

Canvey Island Town Council

Social Media Policy

Definition

“Social Media” - For the purpose of this Policy, Social Media includes but is not limited to websites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google Plus, Yammer, Instagram, TikTok and Pinterest, as well as all online public blogs.

“Personal Blog” – For the purpose of this Policy a Personal Blog includes any blog that is the sole or joint responsibility of a Councillor i.e. it is owned managed or maintained by a Councillor. This includes a Councillor’s blog hosted by a third party website e.g. blog on Wordpress or Blogger.

“Media Devices” – Includes mobile phones, tablets, cameras and any other device capable of recording sound and image. For the purposes of this Policy, this definition will extend to both personally owned media devices as well as any media devices provided to a Councillor by the Council.

“Members of the Public” – Any person who is not a Member of the Council or Officer taking part in the Council meeting. This includes journalists.

Purpose

Canvey Island Town Council has a corporate presence on the web and the use of e-mail and will always try to use the most effective channel of communication with people who live in, work in or visit Canvey Island. The purpose of this Policy is to ensure transparency and consistency across all forms of online Social Media.

Social Media and Personal Blogs are effective methods for Councillors to interact with residents and support local democracy. Used effectively, they can engage those who would not normally have access to local policies. However, it is not always clear whether such activities are covered by the Member Code of Conduct. The main purpose of this Policy is to protect the Council and Councillors with particular regard to issues such as standards, libel, copyright, data protection, bias and pre-determination as well as encouraging good manners on line and in Council meetings.

Please note that issues relating to filming, videoing, photography and audio recording are not covered by this Policy, and can be found in the Recording of Meetings policy.

All Councillors and Members of Staff are expected to abide by this policy and any serious breaches of this policy will be dealt with by the Employee Disciplinary Procedure or Members Code of Conduct. Any breach could bring the Town Council into disrepute.

1. Use of Social Media by Councillors

Councillors are required to act in accordance with the Member Code of Conduct whilst conducting business of the Council or acting, claiming to act or giving the impression they are acting as a representative of the Council.

Councillors should be aware of anything they publish on a Social Media website can be accessed by anybody with an internet connection, and once it has been posted, it will be a permanent on line record. Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.

A common sense approach should be adopted by all Councillors. When using Social Media, Councillors should: -

- i) Have particular regard to Section 3 of the Member Code of Conduct and ensure that, even when online, they treat others with respect and conduct themselves in a manner that will not bring the Council into disrepute.
- ii) Think before they publish – even if a post is deleted hastily, it will probably have been read several times and may have been indexed and duplicated on line beyond reach.
- iii) Be aware of their blurred personality online. Even if posting online in a personal capacity it is likely that they will be seen as acting as a representative of the Council. In order to ensure comments are not misconstrued as being from the council, it may be prudent to refrain from commenting on contentious ongoing matters. If councillors do wish to comment on such matters they should consider using their comment to direct the public to any official statement made by the Town Council.
- iv) Consider whether there are appropriate privacy settings in place for their Social Media accounts.
- v) When setting up a Social Media account, consider posting a short statement disclosing their identity as a Councillor and the political party they represent.
- vi) Be aware that, by publishing information obtained from their position as a Councillor, they will be seen as acting as a representative of the Council.
- vii) Be aware of the irony – few writers are able to communicate sarcasm or irony through short online messages. Even if the intention was clear, the message may be misconstrued.
- viii) Not be drawn into an online argument with someone clearly trying to provoke them. Simply do not respond. If the content may be considered defamatory or illegal, a Councillor should consider reporting the post to the Social Media site administrators.
- ix) Be careful if publishing information regarding a forthcoming or on-going matter yet to be determined. Any indication of bias or pre-determination could result in a decision becoming void.
- x) Be aware that liking, sharing or retweeting someone else's post e.g. sharing on Facebook or re-tweeting on Twitter, may be interpreted as the Councillor agreeing or supporting its content.
- xi) Be particularly aware of their 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.
- xii) Councillors are not permitted to friend members of staff on social media as this could be perceived as having a personal connection to the staff member and could be deemed as bias for any personnel or disciplinary proceedings.

A failure to comply with Section 1 of this Policy may void any on-going decision and an offending Councillor may be subject to a standards complaint or personal liability.

2. Councillor's use of Personal Blogs

Councillors will be personally responsible for their Personal Blogs. The Council has no responsibility for the Councillor's Personal Blog content or maintenance.

If Councillors are using a third party website to host their Personal Blog, they should familiarise themselves with the website's terms of service. Most blogging websites make the content the responsibility of its owner. Additionally, most will also have a reporting and takedown procedure to flag up any potential issues with site administrators.

If a Councillor is exclusively in charge of a Personal Blog (i.e. it is not hosted by a third party blogging site) they should consider producing their own terms of use in order to reduce liability and establish procedures to deal with potential breaches.

Councillors need to be aware that they may be held personally liable for copyright and trade mark breaches, defamation, contempt of court and privacy infringements on the Personal Blogs. This may be the case even if a Councillor does not produce the offending content. A Councillor with a Personal Blog will have a duty to take reasonable care when dealing with the Personal Blog content.

Councillors should actively try to monitor their Personal Blogs to ensure that any breach or infringement is dealt with quickly and expediently. In addition, it may be worth directing blog/readers/contributors to an email or contact in order for users to flag up potential legal risks quickly to the Councillor or to the site administrators.

Where a Councillor is responsible for a Personal Blog which stores or holds personal information (e.g. email addresses), they should be aware that they may need to register with the Information Commissioners Officer under Data Protection legislation.

3. Councillor's use of Media Devices during Council meetings

This Policy applies to all the meetings of the Council, all Committee and Sub-Committee meetings and any other meetings held under the auspices of the Council at which Members are present.

The use of Social Media is not permitted during meetings, as it may distract from proceedings or demonstrate pre-determination or bias or give the impression of doing so.

If a Councillor does need to take or make an urgent phone call, text or email during a meeting they must leave the room quietly, returning to their seat at an appropriate juncture of the meeting. They must not distract proceedings and need to remember that any phone call made or text or email sent must not show any indication of bias or pre-determination.

The Chairman of a meeting may ask a Councillor who disregards any part of Section 3 of this Policy to refrain from using the Media Device and, where appropriate, to leave the meeting.

Councillors are reminded that publishing information regarding a forthcoming and on-going decision may void that decision and/or be subject to a complaint.

Similarly there may be matters of a private or confidential nature which should not be published. A failure to comply with any of Section 3 of this Policy may result in the Council being made subject to a standards complaint or personal liability or the decision being subject to challenge.

4. Members of the Public's use of Media Devices during Council meetings.

Members of the Public should conduct themselves in a way that does not disrupt or distract the course of the meeting.

Members of the Public are permitted to text, use email or Social Media discreetly during Council meetings provided this does not disturb the meeting.

If a member of the Public needs to take or make an urgent phone call during the meeting they should leave the room quietly returning to their seat at an appropriate juncture of the meeting.

The Chairman of a Council meeting may ask a Member of the Public who disregards Section 4 of this Policy to refrain from using the Media Device and where appropriate, to leave the meeting.

Facebook, Instagram and X

The Town Council does not respond to comments on its Facebook Page. If a member of the Public has a general enquiry, they should visit the Town Council's web page www.canveyisland-tc.gov.uk. Any posts made on the Town Council's Facebook, Instagram or X Pages will have commenting disabled and will be for the purpose of providing information only.

The views of participants commenting on Canvey Island Town Council's Facebook, Instagram or X pages do not necessarily represent the views of the Council.

Constructive discussions are welcome as part of a conversation; however, inappropriate, abusive, discriminatory, offensive or unlawful comments are prohibited and may be removed.

The use of the Town Council Facebook Instagram or X Pages and its content is at members of the Public's own risk. The content on the site should not be relied upon as legal or other professional advice. Canvey Island Town Council is not responsible for the security of the page or site.

Canvey Island Town Council will not be responsible for the use or misuse by third parties of items or information posted on or submitted to these pages or sites.

The decision to display comments from, befriend or follow any organisations or individuals using social media does not constitute an endorsement by Canvey Island Town Council of any kind.

Council Use of Social Media Principles.

Canvey Island Town Council updates its Facebook Instagram and X Pages with links to the Town Council's website where Town Council documents can be found. The Facebook Instagram and X Pages are used to publish information about the work of the Town Council only.

Social Media must not be used in the recruitment process for employees or Councillors as this could lead to breaches of privacy, potential discrimination claims and data protection issues. Advertising a vacancy is permitted.

The only approved Social Media for the Town Council is the Official Canvey Island Town Council's Facebook Instagram and X Pages

Users of the Facebook Page

The Town Clerk of the Council or duly authorised members of staff are the only people authorised to post on the Town Council Facebook Instagram and X Pages. Councillors must not issue public statements on the Town Council's behalf. All posts are reviewed and published subject to the Town Clerks approval.