



Congleton Town Council

Historic Market Town

Chief Officer: David McGifford CiLCA

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

(Including WhatsApp)

VERSION CONTROL	Version 1
Previous Version Approval Date	
Current Version FAP Review Date	
Current Version Approval Date	
Current Version Approval Reference	
This version of the Policy supersedes any previous versions.	



Congleton
beartown
where friends are made

Congleton Town Council, Town Hall, High Street, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 1BN

Tel: 01260 270350

Email: info@congleton-tc.gov.uk www.congleton-tc.gov.uk



Contents

1 Introduction	1
2. Purpose of the Policy	1
3. Aims and Objectives.....	1
4 Definition of Social Media	2
5 Pitfalls.....	2
6 Policy Statement	2
7 Responsibilities	3
8 Asking the Council to follow, like or share messages	4
9 Pre-election Period	4
10 WhatsApp and Messaging services.....	4
11 Addendum: Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Social Media	5

1 Introduction

The objective of this policy is to provide Officers and Councillors with an overview of Social Media to outline the Council's position on various aspects of its use. In addition, it includes guidelines on Officer and Councillor responsibilities when using such channels of communication in their official capacity.

2. Purpose of the Policy

Social media provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities, providing updates, news, information, and passing on of relevant information.

The Council will make use of approved social media tools to quickly release information but carefully control its use in order to minimise risk.

3. Aims and Objectives

Social media can be used by the Council as an effective way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity. The aim of this Policy is to ensure

- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media.
- That Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media including but not limited to personal data, commercially sensitive information belonging to the Council etc.

- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines, and relevant legislation.
- That the Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected.
- That communication by use of social media is effective, timely, appropriate, useful, engages with a wider audience and utilises cross-promotion of other Council communication tools (eg website, Bear Necessities etc).

Social media activity is not something that stands alone, to be effective it needs to integrate as part of general communication. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities can be plugged into social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

4 Definition of Social Media

Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content. They include social networking sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction.

Examples of popular social media tools include Facebook, You Tube, Pinterest, Podcasts, WhatsApp Linked in etc.

5 Pitfalls

Whilst these tools are especially useful to share information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of:

- The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world.
- The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is all too easy to respond instantaneously which can result in unintentionally inflaming a situation.
- As identity theft, account takeover and impersonation are common on social media, potentially leading to damage to reputation of the individual or their organisation, Officers and Councillors are recommended to ensure that social media accounts are protected by ensuring best practice for password quality is adopted.
- Officers and Councillors are recommended to avoid, wherever possible, the re-sharing of 'fake' content by applying due diligence, for example checking the sources behind a story and verifying facts before reporting it themselves.

6 Policy Statement

It is acknowledged that there is considerable potential for using social media which can provide significant advantages. The responsible, corporate use of social media is actively encouraged. The following applies equally to Officers and Councillors.

The policy provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems/networks.

Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, and ensure that its use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, not be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected of a representative of Congleton Town Council.

- Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy.
- Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.
- Never give out personal details of others such as home address and telephone numbers.
- Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act.
- When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply that you are speaking for Congleton Town Council. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only.
- Know your obligations. You must comply with other Council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach Council confidentiality.
- Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong.
- Use of the Town Council's Social media accounts must reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal opinion.
- Councillors are at liberty to set up accounts using any of the tools available, but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view.

7 Responsibilities

The Chief Officer is the designated 'Council' owner of the Council Social Media channels agreed by the Council.

Good practice guidelines for the use of Facebook by the Council as a body or Councillors as individuals are:

- Officers and Councillors should not publish or report details of meetings which are not open to Councillors of the public including any confidential reports.

- Only authorised officers can use Congleton Town Councils social media accounts.
- All information to be released should first be approved by the Chief Officer and/or the Marketing, Communications and Civic Manager.
- As a Town Council, we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image.
- Remember that people classified as “friends” have the ability to download and share your information with others.
- Post only what you want the world to see.
- Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise Council policies or personnel.
- Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libellous.
- Please stay informed and cautious in the use of all new networking technologies
Councillors are entitled to use any form of social media they wish, but must abide by this policy at all times, when so doing.

8 Asking the Council to follow, like or share messages

The Council may follow, like or share messages, mostly from our partners, other organisations we work with and local media. This allows us to monitor and disseminate important information that we may need to make residents aware of.

9 Pre-election Period

In the six weeks run up to a local election – councils have to be incredibly careful not to do or say anything that could be seen in any way to support any political party or candidate.

Notwithstanding this the Council will continue to publish Important Service Announcements using social media during the period.

10 WhatsApp and Messaging services

General Principles

- Responsibility: Group admins are responsible for the group's content.
- Admin to regularly review group members to ensure only relevant individuals are included. Remove inactive or non members promptly.
- For Congleton Town Council officers, only work mobile numbers should be used for official communication.
- Be explicit that professional standards of conduct apply on all platforms.

- Obtain Consent: Do not add anyone to a work-related WhatsApp/Messaging group without their explicit consent.
- Confidentiality: Prohibit the sharing of sensitive, personal, or confidential information on WhatsApp.

Specific to Working with Children/Vulnerable Adults

- No child or vulnerable adult should be added to a group with the correct consent, such as parent/guardian/carer.
- Age-Appropriate Content: All communication should use age-appropriate language and topics.
- No 1:1 Messaging: There should be no one-to-one messaging with a child or vulnerable adult; all communications should be within a group that includes another officer.

11 Addendum: Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Social Media

1. Definition

For the purposes of this policy, AI tools include generative AI systems (e.g. text, image, audio or video generation tools), AI-assisted scheduling or analytics tools, and AI-powered chatbots.

2. Permitted Use

AI tools may be used to assist with:

- Drafting or refining social media posts
- Generating captions, summaries, or alternative wording
- Creating suggested alt text for accessibility
- Translating content
- Producing draft visuals or design concepts

All AI-generated content must be reviewed, edited, and approved by a designated officer before publication. Responsibility for accuracy and compliance remains with the Council officer publishing the content.

3. Prohibited Use

AI must not be used to:

- Input, process, or disclose confidential, personal, or sensitive information unless the tool has been formally approved by IT and Data Protection officers
- Generate misleading, deceptive, or impersonated content
- Create deepfake audio, video, or imagery of real individuals
- Issue automated responses to complaints or service requests without human oversight

- Produce political or party-political content

4. Data Protection and Compliance

Use of AI must comply with all relevant legislation and Council policies, including:

- Data Protection legislation (e.g. UK GDPR / Data Protection Act 2018)
- Freedom of Information obligations
- Equality and accessibility requirements
- Personal data must not be entered into publicly available AI systems unless explicitly authorised.

5. Transparency and Accountability

Where AI has been used in a way that materially affects public-facing content (e.g. AI-generated images or chatbot interactions), the Council will be transparent about its use where appropriate.

The Council remains fully accountable for all content published on its social media channels, regardless of whether AI was used in its preparation.

6. Governance and Review

Only AI tools approved by the Council’s IT and/or Communications teams may be used for official purposes. This addendum will be reviewed periodically to reflect technological and regulatory developments.

Full Version Control

Date	Changes	Approval Reference
	New policy	