



IVYBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL MEDIA POLICY



Adopted 29 June 2020

Preamble

1. The aim of this policy is to establish the principles of use of media and social media by Ivybridge Town Council elected members, employees, working party representatives and volunteers on the use of media.
2. For the purpose of this policy media is defined as:
 - Written word, including email and text messages or similar
 - Television
 - Radio
 - Social Media
 - Any other associated means of communication.
 - Social media is defined as websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking, including, but not limited to:
 - Flickr and Instagram (video and photo sharing)
 - Snapchat and WhatsApp (messaging applications on which photographs can be sent)
 - Twitter and Tumblr (micro-blogging)
 - Forums and discussion boards
 - Websites on which users can leave comments and interact with other users via the comments section
 - Any websites that allow users to create and share content
 - Social networking e.g. Facebook
 - Professional networking e.g. LinkedIn
 - Video sharing e.g. Youtube
 - Blogs – e.g. Wordpress
 - Micro-blogging e.g. BBC Messageboard
 - Wikis e.g. Wikipedia
3. The policy is based on that included in the NALC 2013 publication 'Local Councils Explained' but takes into account the ever-developing world of social media.
4. Although a meeting of Ivybridge Town Council (the Council), its committees and sub-committees must be open to the public there are circumstances set out in paragraph 15 below where the public and press shall be excluded.

Introduction

5. The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through two-way communications with the community. It is committed to the provision of accurate information in respect of its functions, decisions and actions. See appendix 1 Local Government Association social media do's and don'ts.

6. The Council may communicate with those whose work involves gathering material for editorial publication in print, broadcast and electronic form (e.g. researchers, journalists, reporters, photographers, editors of newspapers and magazines, camera or sound operators and crew of TV and radio programmes), ("the media"), to publicise its business, decisions and actions. Subject to paragraphs 14 and 15 below, the Council's standing orders allow for recording by electronic means by anyone attending a meeting.

7. Where information is not available via the Council's publication scheme the Council shall endeavour to assist the media with enquiries about the Council's functions, decisions and actions.

8. This policy explains how the Council, its councillors and staff will work with the media, and the wider public, to meet the above objectives.

Legal and statutory restrictions

9. This policy is subject to the Council's statutory obligations set out in the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998, General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Council's standing orders. Relevant standing orders referenced to or explained in this policy are available via the Council's publication scheme.

10. The Council is also subject to the 2011 Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity issued under the Local Government Act 1986 which defines publicity as 'any communication in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or a section of the public'. Publicity has to be lawful, cost-effective, objective, even-handed, appropriate, have regard to equality and diversity and be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity

11. The Council, its councillors and staff cannot disclose information which is confidential or where disclosure of information is prohibited by law. Some but not all of the relevant obligations that councillors are subject to are contained in the Council's Code of Conduct, a copy of which is available via the Council's publication scheme.

12. Use of social media sites must at all times be consistent with the council's duty to safeguard children, young persons and vulnerable adults.

Meetings

13. As part of the Government Transparency Code (Open and accountable government), any member of the public is able to take photographs, film and audio-record the proceedings. Notices will be displayed making any members of the public attending meetings of the council or its committees aware that the meeting could be filmed or recorded by broadcasters, the media or members of the public. Although every effort will be made to ensure that members of the public are not filmed, there can be no guarantee of this, particularly where members of the public are speaking or taking an active role.

14. Where meetings include time for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Council's standing orders and leaflets are available for guidance.

15. The principles in paragraph 13 above also apply to social media, but in addition there may be an expectation that Wi-Fi will be available. However, availability of the systems at the Watermark cannot be guaranteed at all times. People attending meetings for the purpose of recording or using social media must be aware that where confidential matters are being discussed, or if they act in a disruptive manner to the good order of the meeting, then in accordance with standing orders they will be asked to leave.

16. In advance of meetings of the Council, its committees, sub-committees and joint committees, newspapers, news agencies or organisations that collect news for sound and TV broadcast are entitled, on payment of postage or other necessary charges, to copies of the agenda and necessary supporting papers. The accredited representatives of newspapers, news agencies or organisations that collect news for sound and TV broadcast shall be given reasonable facilities for taking their report of a meeting. Copies of agendas are also available on the Council's website as well as supporting information for full Council meetings.

Interviews, statements and articles

17. There will be one central point of control for all communications and the media must contact the Town Clerk if they wish to interview councillors or staff about its business decisions and actions or obtain a verbal or written statement from the Council about its business decisions and actions. If the Town Clerk is not available, the media should contact the Deputy Town Clerk, or the Mayor.

18. The Town Clerk, or in her absence, the Deputy Town Clerk may contact the media if the Council wishes to give an interview, provide a verbal or written statement to the media or publish an article using the media about its business, decisions and actions.

19. Any verbal or written statement given by the Town Clerk (or the designated deputy as the case may be) to the media represents the corporate position and views of the Council, not the individual views of its councillors or staff held in their official capacity.

20. The Mayor, Committee Chairmen and lead councillors on specific items such as transport are empowered to make statements of fact rather than of policy and respond to interviews subject to Council agreeing this annually. Written statements for the media or articles for publication should still be forwarded via the Town Clerk, or in her absence a nominated deputy, after checking for accuracy and accordance with the Council's decisions.

21. Councillors and staff cannot communicate their personal views about the Council's business decisions and actions and must not misrepresent the corporate position and views of the Council, or damage the reputation of others in the Council or the Council itself, which may be construed as bringing the Council into disrepute. Councillors and staff need to understand that a decision taken by the Council is the corporate view and position of the Council, even if they voted against it as a Councillor or disagree with it as a member of staff.

22. The Code confirms that it is acceptable for local councils to publicise the work done by individual councillors. This might be appropriate, for example, when one councillor has been the "face" of a particular campaign.

23. Particular care needs to be taken during the period between the notice of an election and the election itself ('Purdah') and members should be aware that the Council must not do or say anything that could be seen to support any political party or candidate. The Council will continue to publish service announcements using social media but may have to remove responses if they are deemed to be overtly party political.

24. If councillors or staff, in their private capacity, provide verbal or written statements or interviews to the media or write articles for publication using the media/social media on non-Council business, they are not permitted to use their title "Councillor" and staff members are not permitted to use their job title. They must ensure that it is clear that any such article has been produced in the member or member of staff's private capacity.

Appendix 1

Local Government Association - Social Media Do's and Don'ts

This policy has been developed following a survey of over 120 local government councillors and officers up and down the country. Their valuable feedback should help you get the most from social media.

This policy is intended to open the door to social media use in your local authority rather than block it. This policy is also intended to be a template for any local authority to use through a short list of common sense 'do's and don'ts'. Do feel free to add to them.

Social media guidelines can be as simple or as complicated as you want to make them. Many organisations have their guidelines down to just a single page. Some have reduced their guidelines down further to just five or six golden rules. And some have gone even further and covered them with one single sentence.

If you stick to this one simple rule you won't go too far wrong: don't post any message on social media that you wouldn't happily say in a public meeting.

LGA policy template: do's and don'ts at a glance

Do

- **Talk** to residents, staff and others. And do answer their questions (quickly and honestly)
- **Trust** your teams and staff to use social media
- **Be responsible** at all times
- **Be respectful** at all times, too
- **Innovate** – different approaches work for different people
- Have a **personality** – corporate speak or just issuing press releases won't work well on social media
- **Share** other people's helpful content and links
- **Credit** other people's work, ideas and links
- **Listen** (social media is designed to be a two-way channel, just like any good conversation)
- **Ask** your own questions. Seek feedback from your residents (but make sure you share the results with them)
- Have a **rota** where appropriate – share the load and you'll get more from your accounts
- Adhere to your existing **HR policies** – you don't need a separate HR policy especially for social media
- **Talk** to your communications team – they are there to help you
- **Learn** from others – there is rich learning of good practice social media use. Local government via organisations such as the LGA, **comms2point0**

- And more than anything, do use social media in the spirit in which it was intended – to **engage, openly and honestly**.

Don't

- **Broadcast** or talk at people. Your residents will soon spot broadcasts and respond accordingly
- **Block** social media – social media is not a risk, blocking its use is a risk
- Try to **cover up** mistakes, be honest and you'll get more respect for it in the long run
- Build accounts and just hope that people will come – sometimes it is best to go to the places where your audiences are already having conversations
- **Assume** that social media will look after itself – you will need to invest time, enthusiasm and energy to make it work. And don't leave your accounts unattended for long spells
- Post content which will **embarrass** your council or yourself
- **Ignore** legal advice, it's there to help you
- Think that a **disclaimer** in your bio will save you from potential legal action, it won't
- Expect your staff to make do with **old technology** which can be a barrier to effective working
- **Share your passwords** with anyone other than your communication leads
- Forget that **social media is 24/7** – just because you leave at 5pm doesn't mean the world stops or that residents won't be active. If your account is only staffed 9-5 then you should say so on your profile.