



Leigh-on-Sea Town Council

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USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, INTERNET & EMAIL POLICY

Adopted: May 2021

To be reviewed: November 2024

1. Introduction

The Council recognises that email and internet are important information and communication systems which are used during the course of Council business. This policy provides guidelines and procedures to protect users and the Council.

2. Scope of the policy

All employees, Councillors and volunteers are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council.

Breach of this policy by employees and Councillors may be dealt with under the adopted Code of Conduct or Disciplinary Procedure and in serious cases may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal in the case of employees.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

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

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

All employees, Councillors and volunteers should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Any breach of it should be reported to the Town Clerk. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Town Clerk.

4. Social Media

Only certain members of staff have the authority from (and in consultation with) the Town Clerk to post material on the Council's websites and social media accounts in the Council's name and on behalf of the Council.

❖ Rules for Social Media

Whenever permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, the following general rules must be adhered to:

- Do not upload post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- Any employee, Councillor or volunteer 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.

- Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether information to be shared falls within one of these categories, this should be discussed beforehand with the Town Clerk.
- Before including a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link it.
- When making use of any social media platform its terms of use must be read and complied with.
- Be honest and open but be mindful of the impact a contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council.
- Employees, Councillors and volunteers are personally responsible for any content they publish into social media tools.
- Do not escalate heated discussions. Try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- Do not discuss employees, Councillors and volunteers without their prior approval.
- Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
- Do not publish personal contact details where they can be accessed and used widely and never publish anyone else's personal contact details.

❖ **Monitoring use of Social Media**

- a) Employees, Councillors and volunteers should be aware that any use of social media (whether or not accessed for Council purposes) may be monitored and where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken under the scope of this policy.
- b) Misuse of social media can in certain circumstances constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against the Council and its employees.
- c) In particular a serious case of uploading, posting, forwarding or linking 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/breach of the Code of Conduct (this list is not exhaustive):
 - Material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights or which invades the privacy of any person
 - Pornographic material (that is writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature)
 - A false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation
 - Material which is offensive, obscene, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, Councillors, employees or volunteers
 - Confidential information about the Council or anyone else
 - Any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil and whether for employees or the Council).
- d) Where evidence of misuse is found a more detailed investigation will take place involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.
- e) Any breach of the policy should be reported to the Town Clerk in accordance with the Council's Whistle Blowing policy within the Staff Handbook.

❖ **Social Media Engagement Guidelines – advice tips for Councillors created by Councillors**

Professional – *to not be drawn into heated discussion or become defensive or argumentative when engaging with others.*

Accessible - *we should ensure all residents understand the responses and keep language simple and concise.*

Positive – *encourage positive interactions. Social media can attract complainers - we need to ensure we take negative rants offline as soon as possible.*

Responsive - *This is key, even if it's to just direct them elsewhere or to let them know you need to seek more information. Aiming to respond within 48hours would be ideal. A major frustration with many members of the public is red tape - if we respond to queries as quickly and as accurately as possible and direct residents to the right place we are creating 'little wins' and gaining their trust.*

Factual and Efficient – *only share credible information with permission to share it. Credit other people's work, ideas and links and be as helpful as possible.*

5. Email

- a) Use of email is encouraged as it provides an efficient system of communication.
- b) Email should be regarded as written paper documents for the purposes of production, use, retention and disclosure and can be called upon under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and other Data Protection legislation. Personal information should be kept in accordance with the principles established under Data Protection legislation.
- c) The Council reserves the right to open any email file stored on the Council's computer system.

❖ **Email Etiquette**

All employees, Councillors and volunteers must follow the procedure outlined below when sending and receiving emails on behalf of the Town Council:

- Only agreed email signatures may be used
- All messages must use appropriate business language
- A waiver clause will be included at the end of each email message
- The circulating of offensive, indecent or obscene material or anything which breaches the Equal Opportunities Policy is strictly prohibited.
- Confidential material should not be disclosed
- Only attachments from a trusted source may be downloaded
- Ensure that the address of the recipient is correct before sending emails
- Ensure that a 'reply to all' is appropriate
- Ensure that essential files are saved before deleting the message in which they were received.
- Emails which create obligations or give instructions on behalf of the Council must be sent by officers only, not Councillors

❖ **Reporting and sanctions**

If a staff member or Councillor receives an email from a staff member or Councillor which they believe is contrary to the guidance provided in this policy it should be reported to the Town Clerk who will consider the use of formal disciplinary procedure/grievance or reporting through Code of Conduct or refer the matter to the Staffing Committee depending on the severity of the event.

6. Internet

- a) Staff members are encouraged to use the internet responsibly as part of their official and professional activities.
- b) Information obtained via the internet and published in the name of the Council must be relevant and professional. A disclaimer must be stated where personal views are expressed.
- c) The use of the internet to access and/or distribute any kind of offensive material will not be tolerated and staff may be subject to disciplinary action.
- d) The equipment, services and technology used to access the internet are the property of the Council. The Council reserves the right to monitor internet traffic and monitor and access data that is composed, sent or received through its online connections.

❖ **Unacceptable use of the internet**

This includes but is not limited to:

- Sending or posting discriminatory, harassing or threatening messages or images
- Using computers to perpetrate any form of fraud and/or software, film or music piracy
- Obtaining, using or disclosing another staff member's password without authorisation
- Sharing confidential material or proprietary information outside of the Council
- Hacking into unauthorised areas
- Sending or posting information that is defamatory to the Council, its services, Councillors and/or members of the public
- Introducing malicious software onto Council computers and/or jeopardising the security of the Council's electronic communication systems
- Sending of posting chain letter, solicitations or advertisements no related to Council business activities
- Passing off personal views as those representing the Council

7. Security

Only software purchased by the Council shall be installed on the Council's computer system. Software licences shall be retained.