



Brixham Town Council

Social Media Networking Policy

Date of Adoption	
Reviewed	May 2010, May 2011, May 2012, July 2013, June 2021
Written by	Tracy Hallett, Town Clerk

1. The Advantages of Social Media Networking

- It enables Brixham Town Council to reach a much wider audience, especially some hard to reach groups
- It is an additional method of keeping people notified of events, news, consultations, or anything worthy of notification, even emergency situations.
- It is an excellent method of communication not requiring mass email, giving the ability to instantly spread information to a target audience.
- It allows people to keep Brixham Town Council in their minds on a daily basis – anyone who is a fan/follower on Facebook/Twitter will be reminded of the Council periodically via status updates, which will automatically appear in their notifications.
- It enables the Council to create a ‘community’ and gives people the opportunity to contribute, showing that the Council is interested in more than just a one-dimensional relationship.
- It is an additional method of consultation.
- It’s free to set up a profile and, using the technology available, regular status updates/tweets can be made quickly attracting greater traffic to the Council website, and encourage greater involvement, with minimal effort.

2. Terms of use of Social Media networking applications Content

Those using the Social Media networks must not use the facility:

- To publish any content which may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes but is not limited to material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the Council into disrepute.
- For party political purposes or specific campaigning purposes as the Council is not permitted to publish material which ‘in whole or part appears to affect public support for a political party’ (LGA 1986)
- For the promotion of personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns.
- To be used in an abusive or hateful manner.
- For actions that would put Council representatives in breach of the Code of Conduct or policies relating to Town Councillors or staff. Please refer to the Disciplinary Policy for staff.

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Promote good news stories with a linked website or press page
- Advertise job vacancies
- Retweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Announce new information
- Post or share information from other Town Council related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities

- Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other Councillors
- Share any other information that is relevant to the community

Other users

Where individuals from partner organisations are involved and are acting on behalf of the Council, they will also be expected to comply with the relevant Council policies.

Terms of Use

It is also important to ensure that members of the public and other users of online services know when a social networking application is being used for official Council purposes. All Council representatives must adhere to the following requirements:

- They must only use the generic Brixham Town Council email addresses (or that of their own reputable organisation if they are not employed by the Council) for user accounts which will be used for official Council purposes. No personal email addresses should be used.
- Where social networking applications are being managed by Council representatives, appropriate feedback and complaints information must be published in a prominent place which is easily accessible to other users.
- The use of the Council's logo and other branding elements should be used where appropriate to indicate the Council's support. The logo should not be used on social networking applications which are unrelated to or are not representative of the Council's official position.
- Council representatives should ensure that any contributions they make are professional and uphold the reputation of the Council.
- Council representatives must not promote or comment on political matters or issues that may be regarded as such.
- The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.
- The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.
- Individual Town Councillors and Council staff are responsible for what they post in a Council and personal capacity.
- In the main, Councillors and Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Election protocol

All users need to be aware that applications may be closed for a defined period before local and national elections in order to comply with legislation which affects local authorities.

3. Enforcement

Any breach of the Terms of Use could result in the application or offending content being removed and the publishing rights of the responsible Council representative being suspended.

The Town Council reserves the right to close any applications, or remove content published by Council representatives which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council or put it at risk of legal action.

Any communications or content published that causes damage to the Council, any of its employees or any third party's reputation may amount to misconduct or gross misconduct to which the Council's Disciplinary Procedure applies.

4. Data Protection

As a Town Council we conform to Data Protection legislation in relation to all personal data that we hold, we are bound by the principles mentioned in the Act. Constant monitoring of our social networking sites is needed to ensure we do not breach legislation – hence the constraints that have been placed to limit this risk.

Facebook and Twitter both have their own Privacy Policies in place which users agree to when they register with the site and they are able to control what personal information is available and who can see it through their privacy settings. No personal information is held at any time by Brixham Town Council.

5. Freedom of Information

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Brixham Town Council is obliged to release certain information to the public. Information cannot be included on these two social networking sites that is not already publicly accessible on our website or Publication Scheme.

6. Risk

There are three main categories of risk when creating pages on any Social Networking sites:

- risk to the reputation of the Council
- technological risk
- risk to productivity of the Council's workforce

When creating content on Facebook and Twitter all three of these categories will be considered and appropriate steps taken to minimise them and ensure the Council does not incur unnecessary risk. If at any point it is felt that these risks outweigh the benefits, the content will be removed, access permissions denied or the applications withdrawn from use.

7. Code of Practice

When using social media (including email) Town Councillors and Council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Town Councillors and Council staff must not:

- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Present personal opinions as that of the Town Council
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council
- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Town Council
- Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- Use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post any information that infringes copyright of others
- Post any information that may be deemed libel
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Bring the Town Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages.

This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim may result in an award of damages against you.

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation and an offence.

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or committee meeting may constitute predisposition, predetermination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Town Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Town Clerk.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

The Town Clerk acts as the moderator of Town Council's social media output and is responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.

The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from Council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature. Where

appropriate, the moderator will have the authority to report any such posting to any other appropriate agency including Devon and Cornwall Police and Torbay Council's Safeguarding.