



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

YEOVIL TOWN COUNCIL



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1. Purpose

- 1.1. Yeovil Town Council recognises the importance of social media as a tool for communication, engagement, transparency and the promotion of Council services and activities.
- 1.2. The purpose of this Policy is to:
 - Promote responsible and effective use of social media;
 - Protect the reputation of the Council;
 - Support community engagement and local democracy;
 - Ensure compliance with legal and regulatory requirements;
 - Safeguard confidential, personal and sensitive information;
 - Maintain professional standards of conduct; and
 - Provide clear guidance on the use and management of social media accounts.

2. Scope of Policy

- 2.1. This Policy applies to:
 - All Yeovil Town Councillors;
 - The Chief Executive/Town Clerk and all Council employees;
 - Volunteers and contractors acting on behalf of the Council; and
 - Any person authorised to manage or contribute to Council social media platforms.
- 2.2. This Policy should be read alongside:
 - The Members' Code of Conduct;
 - Councillor–Officer Relations Protocol;
 - Data Protection Policy;
 - Information Security Policies;
 - Employee Code of Conduct;
 - Disciplinary Procedures;
 - Whistleblowing Policy; and
 - Relevant legislation and statutory guidance.
- 2.3. For the purposes of this Policy, social media includes, but is not limited to:
 - Facebook;
 - Instagram;

- X (formerly Twitter);
- LinkedIn;
- YouTube;
- Threads;
- WhatsApp Channels;
- Blogs and forums;
- Community discussion platforms; and
- Any future social media platform adopted by the Council.

2.4. The principles of this Policy apply equally to messaging and collaboration platforms, including WhatsApp, Signal, Messenger, Teams and similar applications, where Council business is discussed or communicated.

3. Principles

3.1. The Council supports the appropriate use of social media to:

- Share information about Council services;
- Promote Council events and activities;
- Engage with residents, businesses and community organisations;
- Encourage public participation; and
- Enhance openness and transparency.

3.2. All use of social media on behalf of the Council must be:

- Lawful;
- Professional;
- Accurate;
- Respectful;
- Non-political;
- Accessible; and
- Consistent with Council policies and objectives.

4. Corporate Social Media Accounts

4.1. The Council may maintain official social media accounts to communicate with residents and stakeholders.

4.2. Official Council accounts may be used to:

- Publish Council news and announcements;
- Promote Council services and facilities;
- Share information relating to Council decisions;
- Advertise events and activities;
- Communicate emergency information;
- Support community initiatives; and
- Share relevant information from trusted partner organisations.

- 4.3. Access to official Council social media accounts must be authorised by the Chief Executive/Town Clerk.
- 4.4. The Chief Executive/Town Clerk shall determine who may publish content on behalf of the Council.
- 4.5. Council social media accounts must not be used to promote or oppose any political party, political campaign or candidate for election.
- 4.6. During periods of heightened sensitivity, including local, regional and national elections and referendums, all Council social media activity must remain politically neutral, factual and balanced. Council platforms must not be used in any way that could reasonably be perceived as seeking to influence public support for a political party, candidate or campaign, and all publicity must comply with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity, election-period restrictions, and any guidance issued by the Returning Officer or Monitoring Officer. The factual reporting of Council decisions, services, meetings, events and statutory functions shall not be regarded as political publicity, provided such communications are accurate, balanced and consistent with legal requirements.
- 4.7. Each official Council social media account must have clear ownership, named authorised administrators and appropriate business continuity arrangements. Administrator access must be reviewed periodically and promptly updated when roles change or access is no longer required.

5. Personal Use of Social Media

- 5.1. The Council recognises that Councillors and employees may use social media in a personal capacity.
- 5.2. When using social media in a personal capacity, individuals must not:
 - Claim or imply they are speaking on behalf of the Council unless authorised to do so;
 - Bring the Council into disrepute;
 - Disclose confidential information;
 - Publish inaccurate or misleading information about the Council;
 - Engage in harassment, bullying or discriminatory behaviour; or
 - Use Council equipment or resources for inappropriate personal purposes.
- 5.3. Personal opinions must not be presented as official Council views.
- 5.4. Complaints, concerns or criticisms regarding Council services, decisions, Councillors or employees should ordinarily be raised through the Council's established complaints procedures, governance arrangements or other appropriate channels rather than through social media.

6. Councillor Responsibilities

- 6.1. Councillors must ensure that their use of social media complies with the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 6.2. When discussing Council business online, Councillors should:
- Act respectfully and professionally;
 - Consider whether they may be perceived as acting in their official capacity;
 - Distinguish clearly between personal and Council views;
 - Respect confidential information;
 - Correct inaccurate information where appropriate; and
 - Encourage constructive public debate.
- 6.3. Councillors must not:
- Use social media to bully, harass, intimidate or discriminate against others;
 - Publish confidential or exempt information;
 - Make defamatory comments;
 - Publicly criticise, undermine or make allegations regarding the conduct, capability or performance of Council employees through social media or other online platforms;
 - Seek to influence employee management matters through social media; or
 - Use Council platforms to promote political parties, candidates or political campaigns.
- 6.4. Concerns regarding employees must be raised through the Council's appropriate management, governance or complaints procedures and not through social media channels.

6.5. Council Business and Decision-Making

- 6.5.1. Councillors should not use social media, messaging applications or other online platforms to conduct Council business, make Council decisions or seek to reach collective decisions outside properly convened meetings.
- 6.5.2. Social media must not be used as a substitute for the Council's formal decision-making processes.

7. Officer Responsibilities

- 7.1. Officers must maintain professional standards when using social media.
- 7.2. Officers must not:
- Engage in online conduct that could compromise their professional impartiality;

- Disclose confidential information (including confidential agenda items or information otherwise shared in confidence);
- Misrepresent Council policy or decisions;
- Criticise Councillors, colleagues or members of the public; or
- Use social media in a manner that could damage working relationships or public confidence in the Council.

7.3. Officers managing Council social media accounts must act impartially and professionally at all times.

8. Standards of Conduct

8.1. When participating in social media activity, users must:

- Be respectful and courteous;
- Act honestly and transparently;
- Ensure information is accurate;
- Use appropriate language;
- Consider the potential impact of published content;
- Respect the privacy of others; and
- Comply with all relevant laws and Council policies.

8.2. Content must not:

- Be abusive, threatening or offensive;
- Contain discriminatory or hateful language;
- Include defamatory statements;
- Encourage unlawful activity;
- Breach copyright;
- Contain false or misleading information; or
- Infringe the rights of others.

9. Confidentiality and Data Protection

9.1. Users must not publish:

- Confidential Council information;
- Personal data without lawful authority;
- Commercially sensitive information;
- Legally privileged information; or
- Information designated as exempt under legislation.

9.2. All processing and sharing of personal information must comply with:

- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR);
- Data Protection Act 2018; and
- The Council's Data Protection Policy.

- 9.3. Social media posts, direct messages, comments, moderation decisions, account access records and related communications concerning Council business must be retained in accordance with the Council's records management arrangements, retention schedule and legal obligations.
- 9.4. Content and communications on social media or messaging platforms relating to Council business may be disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, including in response to Freedom of Information requests, Environmental Information requests and Subject Access Requests.

10. Photography and Images

- 10.1. Photographs and video recordings must be used responsibly and in accordance with data protection requirements.
- 10.2. Photographs or videos of children and young people will only be published where appropriate consent has been obtained.
- 10.3. Users must respect the privacy of individuals when publishing photographs, videos or other visual content.
- 10.4. Where images or videos include children, young people or vulnerable adults, safeguarding considerations must be assessed before publication. The Council must avoid publishing personal details, locations or contextual information that could create safeguarding risks, and must remove or withhold content where a safeguarding concern is identified.

11. Copyright

- 11.1. Users must not publish, reproduce or distribute material owned by third parties without permission, licence or other lawful authority.
- 11.2. Copyright, intellectual property and licensing requirements must be respected at all times.

12. Accessibility

- 12.1. Council social media content should be accessible to as many people as reasonably possible. Posts should use clear and plain English, avoid unnecessary jargon, and provide key information in accessible formats where appropriate.
- 12.2. Images should include meaningful alternative text where the platform allows. Videos should include captions, subtitles or transcripts where practicable, and important information should not be conveyed by images, colour or audio alone.

13. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- 13.1. Artificial intelligence tools may be used to assist in producing social media content.
- 13.2. Where AI-generated content is used:
 - Content must be reviewed by an authorised officer before publication;
 - Information must be checked for accuracy;
 - Content must comply with Council policies and legal requirements;
 - Personal data must not be entered into public AI systems without appropriate safeguards; and
 - Responsibility for published content remains with the person authorising publication.

14. Social Media Moderation

- 14.1. The Council reserves the right to monitor and moderate content published on its social media platforms.
- 14.2. The Council may remove content that:
 - Is defamatory;
 - Is discriminatory or hateful;
 - Contains personal information;
 - Is offensive or abusive;
 - Promotes unlawful activity;
 - Constitutes spam or commercial advertising;
 - Is deliberately misleading; or
 - Otherwise breaches this Policy.
- 14.3. The Council may restrict access to its social media channels where behaviour is abusive, unlawful, discriminatory, threatening, defamatory or repeatedly breaches this Policy.
- 14.4. The Council's moderation rules should be published on, or made available from, its social media platforms so that users understand the standards expected and the circumstances in which content may be hidden, removed, reported or otherwise moderated.
- 14.5. Moderation decisions will be applied fairly, consistently and proportionately. The Council will not moderate content solely because it is critical of the Council, its decisions or services, provided that the content is lawful and does not otherwise breach this Policy or the published moderation rules.

15. Security and Incident Response

- 15.1. Users with access to official Council social media accounts must:
 - Use strong passwords;

- Maintain account security;
 - Enable multi-factor authentication where available;
 - Keep login credentials confidential; and
 - Report any suspected security breach immediately to the Chief Executive/Town Clerk.
- 15.2. Access rights should be reviewed regularly and removed where no longer required.
- 15.3. Suspected account compromise, impersonation, misinformation, unauthorised publication, loss of account access or urgent takedown requirements must be reported immediately to the Chief Executive/Town Clerk. The Council will take proportionate action, which may include securing accounts, correcting or removing content, notifying relevant authorities or platform providers, preserving records and communicating with the public where necessary.

16. Responsibilities

16.1. Chief Executive/Town Clerk

16.1.1. The Chief Executive/Town Clerk is responsible for:

- Overseeing implementation of this Policy;
- Authorising access to Council social media accounts;
- Managing reputational risks arising from social media activity;
- Investigating reported breaches; and
- Ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.

16.2. Councillors and Officers

16.2.1. Councillors and Officers are responsible for:

- Complying with this Policy;
- Using social media responsibly;
- Protecting Council information; and

16.2.2. Maintaining professional standards of conduct.

17. Breaches of this Policy

- 17.1. Breaches of this Policy by employees may be dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedures.
- 17.2. Breaches of this Policy by Councillors may be considered under the Members' Code of Conduct where the conduct falls within its scope.
- 17.3. The Council reserves the right to remove access to Council social media accounts where misuse occurs.

18. Monitoring and Review

- 18.1. The Council will monitor the effectiveness of this Policy and any associated procedures.
- 18.2. This Policy will be reviewed every five years or sooner where legislative, technological or organisational changes require amendment.

Yeovil Town Council
29th September 2026

To be reviewed: September 2031