



## **Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy.**

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Town Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Council has a website, Facebook page, and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

The Council's Facebook pages intend to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Town and promote our community positively.

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information.
- If it is official Council business it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Clerk to the Council;
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page or Twitter site for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

Social Media and the website is managed solely by the Town Council Office. No council member will have access to the administration of the social media accounts and website.

While the private accounts of employees and Councillors are their own business, the content posted on them must not affect their professional standing and/or that of the Council.

Members and Officers should not include any reference to, or post comments about, the council, job roles, colleagues. If however references to your employment or connection with the council are made on a personal social media profile, Members and Officers should ensure the following actions are followed:

- Declare somewhere on your page or biography that the views expressed are yours alone
- Do not bring the authority into disrepute
- Do not reveal any potentially confidential or sensitive information about the authority that you may have come across in your work or role for the Council.
- Do not use any council-owned images or logos
- Do not include contact details or photographs of service users or staff.
- Do not make offensive comments about the authority, members, officers, colleagues or members of the public as this is a disciplinary offence

Town Councillors may wish to share posts from the Official Town Council page to community group pages.

The site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.

Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the council's Clerk and/or members of the council by emailing.

We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements.
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page. The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

### **Town Council Website.**

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have and maintain a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The local group would be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Council's 'rules and expectation' for the web site. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local

group's information from the web site if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website. Where content on the website is maintained by a local group it should be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Council.

#### **Town Council email.**

All employees and Councillors have their own email addresses. The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate. The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with members of public in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

E-mails from Councillors to external parties must use the [horsforthtowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:horsforthtowncouncil.gov.uk) address and must be copied to the Clerk

Under the General Data Protection Regulation passing off is not permitted - any email forwarded by the office, should then not be passed off or forwarded to a third party. It has to stay within the circle of the 'data controller' the council as a whole. If you would like to forward the content of the email to a third party, and you consider it safe to do so, please rewrite the email ensuring that there are no named data subjects and no data subject email addresses showing. Members should also be careful to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option so that passing off does not take place.

#### **SMS (texting).**

Members and the Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messages.

#### **Video Conferencing**

If this medium is used to communicate, please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

#### **Internal communication and access to information within the Council.**

The Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of social media and electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the Council. As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation). Members should also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

## **Town Council Correspondence**

The point of contact for the Town Council is the Clerk, and it is to the Clerk that all correspondence for the Town Council should be addressed.

The Clerk should deal with all correspondence following a meeting.

No individual Councillor or Officer should be the sole custodian of any correspondence or information in the name of the Town Council, a committee, sub-committee or working party. In particular, Councillors and Officers do not have a right to obtain confidential information/documentation unless they can demonstrate a 'need to know'.

All official correspondence should be sent by the Clerk in the name of the Council using Council letter headed paper.

## **Communications with the Public and Press**

Councillors and employees must follow the Media and Press Policy when dealing with the press.

Unless a Councillor is absolutely certain that he/she is reporting on an adopted policy of the Council, they must make it clear to members of the public that they are expressing a personal view.

If Councillors receive a complaint from a member of the public, this should be dealt with under the Council's adopted complaints procedure, or via a Council agenda item.

## **Communications with Town Council Staff**

Councillors must not give instructions to any member of staff, unless authorised to do so by delegated powers from the Council.

No individual Councillor, regardless of whether or not they are the Chair of the Council, the Chair of a committee or other meeting, or are styled "Leader" of the Council, may give instructions to the Clerk or to another employee which are inconsistent or conflict with Council decisions or arrangements for delegated power.

Telephone calls should be appropriate to the work of the Town Council.

E-mails:

- Instant replies should not be expected; reasons for urgency should be stated
- Information to Councillors should normally be directed via the Clerk
- E-mails from Councillors to external parties must use the [horsforthtowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:horsforthtowncouncil.gov.uk) address and must be copied to the Clerk
- Councillors should acknowledge their e-mails when requested to do so

Meetings with the Clerk:

- Councillors should be clear that the matter is legitimate Council business and not matters driven by personal or political agendas.

Adopted: 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023

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