



Sturminster Newton Town Council

Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

Sturminster Newton Town Council recognises that social media is an important tool for communication, engagement and transparency.

This policy provides a framework for how the Council and its councillors use social media responsibly and lawfully.

This policy aligns with:

- Standing Orders 2025–26
- Scheme of Delegation 2025
- LGA/NALC Model Councillor Code of Conduct (2020)
- Data Protection legislation (UK GDPR)

2. Purpose of this Policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Set standards for the use of social media by councillors,
- Clarify how official Council social media is managed,
- Protect the reputation and integrity of the Council,
- Reduce the risk of misinformation,
- Ensure compliance with the Code of Conduct,
- Clearly distinguish between official Council communications and personal views.

3. Official Council Social Media

3.1 Official Council social media accounts are controlled and managed by the Proper Officer (Town Clerk), as per the Scheme of Delegation.

3.2 Only the Proper Officer, or an officer authorised by them, may:

- Post on behalf of the Council,
- Issue public statements,
- Respond to official enquiries online,
- Correct misinformation where required.

3.3 Councillors must not operate or post from any social media account implying that it represents the Council unless formally authorised.

4. Standards for Official Accounts

Official Council social media must:

- Be factual, accurate and politically impartial,
- Be respectful and accessible,
- Protect personal data and confidentiality,
- Signpost to the Council's website for formal information,
- Avoid argumentative or political debate.

5. Councillors Using Social Media in a Personal Capacity

Councillors may use social media personally or politically, but must comply with the Code of Conduct at all times, including online.

5.1 Mandatory Disclaimer

Councillors must clearly state on ****every post**** expressing an opinion or commentary on Council-related matters:

"These are my own views and not the views of Sturminster Newton Town Council."

Where character limits apply, a shorter version is acceptable:

"Views my own, not the Council's."

5.2 When to Use the Disclaimer

The disclaimer must be included when posting about:

- Local issues,
- Council decisions, services or policies,
- Council staff, committees or councillors,
- Anything reasonably interpreted as relating to Council business.

6. Councillor Responsibilities on Social Media

Councillors must:

6.1 Be clear about capacity

- Never imply they speak for the Council unless authorised,
- Avoid using Council logos or assets on personal accounts.

6.2 Be factually accurate

- Information posted must be accurate, fair and not misleading,
- Any inaccuracies must be corrected promptly once identified.

6.3 Behave respectfully

- Treat others with respect,
- Avoid harassment, bullying or discriminatory behaviour,
- Not disclose confidential information.

6.4 Avoid bringing the Council into disrepute

- Avoid posts that undermine public confidence,
- Never attack officers, who cannot respond publicly.

6.5 Declare interests

- Any personal interest should be declared when commenting on related matters.

7. Respect for Democratic Decisions

Sturminster Newton Town Council is a democratic corporate body, and decisions are taken collectively by majority vote.

7.1 Acceptance of Council Decisions

Once the Council has lawfully resolved a matter, that decision becomes the position of the Council as a whole. Councillors may explain how they voted, but must not use social media to denigrate, undermine, or campaign against a democratic decision of the Council.

7.2 Accurate Presentation of Decisions

Councillors must present Council decisions fairly and accurately, must not misrepresent them, and must not imply that the Council is acting improperly.

7.3 Constructive Expression of Dissent

If a councillor disagrees with a decision, they may state so factually (e.g., “I voted against this decision”), but must refrain from negative commentary that damages the Council’s reputation or misleads the public.

8. Misinformation and Misconduct

If a councillor posts information that is misleading, inaccurate or presented as Council policy when it is not, the Proper Officer may:

1. Ask the councillor to correct the post,
2. Publish an official correction if necessary,
3. Refer the matter to the Monitoring Officer if it may breach the Code of Conduct,
4. Notify Full Council or a committee if reputational risk is significant.

9. Restricted or Prohibited Content

The following must not be posted by councillors or officers:

- Confidential or exempt information,
- Personal data without consent,
- Defamatory, abusive or discriminatory content,
- Material that breaches copyright or legal restrictions.

10. Moderation and Records

The Proper Officer will ensure:

- Important official posts are retained under the Records Retention Policy,
- Screenshots of abusive or threatening posts are kept where needed for evidence,
- The Council can comply with FOI or data protection requests involving social media.

11. Staff Use of Social Media

Staff conduct on social media is governed by the Staff Handbook.

Staff must not post on behalf of the Council unless authorised by the Proper Officer.

12. Training and Support

The Council will offer councillors training on:

- Safe social media use,
- Understanding the Code of Conduct online.

13. Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if required due to changes in:

- Legislation,
- Code of Conduct requirements,
- Council governance,
- Identified risks.

Approved on: 26 November 25

Review Due: November 27