

ROTHWELL TOWN COUNCIL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Rothwell Town Councillors, Town Council staff and others who engage with the Town Council using social media. This policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration. In the main, Town Councillors and Town Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Facebook, LinkedIn and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clip and podcast sites
- Blogs and discussion forums

Social media does not replace existing forms of communication. The current Code of Conduct applies to social media activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Individual Town Councillors and Town Council staff are responsible for what they post in a Town Council capacity. Social media may be used to:

- Distribute Town Council agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise Town Council events and activities
- Announce new information from the Town Council
- Advertise Town Council vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Post or share information from other Town Council-related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other Town Councillors

Code of Practice when using social media Town Councillors and Town Council staff must be mindful of the information they post in a Town Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative. Town Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Town Council at a Council may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings. Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media that denigrates Town Councillors, Town Council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Town Council. Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative. Town Councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the Town Council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Town Council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Town Council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks

- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish the email address of any other Town Councillor without their written permission
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission

- post any information that infringes the copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libellous
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the Town Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence
- publish untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation as doing so is libelous and can result in a court action and a fine for damages
- post copyrighted images or text on social media as it is an offence to do so. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.
- publish personal data of individuals without permission as this is a breach of Data Protection legislation and is an offence
- publish obscene material as it is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken. This policy will be reviewed annually.

The Local Government Audit and Accountability Act 2014 came into force as of 6 August 2014. It should be noted that the ability of the public to film, record and distribute Town Council meetings is now law. The right of the Town Council to exclude the press and public from parts of Town Council meetings for contractual and staff confidentially reasons remain unaffected. Members of the public are permitted to film or record Town Council meetings, to which they are permitted access, in a non-disruptive manner. The Chairman of the meeting has the authority to stop a meeting and take appropriate action if any person contravenes these principles or is deemed to be recording in a disruptive manner.

The use of digital and social media recording tools, for example Twitter, blogging or audio recording is allowed as long as it is carried out in a non-disruptive way and only to the extent that it does not interfere with any person's ability, including where he or she has a disability, to follow the debate. While those attending meetings are deemed to have consented to the filming, recording or broadcasting of meetings, those exercising the rights to film, record and broadcast must respect the rights of others people attending under the Data Protection Act 1998. This will include the particular rights of any children or vulnerable adults attending the meeting.

Any person or organization choosing to film, record or broadcast a meeting of the Town Council is responsible for any claims or other liability from them so doing. The Town Council asks those recording proceedings do not to edit the film or recording in a way that could lead to misinterpretation of the proceedings, or infringe the core values of the Town Council. This includes refraining from editing an image or views expressed in a way that may ridicule, or show lack of respect towards those being filmed or recorded.