



EMERSONS GREEN

TOWN COUNCIL

Social Media Guide

1. Acceptable behaviour on social networking sites

- a) Online behaviour should not differ from offline behaviour and specifically when reference is made to the council in any context. The internet is merely a facility and the approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour should not differ because it was carried out online. It is worth bearing in mind the following: 'Don't do anything online that you wouldn't do offline'.
- b) Think about the image you are presenting – and remember what is published has the potential to be accessed for many years; even after the original content has been removed.
- c) Cyber-Bullying – means 'any use of information and communications technology to deliberately carry out hostile postings to distress another person.' As with any other form of bullying - this is not tolerated and will be dealt with under the Bullying and Harassment Procedure or Managing Employee Performance Policy.

2. Safety

- a) When social networking websites are used you are joining a global community. Therefore, it is wise to approach social networking with a degree of caution.
- b) Whilst social networking and other websites have considerable benefits, they can also provide access to individual's personal details from undesirable people/sources. Common sense should be applied – remember that you are responsible for what you publish.
- c) If you are concerned or uncertain about the appropriateness of any statement, then you should not post or publish it.
- d) It is easy to publish something inadvertently that cannot be retrieved, and that can have far reaching consequences. It is advisable to check before publishing anything that has the potential to be a cause of concern.
- e) When you sign up for social networking websites, each sets your privacy controls to its default settings. The default settings vary from network to network. **Use your privacy controls** and take the time to set them appropriately to ensure that the right level of privacy protection is applied for you.

3. Personal use

- a) If individuals identify themselves as a council employee (including staff and Councillors), it is important they:
 - are aware that the image portrayed could adversely affect the Council's image
 - use a disclaimer
 - know their obligations (policy, rules etc)
 - are respectful
- b) Employees must make it clear in any published content that connects them with the council that they are speaking on their own behalf, by writing in the first person and using a personal email address. You should still be mindful that what you publish will not bring the council in to disrepute. Remember that what is published has the potential to be accessed for many years, even after the original content has been removed.

4. Using Social Media at Work

- a) Employees should familiarise themselves with the policy, any service specific rules and guidance and with related Council policies, in particular the Code of Conduct.
- b) The council encourages interaction with its residents, partner agencies and community groups. If using social media for this purpose act responsibly, respectfully and ensure information is accurate. Remember you are representing the council so be aware of the image you are presenting.
- c) All council owned social media accounts must be approved by the Town Clerk.
- d) If in doubt about any posting, you intend to make you should seek advice from the Town Clerk.
- e) Do not use social media for work purposes anonymously; be open and transparent.
- f) Use extreme caution if disclosing any personal information, as this could lead to identity theft, etc.
- g) Abide by copyright and data protection legislation.
- h) Use social media positively to project a good image. It is a powerful tool which can be hugely beneficial and provides valuable opportunities to do this.
- i) Deal appropriately with any offensive behaviour experienced;

Apply this standard response where appropriate: 'This comment has been removed as Emersons Green Town Council has a zero-tolerance approach to offensive behaviour of any sort including that carried out online'.
- j) Whilst use of social media is acceptable and even encouraged for the purposes of particular roles, you must ensure it does not interfere with your usual duties or affect your performance.
- k) If you break the law online, you will be personally responsible.

- l) If you are approached by the media regarding any content you have published, you must not respond until you have consulted the Town Clerk or Full Council.
- m) All information on social media is subject to Freedom of Information requests so be aware of the council's liabilities.

5. Guidance for Managers

- a) All social media accounts which will be used to conduct business on behalf of the council must be authorised by the Town Clerk. All accounts remain under the ownership of Emersons Green Town Council at all times.
- b) Managers should decide what interaction through social media if any, is appropriate in accordance with their own service area requirements. If there are any deviations from this guidance, or peculiarities necessary to be applied due to the service then these must be made available to all affected employees.
- c) Be mindful about commercial sensitivities, confidentiality, safety and conflicts of interest when issuing any instructions to employees.
- d) There may be some areas where matters are particularly sensitive and therefore strict guidelines should be compiled with that are particular to these issues. Data protection legislation must be adhered to.