



# New Alresford Town Council

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# Social Media Policy

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## Version Control

Version	Owner	Date Approved	Minute Ref	Website Updated	Next Review
VI	Town Council	18/11/19	19/189	20/11/19	Nov 2021

## **1. Introduction**

This policy is to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of NATC and aims to provide New Alresford Town Council (NATC) staff and Councillors with clear guidance on personal and work-related use of social media.

Social media is the term used for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. Social media is any type of online media that allows discussion and interaction as opposed to broadcast only.

While the use of social media can have many benefits in terms of engaging with residents, local organisations and businesses, staff and Councillors must be mindful that social media should be treated like any other form of communication. Something considered professionally inappropriate to say in person or in an email, would be considered the same on social media.

Social media is not a secure method of communication. Staff and Councillors should be mindful of the information they are sharing.

## **2. Scope**

This policy also applies to any additional social media channels that NATC may choose to use in the future and aims to ensure that NATC is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner and reflects the corporate view of the Town Council. NATC aims to inform its employees, Councillors, Volunteers and the wider community about the standards to observe when using social media to ensure NATC is not exposed to security risks, reputational damage or breach the Data Protection Act and remains lawful.

## **3. Aims**

In light of the many risks associated with the use of social media sites, the main aim of this Policy is to ensure that such use does not damage the Council, its employees, Councillor's, partners and the people it serves. As such this policy seeks to ensure:

- A consistent and corporate approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media.
- Council information remains secure and is not compromised.
- Users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.
- The Council's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected.
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

## **4. Objectives**

This Policy offers guidance in respect of

4.1 How staff and Councillors can best use social media in their NATC capacity

- 4.2 Guidance for staff and Councillors for using social media in a personal capacity
- 4.3 To ensure staff and Councillors are aware of the correct procedures for sharing Council information via social media
- 4.4 To enable Staff and Councillors to use social media effectively and appropriately whilst minimising risk to the Council.
- 4.5 How to report concerns observed on social media.

## **5. Acceptable Use**

NATC is legally responsible for anything that appears on its own social media pages and reserves the right to hide or delete anything which NATC considers to breach this policy, the Code of Conduct or which NATC determine might cause offence to our social media communities.

NATC Social media sites are to be a safe and respectful environment for everyone to use, the online content should be objective, balanced, informed and accurate. Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly. NATC will publish information to:

- 5.1 Promote and publicise activities that will enhance the reputation of NATC
- 5.2 Promote cultural events or tourism for the area
- 5.3 Support community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
- 5.4 Provide and exchange information about services
- 5.5 Respond to specific questions from the public, businesses and partners
- 5.6 Clarify or correcting any ambiguous or incorrect statements or views
- 5.7 Provide information, advice and guidance
- 5.8 Support local democracy

## **6. Responsibilities**

All NATC social media communications must be productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives and Code of Conduct. Councillors are to contribute positively to the content and should do so via the Town Clerk.

In regard to NATC owned social media sites, the Town Clerk and delegated staff will be responsible for:

- 6.1 Managing all NATC social media account(s)
- 6.2 Moderating social media posts and comments
- 6.3 Responding to specific questions from the public, businesses and partners
- 6.4 Responding to complaints received via social media.
- 6.5 Providing information, advice and guidance

NATC owned social media sites will not be monitored 24/7 and not always be able to be replied to individually. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant person(s) or authorities. Do not include personal/private information in your social media posts

Sending a message/post via Social Media is not considered as contacting the Council for official purposes. The formal means of communication is to email directly to the Town Clerk or Councillor.

#### **6.a Staff and Councillors**

Staff and Councillors are not to use council email addresses and other official contact details for setting up personal social media accounts or for communicating through such media.

Staff and Councillors must not make anonymous posts nor use a pseudonym to hide their identity or

Use social media to comment on potentially sensitive matters, including but not restricted to the following

- Information that is politically or commercially sensitive
- Any information intended for internal use only (including matters concerning council services organisational change or related proposals)

Councillors are at all times governed by the Code of Conduct and relevant law. When acting in your “official - capacity” any conduct may fall within the Code whenever you:

- Conduct the business of the Town Council; or
- Act, claim to act or give the impression you are acting as a representative of the Town Council; or
- Act as a representative of the Town Council.

#### **6.b Personal Responsibility**

You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media. Therefore, careful consideration is needed prior to posting on social media and you must not:

- Behave in a manner that would not be acceptable in any other public situation
- Comment on confidential Council related matters.
- Bring NATC into disrepute
- Make comments that could be interpreted as bullying, harassment, or discriminatory to any individuals.
- Use offensive or threatening language
- Use social network sites that could be deemed unlawful
- Post comments about staff, other Councillors, or stakeholders without consent
- Use the Council’s logo or refer to yourself as Councillor, any use or post or misrepresent other Council related material on a personal account or website as it may give the impression you are representing the Council.

This could include content you share or like as this could suggest you approve of that content.

If in doubt do not post.

Where staff or Councillors choose to associate themselves with NATC on a social networking site they must be mindful of how the content they publish affects the reputation of NATC. Where possible, and as appropriate, staff or Councillors should add a disclaimer in a prominent position in their biography or similar which clearly states that whatever is published represents their personal views only and not the views of NATC.

Staff and Councillors need to have regard to their privacy settings on their Social media pages.

## **7. Elections – Purdah**

In the six-week run up to an election – local, general or European – councils maintain normal business, yet have to be careful not to do or say anything that could be viewed in any way to support any political party or candidate. This period is known as purdah. NATC will continue to publish important service announcements using social media but will monitor and potentially have to remove responses if they are party political.

## **8. Reporting Concerns**

If staff or Councillors become aware of any complaints or allegations against NATC, staff or Councillors, through video, image, text or other, they should raise these concerns with the Town Clerk as soon as possible.

Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Town Clerk, or in the case of the Town Clerk, the Chair of NATC