

Yateley Town Council

Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy



1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The use of digital and social media enables the Town Council to improve communications within the Council and with the people, businesses, and agencies it serves. The Council uses a website, Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, Blue Sky and Thread and email for communication. This policy will be updated as new communication channels are added.
- 1.2 The Council's social media aims to provide information, updates, and promote the community positively.
- 1.3 This policy guides Council Officers and Members on using social media, including the Town Council website, and provides guidelines for appropriate usage.

2. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

- 2.1 The policy aims to:
 - Ensure a common strategy on social media usage.
 - Protect the Council and its Members from legal risks.
 - Maintain the Council's good reputation.
 - Separate Council social media from Members' personal accounts.
 - Provide guidelines for professional social media use.

3. DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- 3.1 Social media refers to web-based tools that enable interactions, information sharing, and media distribution.
- 3.2 Common features include:
 - User accounts for secure interaction.
 - Profiles representing individuals or groups.
 - Use of various devices (computers, mobile phones, tablets).
 - Instant or sporadic communication.
 - Sharing of images or videos.

4. BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Engagement: Wider public engagement in real-time.
- Communication: Increased contact with the public to inform decision-making.
- Insight: Awareness of public opinion and larger public consultation.
- Transparency: Increased presence and transparency in the community.
- Promotion: Promotion of Town Council events and work.

5. RISKS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Public Criticism: Managed by a public social media policy.
- Legal Issues: Risks of copyright infringement.
- Cyber-security: Protecting passwords and limiting account access.
- Diverse Audience: Difficult to limit the audience.
- Data Protection: Ensuring compliance with GDPR.

6. USING SOCIAL MEDIA

- 6.1 Social media management is restricted to individuals with permission from the Town Clerk.
- 6.2 Accounts representing the Council, Mayor, and Members are Council property and monitored by the Council.

- 6.3 Members may manage personal social media accounts with a disclaimer that views are personal and not those of Yateley Town Council.
- 6.4 Members should be aware of the impact of personal account statements.
- 6.5 Maintain a professional but friendly tone to encourage community interaction.
- 6.6 Training sessions are available for Members on social media policy and mechanics.

7. CONDUCT

- 7.1 Social media conduct must comply with this policy and existing policies (Bullying and Whistleblowing, Equalities, Member/Officer Relations).
- 7.2 Guidelines for social media use:
 - Use common sense and be aware of the audience.
 - Separate work and personal life.
 - Remember the permanency of social media posts.
 - It is not necessary to respond to every post.

8. OFFICERS

- 8.1 Council social media must be politically neutral.
- 8.2 Rude, disrespectful, or derogatory language is not tolerated.
- 8.3 No personal information should be posted.
- 8.4 Private meeting minutes or agendas should not be published or commented on.

9. MEMBERS

- 9.1 All official communications should be conducted through the Council's official social media accounts. Councillors should not issue communications on behalf of the Council independently. There should be a clear separation between the Council's official social media accounts and those of individual members.
- 9.2 Members identifying as such on personal accounts must clarify that views are personal.
- 9.3 Use appropriate privacy settings depending on their willingness to be contacted by the public and the press.
- 9.4 The name of the Town Council, and any associated logos, should not be used without express permission of the Town Clerk.
- 9.5 Respect other users and avoid personal attacks.
- 9.6 Members will be personally responsible for the content of their personal social media accounts and any content published, or allowed to be published, that may amount to libel, or any other legal infringements.

10. DEALING WITH DEROGATORY SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

- 10.1 From time to time, derogatory or overly negative comments could be posted on the Council's social media pages. In the interests of free speech, such comments may be kept visible but may not necessarily be commented upon by the Council, if it would exacerbate the matter without resolution. Where a complaint type of comment is being made, Council Officers may choose to contact the commenter directly, rather than replying publicly. In some circumstances, it may be suitable to turn off post commenting.
- 10.2 Offensive comments will be deleted.
- 10.3 Comments against the Council's Equalities Policy will be deleted.

11. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL

Communications will:

- Be civil, tasteful, and relevant.
- Not contain unlawful, libellous, harassing, or offensive content.
- Not share personal information without permission.
- Be moderated by the Town Clerk.
- Not be used for political advertising.

12. TOWN COUNCIL WEBSITE

The website may include:

- Meeting dates, agendas, and minutes.
- Financial information.
- Policies and procedures.
- Member information.
- Links to external websites.
- News articles.

The website will not include:

- Political organisation promotions.
- Commercial advertisements.
- Non-charitable fundraising publicity.

13. TOWN COUNCIL EMAIL

The Council Office email is monitored during office hours. The Town Clerk oversees email correspondence, ensuring proper record-keeping and data protection.

14. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Council aims to improve its working through social media and electronic communications.

15. CODE OF CONDUCT AND DATA PROTECTION

Members must abide by the code of conduct and data protection laws, maintaining confidentiality and proper email practices.

Amendment Record

Version 1: Agreed 24.02.25

Due for Review: February 2027