



EAST COWES TOWN COUNCIL

**SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR
EMPLOYEES, VOLUNTEERS
and COUNCILLORS**

1. Policy statement

- 1.1. This policy is intended to guide all employees including part-time, fixed-term and casual employees (collectively referred to as employees in this policy), volunteers and Councillors 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 and LinkedIn.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards the Council require employees, volunteers and Councillors to observe when using social media; the circumstances in which your use of social media will be monitored and the action the Council will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

2. The scope of the policy

- 2.1. All employees, volunteers and Councillors are always expected to comply with this policy to protect the privacy, confidentiality, reputation and interests of the Council.
- 2.2. Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.
- 2.3 Breach of this policy by Councillors may be dealt with under the procedure for breaches of the Code of Conduct and may be reported to the Monitoring Officer of the Local Authority.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

- 3.1. The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 3.2. The Town Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the Council's work.
- 3.3. All employees, volunteers and Councillors should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Town Clerk.
- 3.4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Town Clerk.

4. Using social media sites in the Council's name and Council's social media sites.

- 4.1. Only the Town Clerk and Assistant Clerk are permitted to post material on a social media website in the Council's name and on the Council's own social media sites. Posting will be done within normal office hours.

5. Using social media

- 5.1. The Council recognise the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about the 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.
- 5.2. 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 Communications & Media policy; and
 - b) employees and volunteers must have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from the Town Clerk.

6. Rules for use of social media

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

- 6.1. Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- 6.2. Any employee, volunteer or Councillor 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 the Town Clerk.
- 6.3. 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 the Town Clerk.
- 6.4. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.

- 6.5. 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.
- 6.6. When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- 6.7. Be honest and open but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council. **Please ensure your personal comments are not linked in any way to the Council or the Council's views.**
- 6.8. You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.
- 6.9. Don't escalate heated discussions. Try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- 6.10. Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.
- 6.11. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
- 6.12. 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.

7. Monitoring use of social media websites

- 7.1. 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 policy.
- 7.2. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and the Council.
- 7.3. 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 council 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 policy and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

- 7.4. Where evidence of misuse is found the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Council's 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.
- 7.5. If you notice any use of social media by employees, volunteers or Councillors in breach of this policy, please report it to the Town Clerk.

8. Monitoring and review of this policy

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