



## **Social Media Guidance**

**This guidance applies to staff and Councillors.**

Social media plays an important role in engaging with our residents, businesses, not-for-profits and organisations.

Ludlow Town Council's key corporate accounts are listed on our website.

### **Conduct on social media.**

This guidance includes any social media account that links you to the council or the work of the council (ie. Listed as your employer on your profile).

Employees and Council members must:

- Keep their personal and professional lives separate and always maintain appropriate professional boundaries.
- Ensure they are able to clearly identify where information provided is legitimately representative of the council.
- Be responsible for their own actions and conduct and avoid behaviour which could be misinterpreted by others or which could put themselves in a position where there is a conflict between their work for the council and their personal interests.
- Use social media in a professional, responsible, and respectful way.
- Be aware that everything they post online is public, even with the strictest privacy settings. Once something is online it can be copied and redistributed. They should therefore assume that everything they post online will be permanent and will be shared.
- Be aware when using social media for business purposes, they are acting as ambassadors for the Council. What they say and post online will directly impact the reputation and image of the council.
- Ask and secure permission from the information owner before publishing any documents, photos, emails and/or reporting on social media any conversation that are intended to be private, confidential, or internal.
- Remember they are personally responsible for the content they publish on any form of social media. This includes publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue or damaging statement.

The Council welcomes councillor's use of social media in a professional way.

Do:

- Keep your personal and member profile on social media separate and maintain appropriate professional boundaries.
- Be aware that as a councillor, you will most likely be seen as acting in your official capacity when you use social media, including in public pages as well as in WhatsApp and Facebook Groups.
- It's advised that you set up your Facebook account for your Council work as a public page that people could follow rather than a 'person' that people must 'friend'.
- Include a link on your profile to 'social media terms of use'.

### **How to manage offensive and inappropriate content:**

- Council staff and councillors must not post content that is offensive or inappropriate.
- If you manage an official council account or represent the council in a professional capacity, generally we would advise that you do not respond to content of this nature. This is very different from negative comments, questions or criticisms, these posts should be responded to in a polite, measured and reasonable fashion.
- Where possible abusive and obscene comments/posts should be hidden or deleted.
- These posts or accounts should be reported to social media networks.
- Abusive users can be blocked, however, if you manage an official account, this should be used very rarely and after careful consideration. This can lead to further negative content being generated and is unlikely to reduce the volume of offensive content being posted.

### **Tone of voice.**

Social media by its nature is social, so you can use a more human, relaxed tone in your posts. However, please remember that you are representing the council and your social media posts should always be polite, professional, and written using correct spelling and grammar.

### **Responding to negative comments.**

Negative comments or responses on social media should generally be responded to in a polite, helpful and prompt way via official accounts. They are often an opportunity to answer or address a simple issue, set the record straight or signpost someone to get further support.

Where possible and appropriate, you should:

- Provide assistance by answering the question or signposting them to the correct source/process.
- Politely provide facts or key messages on the council's policy to set the record straight (this is useful for other people who may also be reading the post).
- Address negative comments professionally, if the comment escalates try to take it off public-facing areas to discuss issues privately. Your audience will know that you're dealing with any issues, but the details remain private.
- Keep responses brief, this will reduce the chances of a prolonged and angry back and forth. The more you write, the more material the other person has to criticise. Keeping it brief signals that you don't wish to get into a dialogue.

### **Scenario Specific Advice:**

- **Bad customer experience**  
If you receive a negative post, you may be able to identify whether the person has a genuine complaint. Whether you choose to respond or not will depend on how damaging their personal complaint to be, and the volume of attention the post is receiving.
- **Repeat Poster.**  
Sometimes, even after replying to a comment or complaint with relevant information, someone on social media will continue to mention you and/or demand action to be taken. In these instances, once politely replied you can safely ignore these posts.
- **Social media trolls**  
Unfortunately, on every social media platform, there can be other users who are negative and abusive. Such people are often referred to as 'trolls'. Trolls are not easy to deal with – the best way is 'not to feed them'. By this, we mean don't respond to what they post, which is designed to upset, elicit a response or to further their own goals. Your best response is to either to ignore what they have posted, or (if it's on your own page or profile) to delete or hide their comment, so your other followers don't see it either.

Don't be afraid of taking a break from social media if you feel you need to – to protect your mental health and wellbeing. You can easily temporarily unpublish your Facebook page or Twitter account and give yourself some 'time offline'.

### **Personal use**

What constitutes as 'private / personal' use?

For the purpose of this policy, a councillor's social media engagement will be considered 'private use' when the content they upload:

- It is not associated with, or does not refer to, the council, any other council officials, contractors, related entities or any other person or organisation providing to or on behalf of the Council in their official or professional capacity.
- Is not related to or does not contain information acquired by virtue of their employment or role as a councillor.

- If a council official chooses to identify themselves as a council official, either directly or indirectly (such as in their user profile), then they will not be deemed to be acting in their private capacity for the purposes of this policy.

It's important to be aware that your actions could have an adverse impact on your professional role and/or the council's image and reputation and to avoid a potential conflict between their personal use of social media and their role.

Ensure you are aware of the privacy levels of your personal accounts and preferably, select the maximum privacy options to protect personal privacy. Take responsibility for anything that you say online or anything posted on your account. Remember what you post online will stay online forever.

### **Blurred identities**

It is important for councillors to be aware of the fact that they may have "blurred identities" online. This means that you may have a social media account where you comment both as a councillor and as an individual.

While it may be clear to you when you are posting in your private capacity or as a councillor, this may be less clear to others. Such "blurred identities" may have implications where your views are taken as those of the Council, rather than your own personal opinion. It is therefore important for you to make sure that your social media accounts and profiles are as clear as possible as to whether you are speaking in your private capacity, or as a Member of the Council.

It is generally safest to assume that any online activity can be linked to your official role

### **Managing and moderating your own pages**

- You may wish to set up your own councillor or community page on Facebook. These can be valuable platforms to promote local information, news, events or council developments or seek people's views on community or council proposals.
- Members of the community and others can contribute and comment in an interactive manner and whilst most is constructive and uses acceptable language, some individuals may use bad language or 'cross the line' into abuse or harassment.
- If you are a Group or Page administrator, Facebook provides you with a range of tools to manage and moderate other people's content or contributions to your Group or Page for more serious breaches of standards.

You can:

- a) block certain words or apply a 'profanity filter' in the settings, this will stop such postings appearing in your page.
- b) hide or delete comments, photos or tags.
- c) ban or remove someone from your pages.

- d) find useful guidance and instructions on the 'Banning and Moderation' section of Facebook.
- e) share the responsibility of administering a large Group with other councillors, friends or trusted community members.
- f) find guidance on making other people administrators on Facebook.

### **Sharing photos / social media posts on social media**

Any photographs of civic duties or visits should be sent to the communications team to be shared on official accounts. Please ensure that the correct permission has been obtained to share photographs.

### **Digital Suggestions box**

Councillors can suggest Social media ideas via Trello: [Social Media | Trello](#)

### **How to raise concerns**

If you have any questions about the use of social media, or if you spot any negative posts or threads of misinformation. These should be reported to [social.media@ludlow.gov.uk](mailto:social.media@ludlow.gov.uk)

For support, please read: [Social media guidance for councillors | Local Government Association](#)