

SANDY TOWN COUNCIL

DRAFT SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- 1.1 The widespread availability and use of social networking applications bring opportunities to understand, engage and communicate with our audiences in new ways. It is important that the Council is able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly. However, it is also important to ensure that the Council balance this with its duties to its service users and partners, its legal responsibilities and its reputation.

For example, the Council's use of social networking applications has implications for its duty to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults. There also implications for employees, councillors and the Council as a corporate body.

- 1.2 This policy is intended to help councillors and council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such and provide a framework of good practice.

- 1.3 The purpose of this policy is to ensure:

- that the Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks;
- that the reputation of the Council is not adversely affected;
- that our users are able to clearly distinguish where information provided via social networking applications is legitimately representative of the Council.
- Management of the Council's Facebook site

2. Scope of Policy

- 2.1 This policy covers all individuals working at all levels with the council, including all elected and co-opted councillors, the clerk to the council and all other employees and volunteers. These groups are referred to collectively as 'Council representatives' for brevity.

- 2.2 The requirements of this policy apply to all uses of social networking applications which are used for any Council-related purpose and regardless of whether the applications are hosted corporately or not. They must also be considered where Council representatives are contributing in an official capacity to social networking applications provided by external organisations.

- 2.3 The council has a corporate presence on the web and by use of email, which it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit the parish. Over time the Town Council may add channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these

changes occur this Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

- 2.4 All members and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the council, its services, employees, partners and community.

3. Enforcement

- 3.1 Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Employee Disciplinary Procedure. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments by an employee.

- 3.2 Behaviour required by the members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even when the code does not apply. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when networking or blogging.

- 3.3 Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.

- 3.4 Communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

- 4.1 Social networking applications include, but are not limited to:

- Blogs
- Online discussion forums
- Collaborative spaces
- Media sharing services, for example YouTube
- 'Micro-blogging' applications, for example Twitter.

- 4.2 All Council representatives should bear in mind that information they share through social networking applications, even if they are on private spaces, are still subject to copyright, data protection and Freedom of Information legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and other legislation. They must also operate in line with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

4.3 This policy is based on the Civil Service Code: Principles for Participation Online and advice produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and other sources of good practice.

5. Rules for using Social Media

5.1 Staff and Councillors must not allow their interaction on any website or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves.

5.2 Posts must not contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.

5.3 If staff or councillors blog, tweet or post personally they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the council. If in doubt, they should make it clear they are posting personally, especially when posting on subjects which are the concern of the council.

5.4 All staff and councillors must ensure they use the council facilities appropriately. If using a council-provided website or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Council facilities cannot be used for personal or political blogs.

5.5 When participating in online communication on behalf of the council staff and councillors must;

- Never make false or misleading statements
- Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so.
- Never use language that may be deemed as offensive, relating in particular to sexuality, race, disability, gender, age or religion.

5.6 Discussions and documents which are part of council meetings and are open to the public may be freely referred to in online communications. However e-mail communications, discussions of meetings or parts of meeting which are not open to the public, and any other correspondence or communication should be regarded as confidential unless specifically agreed otherwise.

6. Managing the Council Facebook Page

6.1 The Council will appoint at least three nominated persons as editors and moderators. They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on council pages, ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderators will have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the council's Facebook page if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will be reported to the Clerk for council records.

- 6.2 The Clerk reserves the right to require the removal of content published by Council representatives which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council or put it at risk of legal action.
- 6.2 The Facebook page will be used to;
- Post notices and minutes of meetings
 - Advertise events and activities
 - Post news stories about council activities and decisions
 - Link to appropriate websites
 - Advertise vacancies
 - Share information from partners, i.e CBC, Police, Library
 - Announce new information appropriate to the council
 - Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit, such as sports clubs and community groups
 - Post information about council services
 - Post contact information for the council
 - Post other items as the council sees fit
 - Facebook may be used to support the Town Council website and its information as above.
- 6.3 The site will be checked on a regular basis to ensure security settings are in place. Access passwords for the site will be given to the Clerk and appointed Council editors/moderators only.
- 6.4 The Council will only monitor the page during office work hours and an automatic message will alert any 'posters' to this.
- 6.5 If a matter is raised on the Facebook page which needs further consideration by the council it may be raised at either the public participation session or as an agenda item for consideration by a quorum of councillors. The 'poster' shall be informed via the page or a direct message that this is the case and invited to contact the clerk directly. Any response agreed by council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- 6.6 Reports of any concerns regarding content on the Facebook page should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the moderators and/or council as required.
- 6.7 The use of the Council's logo and other branding elements should be used where appropriate to indicate the Council's support. The logo should not be used on social networking applications which are unrelated to or are not representative of the Council's official position.

