



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to guide both Councillors and Officers of the Council in their relations with the Press and Media, in such a way as to ensure the smooth running of the Council.

This policy does not seek to be either prescriptive or comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the Press and Media.

Above everything else, a Councillor must observe Andover Town Council's Code of Conduct whenever he/she conducts the business of the authority, conducts the business of the office to which he/she has been elected/appointed or acts as a representative of the authority.

TOWN CLERK AND OFFICERS OF THE COUNCIL

The Town Clerk as the Proper Officer of the Council is authorised to receive all communications from the Press and Media and to issue Press Statements on behalf of the Council. In the absence of the Town Clerk, media communications will be handled by the Community Officer. In the absence of both of these officers, enquirers will be referred to the Town Mayor who will act as the spokesperson for the purposes of this element of the policy. All communications made by the Town Clerk will relate to the stated business and day to day management of the activities or adopted policy of the Council. He/She is not expected or authorised to speculate on matters that have not been considered by the Council. Where such questions are put to the Town Clerk she should refer the enquirer to the Mayor or a Committee Chairman as considered appropriate.

No other officer of the Council, unless authorised by the Town Clerk, is permitted to speak or communicate with the Press and Media on any matter affecting the Council or its business.

MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

A Councillor must not disclose information that is of a confidential nature. This includes any discussion with the press on any matter which has been discussed under confidential items on Council or Committee agendas or at any other private briefing.

A Councillor should not raise matters relating to the conduct or capability of an Officer at meetings held in public, ~~or~~ before the press or on any form of social media platform.

DEALING WITH THE PRESS

When dealing with the Press verbally, members and officers should be aware of the following: A Councillor should act with integrity at all times when representing or acting on behalf of Andover Town Council

When speaking or providing written material to the Press and Media, Members should make clear the capacity, in which they are providing the information. For example: -



Using the prefix “Councillor” when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy, make sure you include a statement that you are making a statement as an individual and NOT on behalf of the Town Council itself.

A copy of any written material sent to the Press and Media by a Member, as representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Town Clerk.

Take particular care if the press or media approach you for comment on a controversial subject, and do not be led into stating something you did not really mean to say. If unsure about any particular policy, simply state “no comment” and ask the press to contact the Council Offices.

Councillors should be aware that case law states that the role of Councillor overrides the rights to act as an individual. This means that Councillors should be careful about expressing individual views to the press or media, whether or not they relate to matters of Council business. Councillors also have an obligation to respect Council policy once made and whilst it may be legitimate for a Councillor to make clear that he or she disagreed with policy and voted against it (if this took place in an open session), they should not seek to undermine a decision through the press.

Be informed and certain of all your facts;

Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Town Council that you are aware what Council Policy is and that your comments reflect that policy.

Be calm;

Ensure that your comments and views will not bring the Council, its Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libelous nor slanderous.

- as Mayor
- as Chairman of a Committee
- as an individual (i.e. letter to press for publication)

Issues to be Aware of;

Councillors and officers not used to dealing with the press may be surprised when they see that statements made in all innocence look very different in print than they did when they were spoken. It is advantageous to write out a statement or position beforehand.

MEETINGS OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES

Copies of Agendas, Minutes and Reports sent to Members for meetings of the Council or its Committees will be e-mailed to the Press and Media.

Facilities will be provided at meetings for the Press to take notes of the proceedings.

As provided in the Council’s Standing Orders both the Press and Public may be excluded from a meeting whilst certain confidential matters (as provided for in the relevant legislation) are under discussion.

[Note: The Town Council as a Parish Council is governed by the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act, 1960.]



PRESS RELEASES

The Town Clerk, in consultation with the Town Mayor, is also authorised to publish press releases on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a council meeting. This document has been prepared as a guidance note for officers and elected members. It represents the policy of the Council in respect of its relationships with the Press and Media. The policy has been prepared to ensure consistency in the Council's dealing with the Press and Media and details who is authorised to speak on behalf of the Council. It has been drafted to ensure that the views and policy of the Council are presented accurately. In providing information to the Press and Media, Members and Officers representing the Council will abide by the "Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity" published by the Department for Communities & Local Government. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1878324.pdf> The overriding principle of this policy is that all elements of the Press and Media will be treated equally.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Introduction

1. This section relates to the creation and management of ~~Facebook and Twitter~~ all Social Media accounts by the Andover Town Council.
2. The aim of this policy is to set down rules and regulations to ensure the proper use of such accounts.
3. The aim of the work effort here is to use ~~the Facebook and Twitter~~ Social Media accounts to interact in a stronger way with the residents and to use it to advertise events and other projects of the Town Council/community.

Management

1. Town Council social media will be created and managed solely by the Town Council Office. ~~A Currently a Facebook page, and Twitter~~ and Next Door account ~~will have been~~ created for the Town Council. No council member will have access to the administration of social media accounts.
2. The accounts will be set up using the ~~info@andovertc.co.uk~~ office@andovertc.co.uk or other office email address as necessary.
3. Only information regarding the Town Council will be entered. Other events taking place in the town or its environs may be promoted.
4. The accounts will only link to pages of a local government organisation or organisations/causes relating to the town.
5. No religious or political views will be expressed.
6. "Friends" will not be allowed to post new topics to the Facebook "wall". However, friends will be able to comment on topics created by the Town Council where

appropriate-

7. Posts on the Facebook page will be available for all users of Facebook to see.
8. The Town Council's logo will be the profile picture for everyone to see.
9. Photo Albums will be open for everyone to view.
10. Photographs uploaded will not have a direct view of any child's face without the prior consent of their guardian.
11. The accounts will be maintained by the office staff who will remove messages which include:
 - a. Abusive language content.
 - b. Which may cause offence to a specific group of people e.g. comments on a person's sexuality, sexist comments, racial comments etc.
 - c. Which contain potential libellous comments.
 - d. Any other comment which may cause offence in any way.
12. If any matters raised are relevant and need to be discussed by the Town Council then further information will be sought and brought to the relevant council meeting/committee.
13. Event dates will be created for any Town Council event taking place.
14. Other events taking place in the town may be promoted.
15. People will be encouraged to be "friends" of and "follow" the Town Council.
16. If "friends" or "followers" are repeatedly abusing the Town Council's accounts then they will be removed from the friends/followers list and unable to post to the accounts. Instances which would involve removal include repeated:
 - a. Posting with abusive language content.
 - b. Posting comments which may cause offence to a specific group of people e.g. comments of a person's sexuality, sexist comments, racial comments etc.
 - c. Posting potential libellous comments.
 - d. Any other comment which may cause offence in any way.
17. The account will not be used for playing games, adding applications, or anything of a personal nature. Contravention of this rule could result in disciplinary procedures.
18. Private messages will be sent in response to anyone sending an initial private message to the Town Council accounts. If a "simple" response does not satisfy the enquiry then the person will be asked to email the Council with the request for comment and the office email will be provided. Any posts by "friends"/"followers" raising issues/questions/comments that cannot be answered "simply" will be dealt with separately via email. The Town Council email address will be provided.



Code of Practice for Social Media use (not Andover Town Council official platforms)

When using social media, Councillors and staff 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.

Councillors and staff should not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face.

When participating in online communication, Councillors and staff must:

- Be responsible and respectful, ensuring posts are positive, informative and balanced
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud' i.e. use sentence case format and not write in capital letters or red to emphasise points
- Seek permission to publish original photos or videos (posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence so Councillors and staff must ensure any information does not infringe copyright).
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council, and never hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.
- Spell and grammar check everything

Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- Give out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers.
- Use an individual's name in social media communications or post information about an individual unless given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation)
- Present personal opinions as that of Andover Town Council. If a Councillor or member of staff blogs, tweets or communicates online personally, and not in the role as a Councillor or member of council staff, they must not claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council i.e. they should not include web links to official Council websites, Council logos, Council email addresses or any other Council identification as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council; they must protect the good reputation of the Council
- Make false or misleading statements
- Post personal or political content, content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the



council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks

- Make derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive comments about any person including council staff, councillors, the council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment. Language that may be deemed offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights, hostile communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action)
- Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence)
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence
- Bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity

Councillors views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Predetermination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Town Clerk for referral to the moderator(s) and/or the Council as required.

Changes

1. This policy will be a living document and can be altered by the Town Council Office Staff, if necessary, to allow immediate action should the unexpected arise. This will be key to overcome teething problems that have not already been identified. Changes to the policy will be highlighted at the next Town Council meeting to keep members abreast of the changes for their approval. This policy will be kept under review by the Town Council.

POLICIES OR PROCESSES TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH THIS DOCUMENT

<u>Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act, 1960</u>	
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<p><u>Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity” published by the Department for Communities & Local Government.</u> <u>http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1878324.pdf</u></p>	
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FURTHER ASSISTANCE

For details of our full Privacy Policy, please refer to www.andover-tc.gov.uk.
Alternatively, you may write to us at Andover Town Council, 38 Chantry Way, Chantry House, Andover, Hampshire, SP10 1LS.

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