

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

A guide for staff and Councillors on using social media to promote the work of Watchet Town Council and in a personal capacity

This policy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, at least once a year. Watchet Town Council will amend this policy, following consultation, where appropriate.

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Introduction

What is social media?

Social media is the term given to web-based tools and applications which enable users to create and share content (words, images and video content), and network with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.

Why do we use social media?

Social media is essential to the success of communicating Watchet Town Council's work. It is important for some staff to participate in social media to engage with our audience, participate in relevant conversations and raise the profile of Watchet Town Council's work.

Why do we need a social media policy?

The difference between a personal and professional opinion can be blurred on social media, particularly if you're discussing issues relating to Watchet Town Council's work. While we encourage the use of social media, we have certain standards, outlined in this policy, which we require everyone to observe. Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary in the public domain.

This policy is intended for all staff members and Councillors of all levels, and any volunteers, and applies to content posted on both a Watchet Town Council device and a personal device. Before engaging in work-related social media activity, staff and Councillors must read this policy.

Setting out the social media policy:

This policy sets out guidelines on how social media should be used to support the delivery and promotion of Watchet Town Council, and the use of social media by staff in both a professional and personal capacity. It sets out what you need to be aware of when interacting in these spaces and is designed to help staff support and expand our official social media channels, while protecting the company and its reputation and preventing any legal issues.

Point of contact for social media:

Our Deputy Clerk and Asset Coordinator are responsible for the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of our social media channels. If you have specific questions about any aspect of these channels, speak to the Deputy Clerk. No other staff member can post content on Watchet Town Council's official channels without the permission of the Clerk or Deputy Clerk.

Which social media channels do we use?

Watchet Town Council uses the following social media channels:

Facebook

- **Watchet Town Council:** <https://www.facebook.com/WatchetTownCIL>
- **Watchet Town Council Wednesday Market:** <https://www.facebook.com/WatchetWednesdayMarket>
- **Watchet Community Centre:** <https://www.facebook.com/watchetcommunitycentre>

Instagram

- **Watchet Town Council Wednesday Market:**
Watchet_town_council_market

Watchet Town Council uses its Facebook and Instagram accounts to share news, engage with its Electorate and promote the work of the Council.

Guidelines

Using Watchet Town Council's social media channels — appropriate conduct:

1. The Deputy Clerk is responsible for setting up and managing Watchet Town Council's social media channels. Only those authorised to do so by the Clerk or Deputy Clerk will have access to these accounts.
2. Responses to comments and messages will be made during working hours Monday-Thursday, 9am-3.15pm.
3. Be an ambassador for Watchet Town Council. Staff should ensure they reflect Watchet Town Council values when posting content on social media channels.
4. Make sure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit for Watchet Town Council, and accurately reflects Watchet Town Council's agreed position.
5. Bring value to our audience(s). Answer their questions, help and engage with them
6. Take care with the presentation of content. Make sure that there are no typos, misspellings or grammatical errors. Also check the quality of images.
7. Always pause and think before posting. That said, reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.
8. If members outside of Office team wish to contribute content for social media, whether non-paid for or paid for advertising, they should speak to the Clerk.
9. Do not post content about its electorate or members of Council without their express permission. If staff or Councillors are sharing information about its electorate or members of Council or third-party organisations, this content should be clearly labelled so our audiences know it has not come directly from Watchet Town Council. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, staff must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using them on social media.
10. Always check facts. Staff and Councillors should not automatically assume that material is accurate and should take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification, for example, by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo manipulation.
11. Be honest. Say what you know to be true or have a good source for. If you've made a mistake, don't be afraid to admit it.
12. Refrain from offering personal opinions via Watchet Town Council's social media accounts, or any other "local group" social media accounts, either directly by commenting or indirectly by 'liking', 'sharing' or 'retweeting'. If you are in doubt about Watchet Town Councils, or your personal position on a particular issue, please speak to the Clerk or Deputy Clerk.
13. It is vital that Watchet Town Council does not encourage others to risk their personal safety or that of others, to gather materials. For example, a video of a stunt.
14. Do not encourage people to break the law to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage. All relevant rights for usage must be obtained before publishing material.
15. Do not set up other Facebook groups or pages, Twitter accounts or any other social media channels on behalf of Watchet Town Council or be admin to any electorate pages that could cause controversy or confusion on position. By having official social media accounts in place, Watchet Town Council can ensure consistency of the brand and focus on building a strong following.
16. Watchet Town Council is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. We have every right to express views on policy, including the policies of parties, but we can't tell people how to vote.
17. If a complaint is made on Watchet Town Council's social media channels, staff should seek advice from the Clerk before responding. If they are not available, then staff should speak to the Deputy Clerk.
18. Sometimes issues can arise on social media which can escalate because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to Council reputation. The nature of social media means that complaints are visible and can escalate quickly. Not acting can be detrimental.

The office staff regularly monitor our social media spaces for mentions of Watchet Town Council so we can catch any issues or problems early.

If staff members or councillors outside of the office staff become aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate, whether on Watchet Town Council's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the Clerk or Deputy Clerk immediately.

Use of personal social media accounts — appropriate conduct:

This policy does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media but instead flags up those areas in which conflicts might arise. Watchet Town Council staff and Councillors are expected to behave appropriately, and in ways that are consistent with Watchet Town Council's values and policies, both online and in real life.

1. Be aware that any information you make public could affect how people perceive Watchet Town Council. You must make it clear when you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of Watchet Town Council. If you are using your personal social media accounts to promote and talk about Watchet Town Council's work, you must use a disclaimer such as: "The views expressed on this site are my own and don't represent Watchet Town Council's positions, policies or opinions."
2. If you have a personal blog or website which indicates in any way that they work at Watchet Town Council should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the Clerk.
3. Staff and Councillors well known in their field by their electorate, must take particular care as personal views published may be misunderstood as expressing Watchet Town Council's view.
4. Use common sense and good judgement. Be aware of your association with Watchet Town Council and ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself to the general public.
5. If a staff member is contacted by the press about their social media posts that relate to Watchet Town Council, they should talk to the Clerk immediately and under no circumstances respond directly.
6. Watchet Town Council is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. When representing Watchet Town Council, staff are expected to hold Watchet Town Council's position of neutrality. Staff or Councillors who are politically active in their spare time need to be clear in separating their personal political identity from Watchet Town Council and understand and avoid potential conflicts of interest.
7. Never use Watchet Town Council's logos or trademarks unless approved to do so. Permission to use logos should be approved by the Clerk.
8. Always protect yourself and Watchet Town Council. Be careful with your privacy online and be cautious when sharing personal information. What you publish is widely accessible and will remain for a long time, so do consider the content carefully. When you are using social media sites at work, it is important that you do so safely.
9. Think about your reputation as well as that of Watchet Town Council. Express your opinions and deal with differences of opinion respectfully. Don't insult people or be disrespectful. Passionate discussions and debates are fine, but you should always be respectful of others and their opinions. Be polite and the first to correct your own mistakes.
10. We encourage staff and Councillors to share tweets and posts that we have issued. When online in a personal capacity, you might also see opportunities to comment on or support Watchet Town Council and the work we do. Where appropriate and using the guidelines within this policy, we encourage staff and Councillors to do this as it provides a human voice and raises our profile. However, if the content is controversial or misrepresented, please highlight this to the Clerk who will respond as appropriate.

Further guidelines

Libel

Libel is when a false written statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published online or in print. Whether staff are posting content on social media as part of their job or in a personal capacity, they should not bring Watchet Town Council into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups.

Copyright law

It is critical that all staff abide by the laws governing copyright, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Never use or adapt someone else's images or written content without permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, is also considered a breach of copyright.

Confidentiality

Any communications that staff or Councillors make in a personal capacity must not breach confidentiality. For example, information meant for internal use only or information that Watchet Town Council is not ready to disclose yet.

Discrimination and harassment

Staff and Councillors should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official Watchet Town Council social media channel or a personal account. For example:

- making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief
- using social media to bully another individual or colleague
- posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content

Use of social media in the recruitment process

Any advertising of vacancies should be done through the Clerk.

There should be no systematic or routine checking of candidate's online social media activities during the recruitment process, as conducting these searches might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics, such as religious beliefs or sexual orientation, played a part in a recruitment decision.

Protection and intervention

The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social networking site itself. Different social networking sites offer different models of interventions in different areas. For more information, refer to the guidance available on the social networking site itself. For example, Facebook. However, if a staff member considers that a person/people is/are at risk of harm, they should report this to the Clerk immediately.

Under 18s and vulnerable people

Young and vulnerable people face risks when using social networking sites. They may be at risk of being bullied, publishing sensitive and personal information on their profiles, or from becoming targets for online grooming.

Where known, when communicating with young people under 18-years-old via social media, Watchet Town Council should ensure the online relationship with Watchet Town Council follows the same rules as the offline 'real-life' relationship. Watchet Town Council should ensure that young people have been made aware of the risks of communicating and sharing information online and given guidance on security/privacy settings as necessary. Please refer to our Safeguarding Policy.

Responsibilities and breach of policy

Everyone is responsible for their own compliance with this policy. Participation in social media on behalf of Watchet Town Council is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect. Any breaches of policy may incur disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the issue. Any member who is unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach this policy, should seek advice from the Clerk.