

## **Hungerford Town Council's Social Media Policy – adopted 7/4/2015**

### **1. Introduction**

The objective of this document is to provide Councillors and Officers with an overview of Social Media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use. In addition, it includes guidelines on the responsibilities when using such channels of communication. It should be read in line with other Town Council policies, Equal Opportunities Policy, Grievance Policy and the adopted Code of Conduct.

### **2. What is Social Media?**

**2.1** Social media is a generic term for the sharing of opinions, gossip, discussions, stories, video, pictures and even information electronically. The key feature of such systems is that they can be accessed in different ways – via computers, tablets and phones. Social media can be categorised into six types: blogs; wikis; social networks; forums; podcasts; and content communities. There are many popular packages for social media including Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, YouTube, Pinterest, MySpace, and LinkedIn. Each has a different focus – sharing, conversation, relationships, groups and reputation.

**2.2** Social media has the following characteristics:

- Covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs, and audio
- Allows messages to flow between many different types of device; PCs, phones and tablets (eg iPad, android)
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or just view information
- Speeds and broadens the flow of information
- Provides one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications
- Lets communication to take place in real time or intermittently

**2.3** Whilst social media tools are very useful to share information quickly with other people, there are downsides:

- The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world.
- There is no need to register in many cases to view the content. Registering is only required should you wish to participate and post to the site.
- Groups on specific themes can set up easily and posts then edited by the owners of that group to reflect their single interest, ensuring theirs is the only voice heard.

- There is no guarantee of truth and ill-informed comment and gossip is as likely to be found there as useful information.

- The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is all too easy to respond without thinking and inflaming a situation. Information can then be shared with other sites and be spread far beyond the intended audience. Friends of Friends may not be “your” Friends.

- It is also very easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages that would outweigh the value gained in the first place.

### **3. The Town Council and Social Media**

3.1 Social media can be used by the Council as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity. However, it isn't something that stands alone. To be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities can be plugged in to social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

3.2 The aim of this Policy is to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of council-based services through the use of social media

- 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

- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.

- That the Council's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected

3.3 The Council will make use of these tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control their use in order to minimise the risks as stated above.

3.4 At this time the Council *will only use Facebook initially for a trial period of three months* and its use will be limited to providing information on Council activities and official releases of public information from trusted sources such as WBC. *Facebook account has been set up to do this. Further details of Twitter and Facebook accounts are given in appendix 2.*

- This 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, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

3.5 Councillors and Officers are at liberty to set up their 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. They should ensure that they comply with the Council's Policy statement.

3.6 Councillors and Officers should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language. Guidelines on standards of behaviour expected are given in Appendix 1.

#### **4. Responsibilities**

4.1 The Town Clerk will be the designated owner of the social media accounts which have been approved by the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

4.2 The Town Clerk will designate a site administrator who will be responsible for daily monitoring, responding, upkeeping the content of any social media material within the site.

#### **5. Monitoring**

The Town Council reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of the social media policy or any applicable law.

Users will be informed that their posts may not be published/or may be deleted if they meet any of the criteria below:

- Comments that are not topical to the article being discussed
- Comments that are politically motivated
- Profane language or content
- Material that perpetuates or promotes discrimination of protected characteristics as listed in the Equality Act 2010 which includes age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity.
- Solicitation of commerce
- Illegal conduct or encouragement/support of illegal activities
- Information that compromises or may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems
- Content that violates the legal ownership interest of any other party

#### **6. Measuring Success**

The Town Council is interested in measures of engagement. This can be measured in terms of the number of followers, subscribers, re-posts and likes. The accounts statistics will provide this measure.

## **7. Legal Requirements**

The following legal documents have a bearing, or impinge on the rationale of this policy:

- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Equalities Act 2010