



Leigh-on-Sea Town Council

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Chairman: Cllr Caroline Parker
Vice Chairman: Cllr Paul Lawrence
Town Clerk: Paul Beckerson



LEIGH TOWN COUNCIL Use of Social Media, Internet & Email Policy

Leigh Town Council members¹ and officers are aware that social media, internet & email have become a regular part of everyday life and many people enjoy membership of sites such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn or Twitter. However, the Council is also aware that these sites can become a negative forum for complaining or gossiping and care must be taken not to breach confidentiality or offend anyone when using these services.

General Information for Email & Internet Use

The following policy has been designed to give staff and Members information on what the Town Council expect of them when accessing social media sites, using internet or email.

The lack of explicit reference to specific websites or service does not limit the extent of the application of this policy. Where no policy or guidelines exist, staff and Members use their professional judgment and take the most prudent action possible. Consult with the supervisor/Town Clerk if you are uncertain (an organisation chart is attached for this purpose).

This Policy applies to all staff and Members who are using the Council's computers or network.

Use of the Internet in the office by staff and Members is permitted where such use supports the goals and objectives of the Council. However, access to the Internet through the Council is a privilege and all staff and Members must adhere to the policies concerning computer, Email and Internet usage. Violation of these policies could result in disciplinary and/or legal action, and in the case of staff, could lead to and include termination of employment and for Members, action under the Code of Conduct which has been approved by the Council. They may also be held personally liable for damages caused by any violations of this policy. All staff and Members are required to acknowledge and confirm that they have understood and agree to abide by these rules.

Email and internet usage

- Staff and Members are expected to use the office Internet access responsibly and productively. Internet access is limited to Council related activities only and personal use is not permitted
- Council related activities include research and tasks that may be found via the Internet that would help in their respective roles
- All Internet data that is composed, transmitted and/or received by the Council's computer systems is considered to belong to the Council and is recognised as part of its official data. It is therefore subject to disclosure for legal reasons or to other appropriate third parties
- The equipment, services and technology used to access the internet are the property of the Council and it reserves the right to monitor internet traffic and monitor and access data that is composed, sent or received through its online connections

¹ The term member includes co-opted members

- Emails sent via the Council email system must not contain content that is deemed to be offensive. This includes, though not restricted to, the use of vulgar or harassing language/images
- All sites and downloads may be monitored and/or blocked by the Council if they are deemed to be harmful and/or not productive to business
- The installation of software such as instant messaging technology is strictly prohibited.

Unacceptable use of the internet includes, but is not limited to:

- Access to sites that contain obscene, hateful, pornographic, unlawful, violent or otherwise illegal material
- Sending or posting discriminatory, harassing, or threatening messages or images on the Internet or via the Council's email service
- Using computers to perpetrate any form of fraud, and/or software, film or music piracy
- Stealing, using, or disclosing someone else's password without authorisation
- Downloading, copying or pirating software and electronic files that are copyrighted or without authorisation
- Sharing confidential material or proprietary information outside of the Council
- Hacking into websites
- Sending or posting information that is defamatory to the Council.
- Introducing malicious software onto the Council network and/or jeopardizing the security of electronic communications systems
- Sending or posting chain letters, personal business unrelated to Council, solicitations, or advertisements not related to Council activity.
- Passing off personal views as representing those of the Council

If an employee/Member is unsure about what constitutes acceptable internet usage, then he/she should ask his/her supervisor/Town Clerk for further guidance and clarification.

All terms and conditions as stated in this document are applicable to all users of the Council's network and internet connection. All terms and conditions as stated in this document reflect an agreement of all parties and should be interpreted in accordance with the procedures mentioned above. Any user violating these guidelines may be subject to disciplinary action.

Social Media

Part 1 - Guidance for Work Use.

For the purposes of this policy, social media means any facility for online publication and commentary, including without limitation blogs, wiki's, social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube and also applies to posting Council related business on external sites. This policy is in addition to and complements any existing or future policies regarding the use of technology, computers, e-mail and the internet.

Setting up Social Media

If a staff member is requested by the Council to set up a social media profile this must be consistent with profile on the Leigh Town Council website or other Town Council publications.

If it is felt to be an advantage to the Council to set up a social media site an application must be submitted to the Town Clerk and the approval by of the Finance & General Purposes committee will be sought.

Don't Tell Secrets

It's perfectly acceptable to talk about the work of the Council and have a dialog with the community, but it is not appropriate to publish confidential information. Confidential information includes things such as unpublished Council business, certain financial information, for example quotations and tender costs, Employees and Councillors must respect each other's and customers regarding confidentiality and data protection.

Be mindful not to post information that is not in the public domain.

Protect your own privacy

Privacy settings on social media platforms should be set to allow anyone to see profile information similar to what would be on the Leigh Town Council's website. Other privacy settings that might allow others to post information or see information that is personal should not be available.

Be Honest

Do not blog anonymously, using pseudonyms or false screen names, use your real name, be clear who you are, and identify that you work for, or are a Councillor on, Leigh Town Council. Do not say anything that is dishonest, untrue, or misleading. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out. Be conscious about protecting yourself and your privacy, consider the content carefully and also be cautious about disclosing personal detail.

Respect copyright laws

It is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use or fair dealing of copyrighted material owned by others, including Leigh Town Council.

Respect the Public, Members & Staff of Leigh Town Council

The public in general, Councillors, staff and customers, are diverse so avoid giving contradictory information about the Council. You must also avoid making ethnic slurs, offensive comments, defamatory comments, personal insults references to obscenity and topics that may be considered objectionable, harassing, victimising or inflammatory. Consider also subjects such as politics and religion and use your best judgment. When appropriate make it clear that the views are not necessarily the official view of the Town Council as a decision may be awaited from Council e.g. if a decision by a committee is pending. Make sure what you are saying is factually correct.

If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. If you choose to modify an earlier 'post', make it clear that you have done so. If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as their copyrighted material or a defamatory comment about them), deal with it quickly - better to remove it immediately to lessen the possibility of a legal action. Inform the Town Clerk of the incident immediately you are aware there might have been a mistake.

Think About Consequences As an example consider what might happen if a member of staff or Member is in a meeting with a customer or supplier and someone on the customer side pulls out a print-out of your blog and says " X person at the Town Council says that the customer is not worth having, they have financial problems"

Controversial Issues

If you see misrepresentations made about the Town Council in the media, you should bring this to the attention of the Town Clerk.

Disclaimers

Many social media users include a prominent disclaimer saying who they work for, but that they're not speaking officially. This is good practice and is encouraged.

Enforcement

Policy violations will be dealt with according to the relevant disciplinary procedure.

Part 2 - Guidance for Personal Use

If you have your own personal profile on a social media website, or you post on other people's pages you should make sure that others cannot access any content that would undermine your position as an employee or Member.

When using social media sites, you should consider the following:

If you decide to talk about the Council bear in mind it is not appropriate to publish confidential information, unpublished details about Council business, details of current projects unless discussed in public session at a Council meeting, financial information, research e.g. quotations for projects. This is not an exhaustive list and you should always consider any information you are posting about details of your work or Council business.

If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so. If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as a defamatory comment about them), deal with it quickly.

Social media identities, logon ID's and user names may not use Leigh Town Council's name.

Ways in which you can prevent situations arising are:

- Changing the privacy settings on your profile so that only people you accept as friends can see your content.
- Ensuring personal blogs have clear disclaimers that the views expressed by the author are theirs alone and do not represent the views of the Town Council. Make your writing clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the Town Council.
- Ensuring information published by you does not reveal confidential Town Council business and respects data protection policies. Breach of confidentiality may result in disciplinary action.
- Ensuring you are always respectful towards:

Staff and Members of the Town Council, Customers and Suppliers

Staff and Members should be aware that any disrespectful comments to the above might be seen as libellous and could result in disciplinary action.

- Leigh Town Council logos may not be used.
- Staff must ensure that blogging does not interfere with their job or work commitments

Please remember you are an ambassador for the Town Council and be aware that your actions captured via images, posts or comments online can reflect on the Council.

User compliance - I understand and will abide by this Usage Policy. I further understand that should I commit any violation my access privileges may be revoked, disciplinary action and/or appropriate legal action may be taken.

Employee signature

Date.....

Council Member signature

Date.....