

Olney Town Council

Social Media Policy

1. General introduction to social media

- 1.1.** We encourage all of our staff and Members to engage with social media in a positive and meaningful way. Social media is increasingly popular form of communication for individuals and organisations and is used both socially and for business. Social media is used to describe any kind of on-line tool that you can use for sharing what you know, including blogs, photo sharing, video sharing, social networks, mobile phone applications, texting, digital TV services, gaming and collaboration tools. Unlike a telephone conversation or email, it is a broadcast medium - your messages are likely to be viewed by a wider range of people than just the intended recipient.

2. How is this?

- 2.1.** X (formerly Twitter) messages for example, will appear on the feed of all the account holder's Followers, and can be retweeted, or searched for by unconnected users when content contains a hashtag # prefix. X accounts can be viewed by anyone, without the need for an X account. Facebook posts can be read by anyone, and those with a personal Facebook page can then share them with their Friends. If the Facebook page is a corporate site, its posts will appear on the feeds of those who click the "Like" button on the page. The information on web blogs and other forms of sharing media can be accessed through internet search engines.

3. What you need to remember

- 3.1.** Social media is a cheap and effective way of reaching out to the community, sharing information and ideas. Its immediacy can be invaluable.
- 3.2.** It also means that all messages should be treated as public, and are open to responses from people with different views and agendas. Sometimes this can be positive, but it can also result in unwelcome criticism and abuse. Social media is also popular with journalists, so what you post on one day, may end up in newsprint the next day.
- 3.3.** There is no delete. Even if you delete something from a social media site, it is likely that other people will already have seen it in a news feed popping up on their desktop, or on their mobile phone. Someone may already have posted it elsewhere online, or shared it with their friends. People may also take a screen shot of what you have posted before you deleted it. They may then reproduce this at a future point in time.
- 3.4.** Using social media platforms such as X or Facebook is no different from talking loudly in a public place: you can expect other people to hear what you are saying, including some who like to gossip or malign.
- 3.5.** You must be willing to take personal responsibility for anything that you say online.

4. Social Media and the Law

4.1. The public nature of social media raises some general legal issues which ALL users should be aware of:

- **Libel** – If you publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation, they may take a libel action against you. The same thing may happen if, for example, someone else publishes something libellous on your website, you know about it and don't take swift action to remove it. A successful libel claim could result in the award of damages against you.
- **Copyright** – Using images or text from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos), without obtaining permission, is likely to breach copyright laws. Therefore, don't publish anything you are unsure about, or obtain prior permission. Again, a successful claim for breach of copyright would be likely to lead to an award of damages against you.
- **Data Protection** – Do not publish the personal data of individuals unless you have their express permission.

5. On Council matters:

5.1. Bias and Predetermination – While your likely view on a particular subject may be well known, you need to be able to show that you attended any council meeting prepared to take on board the collective view of the council decision taken. As such, if you are involved in making council decisions, it is not appropriate to say anything through social media (or indeed anywhere else) that suggests you have completely and irrevocably made your mind up on an issue that is due to be formally decided upon.

6. Olney Town Council and Social Media

6.1. Olney Town Council operates a Facebook page and monitors activity involving Olney Town Council and its Members. Our Facebook account provides another way of reaching out to local residents. Its primary aim is to engage people and encourage them to access the information and services available on our web pages.

6.2. Before responding to criticism of the Council, councillors should contact the Clerk to:

- clarify the facts
- provide an appropriate explanation of policy
- agree on a collective, measured, respectful and appropriate response

Once clarification or explanation has been made, and no new issues have been raised, no further correspondence on the matter should ensue.

6.3. While adopting a more informal style, the Olney Town Council Facebook page will:

- treat all individuals with respect.
- not be used to criticise individuals or organisations, even if invited to.
- not engage with people who are abusive, or use racist, sexist, homophobic or threatening language.
- not convey any political or commercial bias.
- not disclose confidential information or the personal information of others.

7. Staff and Members' own social media accounts

7.1. Staff and elected Members should be aware of their obligations under the Staff Code of Conduct and the Members' Code of Conduct. Although many social media accounts allow users to adopt a made-up identity, they should be aware that their proper identity is likely to be revealed over time through its content and contact with others.

7.2. If talking about the Council, staff and Members should be clear about their own personal role and the service that they represent and not say anything that might bring the Council, its Members and/or staff into disrepute.

7.3. In line with our shared vision for developing a compassionate workplace, you should always refrain from criticising members of staff or elected Members, and be aware of your duty of confidentiality with respect to Council information.

7.4. Members should also refrain from criticising named officers, or expressing any views that are likely to compromise the impartiality of those who work for, or on behalf of the Council.

- Do try to make timely and relevant comments that you think other people will be interested in.
- Do take a moment to think before you respond to a comment – comments once made, leave a digital footprint forever.
- Do be aware of the privacy settings on the site you are using.
- Do include photos and web links to help make your points.
- Don't re-share anything you do not know to be true.
- Don't comment in haste, particularly when you are angry or have consumed alcohol.
- Don't post comments that you would not be prepared to make on paper or face-to-face.