

POLICY

DIGITAL & SOCIAL MEDIA

What is in the Policy?	This policy outlines the standards we require employees, members, and volunteers to observe when using social and digital media, the circumstances in which we will monitor your use and the action we will take in respect of breaches of this policy.
Date Adopted	Feb 2024
Review Date	Dec 2025

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1. Policy statement

- 1.1 This policy is intended to help employees (including fixed-term and casual employees), volunteers and members of Ware Town Council (the Council) make appropriate decisions about the use of social and digital media.
- 1.2 This policy outlines the responsibilities and standards expected when using social media inside and outside work to ensure that use does not damage the Council, its employees, members, volunteers, partners, or residents.
- 1.3 This policy supplements the Ware Town Council Internet and Email Policy, the Community Engagement Policy, and the Code of Conduct. For the purpose of the Data Protection Act 2018

(the Act), the data controller is Ware Town Council of the Priory, High Street, Ware, Herts SG12 9AL.

2. The scope of the policy

- 2.1. All employees, volunteers and members are expected to always comply with this policy to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council.
- 2.2. Breach of this policy may be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.
- 2.3. This policy applies (but is not limited) to Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Tik Tok, wikis, discussion forums, user communities, blogs, message boards, comments on web articles, websites, forums, and any other personal web space where content is created, manipulated, and shared. There are many more examples of social media than can be listed here as this is a constantly changing area. Employees, volunteers, and members should follow this policy in relation to any social media they use where the Council could be represented via online participation.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

- 3.1. The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 3.2. The Town Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks.
- 3.3. All employees, volunteers and members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Town Clerk or the Chairperson of the HR Sub-Committee.
- 3.4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Town Clerk.

4. Using social media sites in our name

- 4.1. Only the Town Clerk, or other officers delegated by the Town Clerk are permitted to post material on a social media website in the Council's name and on its behalf.
- 4.2. Any new social or digital media accounts set up on behalf of the Council must have first been agreed by the Town Clerk.

5. Using social media

- 5.1. The Council recognises the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about the Council and community. The Council also recognises the importance of employees, volunteers and members joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.
- 5.2. Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the council you must:
 - a) have read and understood this policy and the Council's Internet and Email and Community Engagement Policies; and
 - b) employees and volunteers must have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from the Town Clerk.

6. Personal and professional profiles on social media

- 6.1. Professional communications are those posted through a Ware Town Council account or website.

- 6.2. Personal communications are those made via a private social media or digital account or website.
- 6.3. Where a private account is used which clearly identifies Ware Town Council as your employer (or where you are a member) or your role within the council, it must be made clear that you are not communicating on behalf of the council.
- 6.4. For personal communications, Ware Town Council respects privacy and understands that staff may use social media accounts in their private lives. However, personal communications likely to have a negative impact on professional standards and/or the Council's reputation are considered in this policy. Responsibility applies regardless of the medium being used. All social media communications, including tags and comments that might affect the Council's reputation, whether made either in a private or professional capacity, should be thought through carefully.
- 6.5. If you or the content that you post links you to Ware Town Council, expect that it could be re-published by a third party or media outlet and by proxy, attributed to the council. Private communications that do not refer to the council or your role (either implicitly or explicitly) are outside the scope of this guidance. It is recommended that employees and members have separate social media profiles for their role and their private life.

7. Rules for use of social media

Whenever you are permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, you must adhere to the following general rules:

- 7.1. Do not upload, post, or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- 7.2. Any employee, volunteer or member 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 their Line Manager or the Town Clerk.
- 7.3. Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with your Line Manager or the Town Clerk.
- 7.4. Do not upload, post, or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- 7.5. Copyright laws still apply online. Placing images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g., extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about or seek permission from the copyright holder in advance.
- 7.6. Before you include a link to a third-party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- 7.7. Council social media accounts must not be used at any time for political purposes or political party campaigning.
- 7.8. When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- 7.9. General advice to follow includes;

Be honest and open but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council.

Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations. Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.

Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g., politics and religion.

Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.

7.10 In the context of the business and activities of the Council:

- a) Employees and members must not publish content from meetings which are private or internal (where no members of the public or press are present, or if it is of a confidential nature) or exempt reports (which contain confidential information or matters which are exempt under the provision of the Local Government (Access to Information Act 1985).
- b) Do not use the council's logo, or any other council related material on a personal account or website.

8. Monitoring use of social media websites

8.1. Employees should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for Council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

8.2. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and the Council.

8.3. A serious case of uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link 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 (this list is not exhaustive):

- a) Pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films, and video clips of a sexually explicit nature).
- b) A false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation.
- c) Material which is offensive or obscene, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, members, or our employees.
- d) Confidential information about the Council or anyone else.
- e) Any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the Council).
- f) Material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

9. Relevant legislation for monitoring use

9.1 The Human Rights Act 1998 gives a 'right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence'. The provision is directly enforceable against public sector employers. Case law suggests that employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace.

9.2 The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 covers the extent to which organisations can monitor or record communications at the point at which they enter or are being sent within the employer's telecommunications system. It applies to public and private communication networks.

9.3 The Data Protection Act 1988 covers how information about employees and job applicants can be collected, handled and used.

Any such action will be addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

9.4 Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with our Disciplinary Procedure, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or

managers involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

9.5 If you notice any use of social media by other employees or volunteers in breach of this policy, please report it to the Town Clerk or Chair of the HR Sub-Committee.

9.6 The Council reserves the right to request the removal of any content that is deemed to be in breach of the code of conduct for members.

10. Monitoring and review of this policy

10.1 The Council will review this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

10.2 The Council, via Full Council meetings, will carry out a six monthly review of the effectiveness of the Town Council's social media.

Review Summary

Date	Update
January 2024	Updated
November 2022	Updated and adopted
January 2019	Adopted