



**Royston Town Council**  
**Social Media Policy**  
**Approved by Full Council 20<sup>th</sup> January 2020**  
**Minute number: 298/20**

## **1. Policy statement**

**1.1** This policy is intended to help Councillors and council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as emails, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other relevant social media websites.

**1.2** This policy provides information and guidelines to Councillors and council staff to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

**1.3** This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction with, all other policies and procedures adopted by the Council, such as the Equal Opportunities Policy, Member Officer Protocol, Data Protection Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Members Code of Conduct and such like.

**1.4** This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

## **2. Who is covered by this policy?**

**2.1** This policy covers all individuals working at all levels within the Council, including all elected and co-opted Councillors, volunteers and council staff.

## **3. The scope of this policy**

**3.1** The council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy. All Members and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.

**3.2** Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking. Inappropriate use of social media by Members could amount to a breach of the Members Code of Conduct. Members should be honest and open, but mindful of the impact their contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.

**3.3** All employees, volunteers and members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Everyone is personally responsible for content they publish.

#### **4. Guidelines for using social media.**

**4.1** Councillors and staff must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They should not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory, abusive, obscene or offensive comments.

As a staff member or as a Councillor you should always:

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Avoid making false or misleading statements.
- Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council.
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Only make comments that you would also be prepared to make in writing or face to face.
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before they are uploaded. Check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used.
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors, staff and residents.
- Avoid posting any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel, copyright or general data protection regulations (GDPR).
- Ensure commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information is not disclosed. Never publish anyone else's contact details without permission.
- Consider if naming individuals is appropriate or necessary, and refer to GDPR. If in doubt, consult with the Clerk.
- Think about how the public may perceive who you follow on social media.

**4.2** Individual Councillors and officers are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity. Councillors must make it clear whether they are speaking from a personal perspective or as a Member representing the Council or as a Member of a political party.

#### **5. Council website and social media pages**

**5.1** The Clerk will be the nominated person to act as moderator on official council pages. The Clerk will have authority to instruct officers to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature.

**5.2** Council officers will be appointed to maintain the Council's website and social media pages. These will be used to communicate council business to the public and will include:

- Notices and minutes of meetings.
- Advertisements for events and activities.
- Good news stories.
- Advertisements for vacancies.
- Information from partners i.e. Police, District council, County Council etc.
- Announcements regarding the Council.
- Posting or sharing information promoting bodies for community benefit.
- Posting other items as the Council see fit.
- Sharing information from affiliated organisations i.e. RAGA and the Twinning Association

**5.3** All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure the appropriate security settings are in place.

## **6. Monitoring use of social media websites.**

**6.1** Any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored.

**6.2** Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give risk to legal liability against you and the Council.

**6.3** Residents and councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

**6.4** If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised as an agenda item for consideration by the Council or a committee. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

**6.5** Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the Council as required.

## **7. Policy Review**

January 2022, or earlier if legislation dictates.