

Upton upon Severn Town Council Social Media Policy for Councillors

1. What is social media

Social media is regarded as platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, blogs etc. There are lots of different types of social media and changes all the time, so this is not intended to be an exclusive list.

2. Purpose

Social media can be an effective way for Councillors to interact with residents and support local democracy. Used effectively, you can engage and use social media as a two way communication tool. That said, it is felt that some additional guidance is needed in support of the member code of conduct to protect both Upton upon Severn Town Council and its Councillors. In particular regarding standards, libel, copyright, data protection, bias and pre-determination, as well as encouraging good online etiquette.

3. Use of social media by Councillors

Councillors are required to act in accordance with the member code of conduct whilst conducting the business of the Council or acting, claiming to act or giving the impression you are acting as a representative of Upton upon Severn Town Council.

Councillors should be aware that anything published on a social media can be accessed by anybody with an internet connection and, once it has been posted, it will be a permanent online record.

A common sense approach should be adopted by all Councillors.

When using social media, Councillors should:

1. Have particular regard to the member code of conduct and ensure that, when online, you treat others with respect and conduct yourself in a manner that will not bring Upton upon Severn Town Council into disrepute.
2. Think before you publish – even if a post is deleted hastily, it could have been read several times and may have been indexed and duplicated online beyond reach. It could also potentially have already had a screenshot taken and saved as a permanent record.
3. Be aware of your blurred personality online. Even if posting online in a personal capacity it is likely that you will be seen as acting as a representative of the Council.
4. Consider whether there are appropriate privacy settings in place for your social media accounts especially those that you use as personal accounts.
5. When setting up a social media account, we recommend you post a short statement disclosing your identity as a Councillor. You may wish to consider having separate accounts for your Councillor posts to your personal ones.
6. Be aware that, by publishing information obtained through your position as a Councillor, you will be seen as acting as a representative of Upton upon Severn Town Council. Councillors should never publish anything online taken from a private meetings or private e-mails unless first discussed and agreed with the Town Clerk or Mayor.

7. Be aware of misinterpretation – few writers are able to communicate sarcasm or irony through short online messages. Even if the intention was clear, the message may be misinterpreted.

8. We advise that you are not drawn into an online argument with someone clearly trying to provoke you or openly criticise Upton upon Severn Town Council, other organisations or residents. Simply do not respond. If the content may be considered defamatory, illegal or could damage reputation and relationships you can gain advice from Malvern Hills District Council Monitoring Officer.

9. Avoid publishing information regarding a forthcoming or ongoing matter/discussion yet to be determined (e.g. Council business or a planning matter). Any indication of bias or predetermination could result in the decision being challenged.

10. Be aware that sharing someone else's post, e.g. 're-tweeting' on twitter or sharing on Facebook, may be interpreted as the Councillor agreeing, endorsing or supporting its content.

11. Be aware that stating that the views posted or shared on social media are not your own, will not exonerate you from potential sanctions under the standards regime. A lot of reporters take stories and comments directly from social media these days and they probably won't even tell you they're doing it.

12. Avoid anything which could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of any individual(s) or other organisations for example by:

- i) Making offensive or derogatory comments related to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, or age.
- ii) Using social media to bully, harass or criticise another individual or organisation.
- iii) Posting images that are discriminatory or offensive, or providing links to such content.

13. Be aware that anything you say online could appear in the papers and create media interest which Upton upon Severn Town Council will have to pick up and could damage reputation.

14. Be particularly aware of your online presence during election periods. Councillors should note that legislation relating to electoral periods (e.g. the Representation of the People Act 1983) will also apply to the online publication of electoral material/statements relating to the election.

4. Councillor's use of social media

Councillors will be personally responsible for their social media presence. Upton upon Severn Town Council does not take any responsibility for social media content or maintenance on behalf of individual Councillors.

Councillors need to be aware that if you engage with social media, you may be held personally liable for copyright and trademark breaches, defamation, contempt of court and privacy infringements on their online presence. This may be the case even if a Councillor does not produce the offending content.

Where to get advice?

If you require further advice or support with social media, please talk to the Town Clerk or Malvern Hills District Council Monitoring Officer.

Any breaches of this policy should be reported to the Town Clerk or Malvern Hills District Council Monitoring Officer.