



INTERNET USE, SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY

Date Passed by Council :- 28.02.24

Review Date :- 01.06.26 or as soon after

1. Introduction

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables Llandeilo Town Council (LTC) to improve communications both within the Council and between it and the people and communities it serves.

The Council has a website, Facebook page and Instagram account and uses email to communicate; the Council will always try to use the most effective medium 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.

It is important that LTC implements a clear and unambiguous policy in relation to the use of all of its various electronic and digital communication media for all users including members of staff, Councillors and members of the public.

1.1 The scope of the policy

All employees and elected members are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council.

A breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct which can lead to dismissal. A breach of this policy by elected members may be dealt with under the Code of Conduct.

1.2 Responsibility for implementation of the policy

The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy. The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the work of the Council. All employees and elected members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy.

Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk and any questions regarding the content or its application should be directed to the Clerk.

2. INTERNET USE

2.1 Purpose

This section governs the Council's approach to managing the internet facilities, ensuring the best interests of both the staff and the Council are upheld. Internet use refers to the use of the internet from any of the Council's computers and/or network.

2.2 Policy statements

The Council's internet facilities will be used in accordance with:

- a. This policy and related guidelines;
- b. All relevant and related policies of Llandeilo Town Council;
- c. All appropriate legislation – including but not limited to the Computer Misuse Act 1990, the Data Protection Act 1998, the General Data Protection Regulation and the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act.

2.3 Responsibilities

The Council will provide staff with education and training to support compliance with this policy.

All officers will be responsible for implementing the policy within their areas of responsibility.

All permanent employees, contractors and temporary staff provided with internet access will signify their acceptance of the policy.

2.4 Internet Use Principles

- a. The use of the Council's internet facilities indicates acceptance of the policy;
- b. The Council offers a payment for internet access to assist employees in the performance of their jobs. Whilst its use should be primarily for official Council business, incidental and occasional personal use of the internet is permitted, on the understanding that:
 - i. Personal use of the internet will never impact the normal business traffic flow
 - ii. Personal use will be limited to those times outside working hours for example lunch times

- c. The Council reserves the right to filter content and block access to websites deemed unsuitable;
- d. The Council reserves the right to block downloads of files from the internet based on their type or content;
- e. No employee, consultant or contractor will attempt to access or transmit content that in any way may be interpreted as insulting, disruptive or offensive or which may be harmful. Examples of prohibited material include but are not limited to:
 - i. Sexually explicit messages, images, cartoons, jokes or movie files
 - ii. Profanity, obscenity, slander, or libel
 - iii. Ethnic, religious, or racial slurs
 - iv. Any content that could be construed as harassment or disparagement of others based on their race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, language, disability, religion, age, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, parental status, marital status or political beliefs
- f. No employee, consultant or contractor will attempt to break through any security controls whether on the Council's systems or any other systems;
- g. No employee, consultant or contractor will attempt to download or transmit any computer virus, spyware or other malicious code using the Council's equipment or Internet link;
- h. All users must ensure compliance with all relevant legislation;
- i. All users must maintain virus awareness. Users of laptops are responsible for ensuring their virus definitions are maintained on a regular basis;
- j. Internet use must not be for personal financial gain, for example you may not conduct your own business using the Council's facilities;
- k. The user logged in at a computer will be considered to be responsible for all sites visited; therefore users must remain vigilant and log off or lock their computers when away from their desks;
- l. Users must not subscribe to email lists which are not relevant to their job function. The volumes of messages that can be generated are high and the content may be dubious resulting in conflict with the conditions stated above.

2.5 Internet monitoring

The use of the Council's internet facilities will be monitored and any breaches of policy may result in disciplinary action being taken.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a blanket term applied to a range of online multimedia platforms and tools that are used for creating content and two way communication.

3.1 Policy statement

This section outlines the standards the Council requires employees and elected members to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the use of social media will be monitored and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy. This is intended to help employees and elected members make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as social networking websites, message boards, blogs or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

3.2 Using social media sites in the name of the council

Nominated and trained members of staff are permitted to post material on a social media website in the name of the Council and on its behalf in accordance with the rules and scope of this policy.

If you are not sure if your comments are appropriate do not post them until you have checked with the Clerk of the Council.

3.3 Using social media

The Council recognises the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about the Council and the support and services it provides to the community. It also recognises the importance of our employees and elected members joining in and helping shape community conversation and direction through interaction in social media.

Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the Council you must have read and understood this policy and must have gained prior written approval to do so from the Clerk.

3.4 Rules for the use of social media

The use of social media must adhere to the following general rules:

- a.** Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content;
- b.** Any employee/elected member who feel that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform the Clerk of the Council;
- c.** Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Clerk;
- d.** Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent;
- e.** Before you include a link to a third-party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it;
- f.** When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use;
- g.** Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council;
- h.** You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media; i. Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations;
- j.** Don't discuss colleagues;

- k. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g., politics and religion. Remember that although it is acceptable to make political points or canvass votes via your own social media accounts this will not be permissible if you are commenting on behalf of the Council;
- l. Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.
- m. All social media posting must be in English and Welsh, across all platforms. This may not be possible when sharing third party content.

3.5 Monitoring the use of social media websites

Employees and elected members should be aware that any use of social media websites will be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under our Disciplinary Procedure and Councillors under the Code of Conduct. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and the Council. In particular a serious case of uploading, posting, forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct/breach of the Code of Conduct (this list is not exhaustive):

- a. pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
- b. a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
- c. material which is offensive, obscene, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council our councillors or our employees;
- d. confidential information about the council or anyone else;
- e. any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, whether for you or the organisation); or
- f. material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Where evidence of misuse is found the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

3.6 Messages Received by the Council via Social Media

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. Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders may be blocked. The Council may post a statement that *'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'*.

4. USE OF EMAIL

All council officers have their own council email addresses.

Each officer monitors these emails during their specific working hours, which vary as per their contract. The Clerk will aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as possible. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

Officers are responsible for dealing with all email received and passing on any relevant mail to Members or external agencies for information and/or action as appropriate.

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).

Users should also be careful only to copy/cc essential recipients on emails i.e. 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.

No personal information about other people or groups outside of the Council should be passed on to other people and this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

5. SMS / WhatsApp/ Private email (Non-corporate communication channels (NCCC)

Members and officers may use NCCC as a convenient way to communicate at times. All are reminded that this policy also applies to such messaging formats.

Guidelines below:-

- Councillors should only use official SMS or WhatsApp LTC Groups for Council business such as Agendas, Meeting reminders, Meeting information, Council specific enquiries
- Matters raised or discussed must be within the interest of Llandeilo Town Council
- Code of Conduct applies to all forms of communication including Text and WhatsApp
- If a matter requires formal discussion, this should be done via appropriate channels such as official emails or if a resolution is required, a Council Meeting
- If unsure regarding any specific point, contact the Clerk. If the Clerk is unavailable, it must be passed by the Chair

6. Video Conferencing e.g. Skype, Zoom, Teams

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

7. Monitoring and Review of this Policy

The Council shall be responsible for reviewing this policy to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

8. Compliance Measurement

Compliance with this Internet Use, Social Media and Electronic Communications Policy is mandatory. Breaches of this policy by staff may lead to disciplinary action being taken. Breaches by Members may be reported to the Monitoring Officer.

9. Ensuring Equality of Treatment

This policy must be applied consistently to all irrespective of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, language, disability, religion, age, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, parental or marital status.