Councillors must not use insulting, offensive or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable elsewhere. They must show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory.

Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important that councillors are confident about the nature of the information they publish. They must not publish or report on meetings or discussions that are meant to be private or internal to the council.

Councillors must not cite or reference customers, partners, or suppliers without their approval.

Responsibilities of Officers

Officers using social media in a personal capacity must ensure that this use is strictly personal, and neither professional nor political.

As members of the public may nevertheless recognise officers as employees of the council, it is important that officers ensure that their personal use of social media is not damaging to the reputation of the council.

They must not use insulting, offensive, or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable elsewhere.

They must show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory.

If an officer receives any threats, abuse, or harassment from members of the public through their use of social media then they must report such incidents to the clerk.



Where officers use social media in a professional capacity to represent the town council, then Somerton Town Council's corporate identity will be used and not that of any individual officer.

Somerton Town Council email addresses will be used.

The use will be non-party political.

Officers using social media in this way must respect copyright, data protection, freedom of information and other laws. They must be aware of the risks of action for defamation including legal action.

Officers must not download any software, shareware, or freeware, unless this has been approved and authorised by the Clerk.

Officers must not cite or reference customers, partners, or suppliers without their approval.

Failure to comply with these guidelines could result in disciplinary action being taken.

Moderation

The Clerk/Deputy Clerk will be nominated person to act as Moderator along with the Chair and the Vice Chair of the Promotions and Communications Committee (P&C). In the first instance, where possible, the Clerk/Deputy Clerk will carry out this function and will be responsible for monitoring the content on the Somerton Town Council social media pages, ensuring posts comply with the Social Media Policy. The Chair and Vice Chair of P & C will support the Clerk/Deputy Clerk with moderation and take the lead in the Clerk's/Deputy Clerk's absence. Moderators have the authority to instruct officers to immediately remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e., Facebook) and to the Council for its records.

If there is disagreement between the Town Clerk, the Chair and Vice Chair of P&C regarding what action should be taken as a result of moderation the final say will rest with the Chair of the Council