

Pontypool Community Council

Social Media Policy 2022 (based on One Voice Wales' national policy template dated March 2021)

This policy was recommended to the Council by the Policy and Finance Committee which met on 2 March 2022. The Council on 16 March 2022 adopted the Committee's recommendation and adopted the policy. The policy remains in force until amended by the Council.

Introduction

Social media is a blanket term applied to a range of online multimedia tools that are used for creating content and enabling two-way communication. It can be accessed via your smartphone, PC, laptop, tablet or smart TV. All social media accounts are free of charge and can be set up quickly and easily from an Internet page.

Social media has become a powerful and helpful tool for councils, helping them engage with and inform communities, raise awareness of community issues, events or Council initiatives and seek views and receive feedback from citizens.

Social media also has a darker side: online abuse and online bullying ("trolling") have reached record levels and politicians/councillors are often the target of unacceptable, unpleasant and sometimes threatening online abuse, which may be criminal acts.

1. Policy statement

- 1.1. This policy is intended to help employees and elected members make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as social networking websites, forums, message boards, blogs or comments on web-articles, including (but not limited to) Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards the Council requires employees and elected members to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which your use of social media may be monitored and the action that may be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

2. The scope of the policy

- 2.1. All employees and elected members are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council.
- 2.2. Breaches of this policy by employees will be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedures. In serious cases, they may be gross misconduct, leading to summary dismissal.
- 2.3. Breaches of this policy by elected members will be dealt with under the Code of Conduct.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

- 3.1. The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 3.2. The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the Council's work.
- 3.3. All employees and elected members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk or the Chair of the Council.
- 3.4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

4. Using social media sites in the name of the council

- 4.1. The Council's social media sites are registered in the name of Pontypool Community Council and Pontypool Youth. The Clerk is the designated person for administration of the Council's social media sites and maintaining securely all relevant passwords.
- 4.2. In addition to the Clerk, the following persons also have access to post on and maintain the Council's social media sites:
 - i) staff whose work requires them to post on or maintain the Council's social media pages, in consultation with the Clerk
 - ii) the Chair of the Council.

5. 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:

- 5.1 Make all posts as factual as possible. Try to limit opinion or comment.
- 5.2 Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- 5.3 Any employee/elected 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 site should inform the Clerk/Chair.
- 5.4 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 the Clerk/Chair.
- 5.5 Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.
- 5.8. Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council.
- 5.9 You are personally responsible for any content you publish into social media tools.
- 5.10 Don't escalate heated discussions; try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- 5.11 Don't discuss colleagues without their prior approval.

- 5.12 Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion. Remember that, although it is acceptable (for councillors) to make political points or canvass votes via your own social media accounts, this will not be permissible if you are commenting on behalf of the Council.
- 5.13 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.

6. Monitoring use of social media websites

- 6.1. Employees and elected members 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 our Disciplinary Procedures and councillors under the Code of Conduct.
- 6.2. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and/or the Council.
- 6.3. In particular a serious case of uploading, posting or forwarding a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, is likely to gross misconduct/breach of the Code of Conduct (this list is not exhaustive):
 - a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
 - b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
 - c) material which is offensive, obscene, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, its councillors or its 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, whether for you or the organisation); or
 - f) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.Any such action will be addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure/Code of Conduct.
- 6.4. Where evidence of misuse is found, the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation 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 any criminal investigation.
- 6.5. If you consider that any use of social media by other employees/elected members may be in breach of this policy, please report it to the Clerk/Chair in accordance with the Council's Whistle-Blowing Policy.

7. Monitoring and review of this policy

- 7.1. The Council shall be responsible for reviewing this policy every six months to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

NB Further information for elected members, published by the Welsh Local Government Association, on the use of social media can be viewed on the One Voice Wales website:
http://www.onevoicewales.org.uk/OVWeb/good_practicegeneral-8204.aspx