



## **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, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, WhatsApp accounts and uses mail chimp and 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 Facebook pages, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube accounts 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 Town Clerk & Business Manager;

- 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 the public 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, Twitter site, Instagram, or LinkedIn for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products, other than items authorised by the council to sell/advertise such as memorabilia, Wednesday/Continental Market to name a few.

The sites are 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, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, or mail chimp 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.

### **Town Council email**

The Town Council email address is ([enquiries@royalwoottonbasset.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@royalwoottonbasset.gov.uk)). 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 Town Clerk & Business Manager and staff are responsible for dealing with emails received and passing on any relevant mail to members, relevant staff, or external agencies for information and/or action. Most communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Town Clerk & Business Manager, and/or otherwise will generally be copied to the Town Clerk &

Business Manager. For all new emails requiring data to be passed on, there will be implied consent to allow the council to act on this correspondence to ensure we can investigate and resolve the issue, with our partner organisations and groups. However personal information will be not shared or provided to any other third party without consent.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views, if appropriate, copy to the Town Clerk & Business Manager. NB any emails copied to the Town Clerk & Business Manager become official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.

These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

### **SMS (texting)**

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

### **Video Conferencing e.g. Skype**

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.

### **Civility & Respect**

A recent campaign the Council signed up to on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2022, focuses on civility and respect issues experienced by Councils. Appendix 1, attached to this policy, outlines the council's rules of engagement with external parties and members of the public when engaging via social media.

The Social Media Civility & Respect Guide and Policy Supplement Version 1.0 (8<sup>th</sup> November 2022) produced by Breakthrough Communications for the Civility & Respect project provides a framework that empowers the Council to take a proactive approach to social media. It offers advice and guidance to Councillors and staff and can be used in conjunction with this policy.

Adopted by Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council:  
Date Review: December 2024

Address: 117 High Street, Royal Wootton Bassett, Swindon, Wiltshire SN4 7AU  
Email: [enquiries@royalwoottonbassett.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@royalwoottonbassett.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 01793 850222

# Appendix 1: Social Media Policy Supplement - Civility and Respect

## 1. Engaging with the council on social media

1.2 The council encourages members of the public, local organisations and community groups, members of the press, local councillors, and others in our wider community to follow and engage with the council through its social media accounts.

1.3 We also encourage everyone in our community to share content from our corporate social media accounts with their own social media networks. This is especially important, for example, during emergency situations or where sharing timely information is essential.

1.4 Councillors may choose to engage with the community on their own 'councillor' social media accounts.

1.4 Individuals and organisations are responsible for the content that they choose to post to their social media accounts. This includes content created by others that individuals or organisations choose to repost, retweet or share.

## 2. Conduct on social media

2.1 The Council will treat everyone with courtesy and respect on its social media channels, and we therefore ask for the same in return from those who choose to engage with us.

2.2 We ask that council staff and councillors are treated courteously. Council staff and councillors should never be subjected to bullying or other forms of abuse or harassment.

2.3 Council staff and councillors have the right to carry out their civic duties and work without fear of being attacked or abused. Any behaviour whether that be verbal, physical or in writing, which causes either councillors or council staff to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or threatened, is unacceptable.

### 3. Reporting a civility and respect-related issue

3.1 Council staff and others operating the Council's social media accounts will at all times be mindful of the council's relevant policies, procedures, and processes, including the Code of Conduct.

3.2 The council will record, and report abuse directed at the Council. The Council may, for example, create screenshots of comments and keep a record of abusive or threatening communications, and may take further action as appropriate.

3.3 Council staff and councillors should not have to put up with abusive or threatening behaviour. When subjected to such behaviour. The council reserves the right to enact its relevant social media policies and may, for example, delete content, block individuals or report individuals to social media platforms when appropriate to do so.

3.4 The Council may need to report issues of poor conduct directly to social media platforms. For instance, if someone has created a 'fake account' or if someone is persistently abusive to the Council.

3.5 The Council reserves the right to report criminal matters it notices on social media to the Police. For instance, hate crime/speech or threats of violence.

3.6 Please get in touch with the Council if you feel that a councillor, member of staff, or a user of our social media has failed to act in a civil and respectful way on our social media.

3.7 You can contact **Mark Hopkins** the **Town Clerk & Business Manager** in the following ways:

- **Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council, 117 High Street, Royal Wootton Bassett, Swindon, Wiltshire SN4 7AU**
- **01793 850222**
- **enquiries@royalwoottonbassett.gov.uk**