



CALDICOT TOWN COUNCIL

Social Media and Communications Policy

1. Policy Statement

1.1 This policy is intended to help employees including clerks, RFO's, Executive Officers, part-time, fixed-term and casual employees (collectively referred to as employees in this policy), volunteers and members make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Google+ and LinkedIn.

1.2 This policy outlines the standards we require employees and volunteers to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which we will monitor your use of social media and the action we will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

2. The Scope of the policy

2.1 The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions; this accountability can be managed, in part, through effective two-way communications. The media is crucially important in conveying information to the community and, as such, the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with the media to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council, and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.

2.2 Caldicot Town Council acknowledges social media as a useful communication tool. However, clear guidelines are needed for the use of social media to ensure they are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that its use does not expose the Council to security risks, reputational damage or breach of the Data Protection Act.

2.3 All employees, volunteers and members are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of our council.

2.4 Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

3.1 The council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.

3.2 The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.

3.3 All employees, volunteers and members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any breach of this policy should be reported to Caldicot Town Council Clerk.

3.4 Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to Caldicot Town Council Clerk.

3a. Using social media sites in the name of Caldicot Town Council

Only Caldicot Town Council Officers are permitted to post material on a social media website in the name of and on behalf of Caldicot Town Council.

4. Using Social Media

4.1 We recognise the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about our council and community. We also recognise the importance of our employees, volunteers and members joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.



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4.2 Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the council you must:

- a) have read and understood this policy and
- b) employees and volunteers must have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from Caldicot Town Council Clerk.

4.3 For the purposes of this policy, the term 'social media' covers sites and applications including but not restricted to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, discussion forums and any sites which may emerge after the creation of this policy where Caldicot Town Council could be represented.

5. Rules for use of social media

5.1 Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, in line with this guidance. Social media sites are in the public domain and officers must ensure the reliability and be confident of the nature of the information published. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without consent, used in different contexts or further distributed.

5.2 Council social media must not be used for party political purposes or specific party political campaigning. Officers must not seek to promote councillors' social media accounts during the pre-election period.

5.3 Whenever you are permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, you must adhere to the following general rules:

- i. Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- ii. Any employee, volunteer or member who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform Town Council Clerk.
- iii. Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with Town Council Clerk.
- iv. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- v. Before you include a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- vi. When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- vii. Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.
- viii. You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.
- ix. Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- x. Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.
- xi. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
- xii. Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.



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6. Risks and monitoring use of social media

6.1 The following risks have been identified with social media use (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Virus or other malware infection from an infected site.
- Disclosure of confidential information.
- Damage to the Council's reputation.
- Social engineering attacks (also known as phishing).
- Bullying or witch-hunting.
- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation.
- Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.

6.2 Social media sites will be monitored to mitigate these risks to ensure:

- A consistent and corporate approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media.
- Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media.
- Users operate within existing policies, guidelines and existing legislation.
- The Council's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected.

6.3 Employees should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under our Disciplinary Procedure.

6.4 Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us.

6.5 In particular a serious case of uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):

- a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
- b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
- c) material which is offensive, obscene
- d) criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the council, members, or our employees;
- e) confidential information about the council or anyone else
- f) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the council); or
- g) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Any such action will be addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure and for employees may result in summary dismissal.



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6.6 Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with our Disciplinary Procedure, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

6.7 If you notice any use of social media by other employees or volunteers in breach of this policy please report it to Town Council Clerk.

6.8 From time to time, the Council may have to respond to negative issues and may become involved in drawn out conversations on social media. Members and Officers must alert the Town Clerk as soon as practicable, so that the situation can be managed effectively and efficiently to minimise negative publicity.

6.9 In the event that the website/social media account is hacked and inappropriate content added, the website/social media account will be deactivated immediately and necessary action will be taken to discover the cause and arrange for issue to be rectified.

7. External communications and working with the Media

7.1 The Town Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with the media.

7.2 Confidential documents, exempt minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible, with appropriate action taken.

7.3 When the media wish to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings then advice should be taken from the Council's solicitor before any response is made.

7.4 There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Town Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain), and disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these, and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Town Clerk before any response is made to the media.

7.5 When responding to approaches from the media, the Town Clerk, Town Mayor or the Chair of Committees are authorised to make contact with the media.

7.6 Statements made by the Town Clerk, Town Mayor, Chair of Committees should reflect the Council's opinion.

7.7 Other Councillors can talk to the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given are their own and not necessarily those of the Council.

7.8 There are occasions when it is appropriate for the Council to submit a letter, for example to explain important policies or to correct factual errors in letters submitted by other correspondents; such letters should be kept brief and balanced in tone and correspondence should not be drawn out over several weeks. All correspondence must come from the Town Clerk.



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8. Attendance of Media at Council Meetings

8.1 The Local Government Act 1972 requires that agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media upon request.

8.2 The media are encouraged to attend Council meetings and seating and workspace will be made available.

8.3 ***'Photographing, recording, broadcasting or transmitting the proceedings of a meeting by any means is not permitted without the Council's prior written consent.'***
[Standing Order 3]

9. Press Releases

9.1 The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of the Town Clerk and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.

9.2 The Town Clerk or any Member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Town Clerk in order to ensure that the principles outlined in Standing Orders are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.

10. Monitoring and review of this policy

10.1 The Town Clerk shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.