



ALSAGER TOWN COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY



Introduction

It is clear that a social media presence is expected by all companies, schools, groups including Town and Parish Councils. It speeds and broadens the flow of information to the community on all aspects of the Town Council.

This social media policy aims to describe how Alsager Town Council will use social media to improve & expand the way in which it communicates externally, with its local residents, local businesses and the various government agencies both local & central that it deals with.

The policy applies equally to both council members and employees and sits along relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration. The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way as it does to other written or verbal communication.

The Town Council has resolved to have a Facebook and Twitter page alongside its existing website. The Town Council may resolve to add to its channels of communications, and when these changes occur it will update this Social Media Policy to reflect the new arrangement.

Definition of Social Media

The definition of Social Media is:-

websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

Social Media is used to publish on the internet to interact with others. This interaction can be through computers, mobile phones and tablets. The policy covers social media and social networking sites which include but are not limited to:

- Town Council website
- Facebook
- Twitter

All laws, including the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act 2018 that apply to publishing and broadcasting apply to social media i.e. libel, slander, copyright and contempt of court.

Pitfalls

Whilst Social Media is very useful to share information quickly with other people, there can be some pitfalls to be aware of:

- The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world. You do not even need to register in many cases to view the content. Registering is only required should you wish to participate and post to the site.
- Posts can be copied, shared and edited by anyone. There is no guarantee of truth and ill-informed comment is as likely to be found.
- A lot of time can be spent viewing and responding to messages that would outweigh the value gained in the first place.

Purpose of the Policy

Social Media provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantly on a range of subjects relating to the business of the council, providing agendas and minutes, updates and news. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with the younger audience, the business community and hopefully the harder to reach groups.

The Council will make use of the approved social media tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control its use in order to minimise the risks as stated above.

Aims and Objectives

Social Media can be used by the Council as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity.

The aim of this Policy is to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of council-based services through the use of social media.
- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media.
- That Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media.
- That officers operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.
- That the Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected.
- That communication by use of social media is effective, timely, appropriate, useful, engages with a wider audience and utilises cross-promotion of other Council communication tools e.g. website, In Focus

When using social media (including email) town councillors and employees must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Online comment must be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Town Councillors and employees must not:

1. Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
2. Present personal opinions as those of the council
3. Present themselves in a way which might cause embarrassment to the council
4. Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
5. Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
6. Engage in personal attacks, online fights or hostile communications
7. Use an individual's name or address unless given written permission to do so
8. Post any information that infringes the copyright of others
9. Post any information that may be deemed libel
10. Post photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
11. Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
12. Bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
13. Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
14. Conduct any online activity which violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.

Council Approved Types of Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)

Social networks are rapidly growing in popularity and are used by all ages in society. The most popular social networks are web-based, commercial, and not purposely designed for Town Council use. For individuals, social networking sites provide tremendous opportunities for staying in touch with friends and family. For the Town Council these sites provide a modern alternative means to communicate with residents of the Town.

Facebook

The Town Council will operate a Facebook page. A Facebook page is a public profile specifically created for businesses, brands or organisations. Unlike personal profiles, pages do not gain 'friends', people can see what is on the page by 'liking' it. Pages can gain an unlimited number of 'likes'

The page will not allow posts to be made to the page by members of the public.

The page will not allow comments to be made on posts and will be purely to share information.

The page will not be monitored continuously.

Sending a message via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Town Council for official purposes.

Guidance and Management

- Posts will not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, sexually oriented or racially offensive and will not bring the Council into disrepute.
- The page shall not be used to disseminate political views, advertising or publications.
- Activities are restricted to promoting the best interest of the Council, explaining Council policy and presenting the Town in the best possible light.

- The account will be created and managed solely by the Town Council office.
- Administration will be carried out under the direction of the Town Clerk/Assistant Town Clerk.
- The Town Clerk has the final decision regarding any posts, in line with this policy.
- Posts will provide:-
 - ❖ Agendas, Minutes and dates of meetings
 - ❖ information on any decision of the Council or its Committees, in line with the resolution of the Council.
 - ❖ Press releases of the Town Council
 - ❖ Advertisements for vacancies of the Town Council
 - ❖ Official information from partner agencies such as Cheshire East Council, Police, library, health etc.
 - ❖ Information from other town related community groups such as schools, community groups or charities which are not the initiative of a political party or individual Councillor.
 - ❖ Advertisements for events and activities the town council contributes or of potential interest to people who live in, work in or visit Alsager which are not the initiative of a political party or individual Councillor.
- Posts will not be published under the direction of an individual Councillor, group of Councillors or the Chairman.

Twitter

The Town Council will operate a Twitter feed. Twitter is an online news and social networking site where people communicate in short messages called tweets. Tweeting is posting short messages for anyone who follows you on Twitter.

There will be no dialogue engagement through the Twitter feed and will be purely to share information.

Guidance and Management

- Tweets will not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, sexually oriented or racially offensive and will not bring the Council into disrepute.
- Tweets shall not be used to disseminate political views, advertising or publications.
- Activities are restricted to promoting the best interest of the Council, explaining Council policy and presenting the Town in the best possible light.
- The account will be created and managed solely by the Town Council office.
- Administration will be carried out under the direction of the Town Clerk/Assistant Town Clerk.
- The Town Clerk has the final decision regarding any tweets, in line with this policy.
- The account will only follow accounts that are appropriate and have relevance to the organisation or the sector
- Retweets will be relevant to the sector
- Tweets will provide:-
 - ❖ Links to Agendas, Minutes and dates of meetings

- ❖ information on any decision of the Council or its Committees, in line with the resolution of the Council.
- ❖ Links to press releases of the Town Council
- ❖ Links to advertisements for vacancies of the Town Council
- ❖ Official information from partner agencies such as Cheshire East Council, Police, library, health etc.
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- ❖ Advertisements for events and activities the town council contributes or of potential interest to people who live in, work in or visit Alsager which are not the initiative of a political party or individual Councillor.

- Tweets will not be published under the direction of an individual Councillor, group of Councillors or the Chairman.

Chairman of the Council.....

Date.....