



ILMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL
Social Media Policy
Approved 16 July 2024
To be reviewed July 2028

Introduction

This policy details how Ilminster Town Council will use social media to improve and expand the ways in which it communicates. This policy applies to the use of all social media by any councillors and employees of Ilminster Town Council.

Social media is a term commonly given to websites, online tools and other Information Communication Technologies (ICT) which allow users to interact with each other in some electronic manner – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks, encouraging participation and engagement. This protocol will also apply to any new or emerging technologies or systems which may develop in the future.

It is a key communications tool for Ilminster Town Council and highlights a commitment to reflect on the organisation. It enables better and more direct contact between Ilminster Town Council and the residents, visitors and businesses it serves, and the community groups and agencies it works and liaises with. It provides an alternative channel to written correspondence, telephone and face to face conversation to enable the Town Council to inform and respond to questions and queries raised.

Ilminster Town Council has a corporate presence on the web and uses email to communicate alongside traditional communication methods. 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.

Social Media Criteria

All social media communications from Ilminster Town Council will:

- Accord with the Ilminster Town Council's Civility and Respect Policy; be civil, respectful and relevant
- Be human - approachable in language and tone and not overly formal
- Be engaging - responding to questions and talking back when we can move the conversation on or help
- Be professional as we are representing Ilminster Town Council
- Attribute and acknowledge the source of any material we share
- Not try to control conversations amongst residents, only contribute to it
- Create sharable and engaging content to contribute to the conversation and be heard.
- Identify who we want to engage with, why and how
- Not be in conflict with any Town Council policy
- Not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, offensive or discriminatory
- Not contain content copied from elsewhere for which it does not own the copyright, unless with permission
- Accord with GDPR requirements, and not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details, unless with

- permission
- Treat all information received via online channels confidentially, securely and sensitively.
- Will not be used for the dissemination of any party political material

Designated officers approved by the Town Clerk are responsible for approving and arranging publication of content to the websites and social media channels.

Officers may set up accounts on new Social Media medium should they feel that the council's use of it will benefit the community. Any new accounts will be Ownership and Management of the Town Council in accord with this policy.

Moderation

Iminster Town Council is under no obligation to moderate posts or comments made by the public on its social media channels. However, the council must not be seen to be endorsing comments which are defamatory, false or misleading; insulting, threatening or abusive; obscene or of a sexual nature; offensive, racist, sexist, homophobic or discriminatory against religions or other groups; promoting illegal activity; or intended to deceive. Such posts to Iminster Town Council's social media pages will be removed.

The ability for the public to respond to posts on the Town council's social media account will normally be turned off. The posts are there for information purposes and unless specifically designed to garner the community's opinion the ability to respond will not be available. Post put up should always allow an opportunity for further information to be obtained from the Council offices if required. Office contact details will be made available on what ever medium is being posted to.

Posts will frequently be shared to other pages and sites. When this occurs people will inevitably have an opportunity to post their own thoughts and opinions. Negative posts cannot be avoided, but how they are dealt with has implications for the Council's reputation.

Sharing information

Iminster Town Council will share third party information or comments that mention the Council where this is considered to be of community value, provided it accords with the criteria above. All social media channels will make clear that content posted by third parties is not the direct responsibility of the Town Council.

Website

The Council's website is an integral part of the Town Council. Its purpose is to inform and communicate with the community - residents, visitors, community/voluntary groups, businesses, other service providers and councils. The Council aims to ensure that all information on the websites is up to date and relevant. Websites will not include content affiliated to, or promoting any political

organisation, or commercial advertisements (except where advertising revenue is obtained or there is an overriding community benefit).

Personal Social Media Accounts

While the private accounts of Town Council employees and councillors are their own business, it is still possible for the content posted on them to affect their professional standing and/or that of the Council. To mitigate this risk members/officers may not wish to include any reference to, or post comments about, the Council, job roles, colleagues, or partner organisations. If, however references to your employment or connection with the council are made on a personal social media profile, please ensure the following actions:

- 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.

APPENDIX A - Social media policy - Do's and don'ts template from the Local Government Association. This policy has been developed following a survey of over 120 local government councillors and officers up and down the country. It is intended to open the door to social media use in your local authority rather than block it. If you stick to this one simple rule you won't go too far wrong: **Don't post any message on social media that you wouldn't happily say in a public meeting.**

LGA Policy template: Do's and don'ts at a glance

Do

- talk to residents, staff and others. And do answer their questions (quickly and honestly)
- trust your teams and staff to use social media
- be responsible and respectful; at all times
- innovate – different approaches work for different people
- have a personality – corporate speak or just issuing press releases won't work well on social media
- share other people's helpful content and links
- credit other people's work, ideas and links
- listen (social media is designed to be a two-way channel, just like any good conversation)
- ask your own questions. Seek feedback from your residents (but make sure you share the results with them)
- have a rota where appropriate – share the load and you'll get more from your accounts
- adhere to your existing HR policies – you don't need a separate HR policy especially for social media
- and more than anything, do use social media in the spirit in which it was intended – to engage, openly and honestly.

Don't

- broadcast or talk at people. Your residents will soon spot broadcasts and respond accordingly
- block social media – social media is not a risk, blocking its use is a risk
- try to cover up mistakes, be honest and you'll get more respect for it in the long run
- build accounts and just hope people will come – sometimes it is best to go to the places where your audiences are already having conversations
- assume that social media will look after itself – you will need to invest time, enthusiasm and energy to make it work. And don't leave your accounts unattended for long spells
- post content which will embarrass your council or yourself
- ignore legal advice, it's there to help you
- think that a disclaimer in your bio will save you from potential legal action, it won't

- expect your staff to make do with old technology which can be a barrier to effective working
- forget that social media is 24/7 – just because you leave at 5.00 pm doesn't mean the world stops or that residents won't be active. If your account is only staffed 9-5 then you should say so on your profile