



Halewood Town Council

Social Media Policy



SUBJECT: Social Media Policy

APPLICABLE: Elected Members and Town Council Staff

APPROVED BY HALEWOOD TOWN COUNCIL : September 2017

1. POLICY AIMS

- 1.1. The use of social media is now commonplace and Elected Members and Members of Town Council staff may use this facility in either a personal or public manner. It is therefore essential for Elected Members and Town Council staff to understand their role in relating to the use of social media and the importance of the implications associated with its use. In particular, Elected Members and Town Council staff must be mindful of the fact that whenever you are using social media, whatever you write or share, will be stored forever (whether you delete it from your device or not).
- 1.2. This policy has two aims:
 - to help Elected Members and Town Council staff from falling foul of the law and will, if adhered to, help protect them from complaints from the general public or other outside agencies.
 - To safeguard the reputation of the Town Council.

2. WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

- 2.1. Social Media can be described as platforms that allow you to share and consume information across your network and to join, create and participate in groups. They include but are not limited to:
 - Facebook
 - Whatsapp
 - Linkedin
 - Google+
 - Vimeo
 - Twitter
 - Digg
 - Flickr
 - Pinterest

and in relation to this policy equally applies to the use of emails.

3. TOWN COUNCIL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- 3.1. Halewood Town Council uses social media to communicate with residents and recognises and accepts that it provides an opportunity to reach a wider audience than traditional communications channels in a faster and more efficient way.
- 3.2. Halewood Town Council uses social media for a variety of purposes, including:
- To promote the Town Council, it's facilities and events
 - To publicise Town Council meetings
 - To direct residents to the Town Council or other websites for information
 - To direct residents to consultations being carried out by Halewood Town Council or other partners which affect the community of Halewood
 - To advertise job and contract opportunities
 - To publicise elections
- 3.3. In their use of social media in any form it is essential that both Elected Members and Town Council staff are always

PROFESSIONAL

Elected Members and Town Council staff are representatives of Halewood Town Council and an integral part of the way the organisation will be perceived. You must be aware that you may attract media interest, even when you are acting in a purely personal capacity.

Remember nothing you post online is totally private. Proceed with care whether you are participating in a professional or personal capacity and remember:.

BE RESPONSIBLE

In their use of social media, Elected Members and Town Council staff

MUST AT ALL TIMES.

- Be careful before endorsing other people's sites or comments.
- Not criticise individuals or organisations.
- Be mindful of legislation covering libel, defamation, copyright and data protection which apply equally to the online world and therefore not contain content that is knowingly or could be construed as being, unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, obscene, profane, sexually orientated, racially offensive or considered a hate crime.
- Be civil, tasteful and relevant.
- Not contain content obtained from elsewhere, for which the enquirer does not own the copyright.

Elected Members and Town Council staff **MUST NOT AT ANY TIME:**

- Disclose any confidential information relating to the Town Council and/or its Members and staff, other than the contact details published on the Town Council website.
- Use offensive language or post any comments or material that could bring the Town Council into disrepute.

- Share, post or comment on Town Council matters until after any official announcement /statement is made by the Town Manager or Chairperson of the Town Council either verbally or in writing.
- Disclose any information which could be perceived by anyone or any organisation as being defamatory or bringing the Town Council into disrepute.
- Post any links to external sites without checking the content of the site before doing so.
- Share content which is irrelevant or off-topic and must not re-tweet like or share content from elsewhere that could be deemed to be offensive, or which make inappropriate jokes or accusations against others.
- Re-tweet, like or share campaigns or petitions unless they are from a legitimate and authentic source.

BE CREDIBLE

Be accurate, fair and thorough and make sure you are doing the right thing. Be personable and speak to people online in a friendly and co-operative manner.

BE RESPONSIVE

Social media is a two way communication channel. If asked a question, answer it, but ensure the answer is factual. Take care during any discussion and be prepared to end it if you feel it is inappropriate.

Elected Members and Town Council staff must be aware of the Code of Conduct relating to the use of social media which states that even though you may be using a personal facebook or twitter account, as soon as you identify yourself as a member of the Town Council, even though you may use a disclaimer, any complaints will be deemed as a breach of the Code of Conduct which could lead to a criminal offence.

4. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:

- 4.1. Elected Members and Town Council staff and staff must be aware of their responsibilities when using social media and other online technology to ensure that they set a positive example to children and young people for safe and responsible use.
- 4.2. Elected Members and Town Council staff **MUST ALWAYS:**
 - Consider the appropriate use of technology to ensure they are safeguarded from potential allegations or inadvertent misuse
 - Consider the appropriate use through direct or indirect contact i.e. through social networking sites.
 - Consider how an action would look to a third party.

5. NEGATIVE COMMENTS:

- 5.1. The interactive nature of social media means that users are able to comment, ask questions or make observations. It will be inevitable that some of these comments may be negative or critical about the Town Council, its Members or staff.
- 5.2. A judgement must be made about whether or not responding to a negative or critical comment would help resolve an issue or turn it into an online disagreement which could escalate out of control.
- 5.3. Elected Members and Town Council staff **MUST**:
 - Ensure that any reply to negative comments are appropriate.
 - Seek appropriate advice from the Town Manager if they are unsure whether or not to reply to a negative comment.
 - Inform the Town Manager of the Council of any negative comments directed towards the Town Council, its members or staff.
- 5.4. Screenshots must be taken prior to any negative comments being deleted.
- 5.5. Elected Members and Town Council staff **MUST NOT**:
 - Reply to any negative, defamatory or comments of a political nature that could bring the Town Council or it's members into disrepute.

6. PERSONAL USE OF 'OWN' SOCIAL MEDIA:

- 6.1. Halewood Town Council respects the rights of Elected Members and Town Council staff to freedom of expression, private and family life and therefore the intention of this policy is not to interfere with this right. However, the following **MUST BE BORNE IN MIND** in terms of personal use of social media:
- 6.2. Elected Members and Town Council staff **MUST** make it clear when publishing content on line that in any way can be construed as being about Town Council business that they are speaking on their own behalf. They must write in the first person 'I', and use a personal email address.
- 6.3. Elected Members and Town Council staff **MUST** be mindful of the potential dangers of the incorrect use of social media platforms.
- 6.4. If Elected Members and Town Council staff do have private social media accounts and in this respect email addresses also, any information sent *in a personal capacity*, to or from a Halewood Town Council email address, even if it is stated as being personal, can, and is most likely to be, construed as be 'official Halewood Town Council business'.
- 6.5. Halewood Town Council social media (including email addresses) will remain non-political and must therefore not be used for political purposes in any way. Personal social media accounts and email addresses **MUST BE USED**.

7. REPUTATION MANAGEMENT AND INTERPRETATION

- 7.1. The underlying purpose of this policy is to protect the reputation of Halewood Town Council and as such, at all times the interpretation of this Policy will remain with the Members of Halewood Town Council 'in Council'.
- 7.2. All information posted on social media is subject to Freedom of Information legislation as outlined in the Town Council's Publication Scheme.

8. BREACH

- 8.1. Elected Members must be aware that a breach of this policy may result in a breach of the Code of Conduct which could lead to a criminal offence and or disciplinary action.
- 8.2. Town Council staff must be aware that any breach of the Town Council's Social Media Policy may result in disciplinary action as outlined in the Disciplinary Policy.

9. SUMMARY

- 9.1. The simple rule for Elected Members and Town Council staff to keep in mind when using social media is;

- **never to post anything that you would be unhappy to see printed or repeated elsewhere, and**
- **if in doubt.....don't!**

10. POLICY REVIEW

Last Review Date	November 2025
Next Review Date	May 2027
Review Cycle	2-yearly

RELATED POLICIES:

- Disciplinary Policy
- Members Code of Conduct
- Press and Media Relations Policy 34