

Document 6.12

**SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY
HERTFORD TOWN COUNCIL ACCOUNTS**

Adopted 27 March 2017

Review by March 2019

INTRODUCTION

Social Media is the use of web-based and mobile technology to create and exchange information between individuals, organisations and communities.

Hertford Town Council currently uses social media to communicate effectively with the community and stakeholders and it is likely that the use of Social Media will continue to increase in the future.

This policy enables effective use of Social Media whilst protecting the organisation's business information and any information within its custody or safekeeping by safeguarding its confidentiality, integrity and availability.

This Policy covers the creation and use of Social Media sites on behalf of the Council and the posting of comments on the Council and other social media comments sites. (Sites could include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google Plus as well as content sharing websites such as Flickr, YouTube and other similar on line channels)

These platforms open up many new opportunities but there are many potential issues to consider both as employees and as an organisation.

These guidelines aim to provide officers with information to consider before participating in or developing any new social media application and assist in getting the best out of the tools available whilst maintaining a safe and professional environment and protecting themselves and the Council.

1. Communicate with the Community

- 1.1 A large percentage of the UK population now use Social Media and a recent study showed that people interact with their favourite brand on these media. Increasingly, social media has a real value when communicating with the public.
- 1.2 The quality of the interaction and audience demographics should influence the choice of social media channels. Facebook and Twitter appear currently to be the social media channels of choice for the local community, however it is important to keep abreast of newly emerging channels and should be used if you are specifically pointed at them or they contain useful information for key groups.
- 1.3 In order to ensure public accountability and transparency, all Council Social Media accounts must make reference to the fact that they are run by Hertford Town Council. Similarly, this also demonstrates the work the Council is doing and how public money is being spent.

2. Use Social Media to Consult and Engage

- 2.1 Social Media can be used to have discussions with the community. If someone raises a concern, request that the person elaborates on an issue, and if you know something that will help, share it with them. Officers should not try to assist everyone that asks a question on a Twitter stream, in some cases it would not be appropriate for reasons of impartiality or legality.
- 2.2 If the Council or Officers receive praise for work done, be sure to pass it on. Similarly, if complaints are received, the Chairman of the relevant Committee should be made aware. Social Media is one of the few ways to directly and instantly receive feedback on policies and decisions.

3. General – ‘The Voice’ for Social media use

- 3.1 Individual officer names should be used on Hertford Town Council operated accounts. (In the biography)
- 3.2 Comments made on the Council operated accounts will conform with all other Council policies at all times.
- 3.3 The ‘voice’ will reflect the nature of social media and will therefore be informal.
- 3.4 When responding to negative comments, be firm, but polite and factual.
- 3.5 Any need to apologise should be done in a sincere manner.
- 3.6 Slang is not to be used as a matter of course.
- 3.7 High standards of spelling and grammar must be maintained at all times.
- 3.8 Plain English must be used at all times.
- 3.9 Swearing is not appropriate under any circumstances.
- 3.10 All posts must stay within libel laws of England.

4. Content

- 4.1 Content must be updated regularly.

- 4.2 All posts must be timely and relevant. Do not write about old news.
- 4.3 Responses to posts made by others should be made within one working day to reflect the speed of the social media sphere.
- 4.4 Officers will signpost matters they think may be of interest/benefit to the community and forward on posts made by others if appropriate.
- 4.5 Confidential and sensitive information will not be posted on line.
- 4.6 More than one officer will be responsible for updating the social media sites, to ensure a balance of information is posted, however the primary officer responsible for the accounts will be the Marketing and Events Manager.
- 4.7 Pre scheduled tweets and posts are regularly used. Four officers have access to the accounts and all are aware that should a news item or unexpected occurrence result in the pre-scheduled tweet/post becoming inappropriate, the first officer to become aware of the issue will check pre scheduling and cancel the post(s) as appropriate.

5. **Active Twitter Accounts**

- 5.1 @Hertfordtc is the active twitter account for Hertford Town Council and provides information on Council business, upcoming events and activity run by the Council. The account is used to promote all Hertford Town Council services and Council matters. In addition, the account is used to promote activities and support local businesses to increase footfall into Hertford. The account can also promote all other Hertford Town Council social media accounts.
- 5.2 @Hertfordartfest is the active twitter account for the Hertford Arts Festival, a new event organised by Hertford Town Council. This account may only be used on a seasonal basis in the lead up to the event. It must be indicated that the account is operated by Hertford Town Council.
- 5.3 @HertfordCastle is the active twitter account for Hertford Castle. The account promotes venue hire at Hertford Castle. It must be indicated that the account is operated by Hertford Town Council.
- 5.4 @ HertfordFoodDri is the active twitter account for the Food and Drink Festival, an established event organised by Hertford Town Council. The account may only used on a seasonal basis in the lead up to the event. It must be indicated that the account is operated by Hertford Town Council.

- 5.5 @RockattheCastle is the active twitter account for Rock at the Castle, an established event organised by Hertford Town Council. The account is organised to promote the event and may only be used on a seasonal basis in the run up to the event, unless there is a news worthy event prior to the run up to the event. e.g the appointment of the Charity to benefit from Rock at the Castle. It must be indicated that the account is operated by Hertford Town Council.

6 **Active Facebook Accounts**

- 6.1 Hertford Town Council has a dedicated facebook account providing information on upcoming events and activity run by the council. The account is used to promote all Hertford Town Council services and council matters. In addition, the account is used to promote activities and support local businesses to increase footfall into Hertford.
- 6.2 Hertford Castle has a dedicated account providing photographs of the grounds and rooms inside the castle. The account is used to promote the www.hertfordcastle.co.uk website to promote venue hire.
- 6.3 Hertford Town and Tourist Information Centre has a dedicated account providing tourist information on Hertford such as where to visit, what events are on, tickets for sale and a weekly newsletter of events taking place.

Purdah

During periods of purdah, permission to continue to operate any Council run social media site must be cleared by the Town Clerk, where each post will be considered on an individual basis. Any account that continues to operate during this period must stick rigidly within the purdah rules. (Purdah is the pre-election period, specifically the time between an announced election and the final election results.