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Social Media Policy

The widespread availability and use of social networking applications bring opportunities to understand engage and communicate with our audiences in new ways. It is important that the Council is able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly; however it is also important that the Council balances this with its duties to its service users and partners, its legal responsibilities and its reputation. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that:

- **the Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks;**
- **that the reputation of the Council is not adversely affected;**
- **that our users are able to clearly distinguish where information provided via social networking applications is legitimately representative of the Council.**

1. Policy statement

1.1. This policy is intended to help employees including clerks, RFOs, Executive Officers, part-time, fixed-term and casual employees (collectively referred to as employees in this policy), volunteers and members make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles. This includes Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn and other similar sites - this list is by no means exhaustive

1.2. This policy outlines the standards we require employees, members and volunteers to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which we will monitor your use of social media and the action we will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

1.3. This policy supplements our Internet and Email Policy.

2. The scope of the policy

2.1. All employees, volunteers and members are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of our council.

2.2. Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

3.1. The council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.

3.2. The Town Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.

3.3. All employees, volunteers and members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Town Clerk.

3.4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Town Clerk.

4. Using social media sites in our name

4.1. Only the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk and the Climate and Ecological Emergency Resilience Officer are permitted to post material on a social media website in the council's name and on our behalf.

5. Members using their own social media account profiles

5.1 Members, if using their own social media account profiles, must ensure that they are either speaking in a personal capacity or simply providing details of works undertaken or policies agreed by Exmouth Town Council and not speaking on behalf of the Council.

6. Using social media

6.1. We recognise the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about our Council and community. We also recognise the importance of our employees, volunteers and members joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.

6.2. Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the Council you must:

a) have read and understood this policy; and

b) members, employees and volunteers must have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from the Town Clerk.

7. Rules for use of social media

Whenever you are permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, you must adhere to the following general rules:

7.1. All contributions to social media should be professional and uphold the reputation of the Council.

7.2. Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.

7.3. Any employee, volunteer or member who feels 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 Town Clerk.

7.4. 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 Town Clerk.

7.5. Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.

7.6. 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.

7.7. When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.

7.8. Be honest and open but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.

7.9. You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.

7.10. Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.

7.11. Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.

7.12. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
7.13. 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.

8. Monitoring use of social media websites

8.1. Employees should be aware that any use of social media sites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under our Disciplinary Procedure.

8.2. Misuse of social media sites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us.

8.3. 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 (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
d) criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the council, members, or our employees;
e) confidential information about the council or anyone else
f) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the council); or
g) material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Any such action will be addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

8.4. Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with our Disciplinary Procedure, 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.

8.5. If you notice any use of social media by other members, employees or volunteers in breach of this policy please report it to the Town Clerk.

9. Monitoring and review of this policy

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

Reaffirmed 18th May 2026
Review date: May 2027