



SELBY TOWN COUNCIL (the Council) COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Introduction

This policy aims to guide Council activity in respect of the media, the use of social media, the use of email and the internet, and events including speaker engagements.

Purpose

- To enable the Council collectively to be a reliable, timely, regular and dependable provider of information
- To enable all Council communications to reflect accurately the position of the Council
- To consult, interact, distribute information and be clear and transparent about the Council's activities and decisions
- To support, guide and assist councillors and staff with their communications, both internal to other councillors and staff and external to members of the public and other organisations
- To meet legislative requirements

Background documents

This policy has drawn from the following:

- The Information Commissioner's Office guidance under the Model Publication Scheme.
- The NALC Parish Council Media Plan
- The Society of Local Council Town Clerks social media policy

Who does this policy apply to?

All employees and members are expected to always comply with this policy to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council.

Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to possible dismissal.

Contents	
Introduction	1
Purpose	1
Background documents	1
Who does this policy apply to?.....	1
MEDIA POLICY	4
Introduction	4
Legal Requirements and restrictions	4
Meetings.....	4
Other communications with the media.....	5
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY	7
Introduction	7
Using Selby Town Council's social media sites	7
Using social media	7
Monitoring use of social media websites	8
Policy for the use of Facebook	9
EMAIL AND INTERNET POLICY	12
Introduction	12
General	12
Email etiquette	12
Unacceptable use of the internet.....	13
Personal use of email and the internet	13
Monitoring and privacy	13
Responsibilities	15
APPENDIX A	16
Press and Social Media Procedure and Guidance	16
Town Clerk and Officers of the Council	16
Members of the Council.....	16
Dealing with the Press.....	17
Issues to be Aware of.....	17
Meetings of Council and Committees	17
Press Releases	17
APPENDIX B	18

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES.....	18
General advice	18
Facebook specific advice	18
Twitter specific advice	18

MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

1. Selby Town Council is committed to the provision of accurate information about its governance, decisions and activities. If information is not available via the Council's media or other policies, the Council's Town Clerk should be contacted.
2. The Council shall, where possible, co-operate with those whose work involves gathering material for publication in any form including use of the internet ("the media").
3. This policy explains how the Council may work with the media to meet the above objectives in accordance with the legal requirements and restrictions that apply.

Legal Requirements and restrictions

4. This policy is subject to the Council's obligations which are set out in the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the Local Government Act 1986, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the General Data Protection Regulations, other legislation which may apply and the Council's standing orders and financial regulations. The Council's financial regulations and relevant standing orders referenced in this policy are available via the Council's publication scheme.
5. The Council cannot disclose confidential information or information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law. The Council cannot disclose information if this is prohibited under the terms of a court order, by legislation, the Council's standing orders, under contract or by common law.

Councillors are subject to additional restrictions about the disclosure of confidential information which arise from the code of conduct adopted by the Council, a copy of which is available via the Council's publication scheme.

Meetings

6. A meeting of the Council and its committees is open to the public unless the meeting resolves to exclude them because their presence at the meeting is prejudicial to the public interest due to the confidential nature of the business or other special reason(s) stated in the resolution. In accordance with the Council's

standing orders, persons may be required to leave a meeting of the Council and its committees, if their disorderly behaviour obstructs the business of the meeting.

7. Where a meeting of the Council and its committees include an opportunity for public participation, the media may speak and ask questions. Public participation is regulated by the Council's standing orders.

8. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a meeting of the Council and its committees (which includes e.g. using a mobile phone or tablet, recording for a TV/radio broadcast, providing commentary on blogs, web forums, or social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) which enable a person not at the meeting to see, hear or be given commentary about the meeting is permitted unless (i) the meeting has resolved to hold all or part of the meeting without the public present or (ii) such activities disrupt the proceedings or (iii) paragraphs 9 or 10 below apply.

9. The photographing, recording, filming or other reporting of a child or vulnerable adult at a Council or committee meeting is not permitted unless an adult responsible for them has given permission.

10. Oral reporting or commentary about a Council or committee meeting by a person who is present is not permitted.

11. The Council shall, as far as it is practicable, provide reasonable facilities for anyone taking a report of a Council or committee meeting and for telephoning their report at their own expense.

12. The Council's standing orders will confirm if attendance by the public, their participation, photographing, recording, filming or other reporting is permitted at a meeting of a sub-committee.

13. The Council has adopted a policy 'Guidance for the Recording of Meetings' which is available on the Town Council website or from the Town Clerk.

Other communications with the media

14. This policy does not seek to regulate councillors in their private capacity.
15. The Council's communications with the media seek to represent the corporate position and views of the Council. If the views of the councillors are different to the Council's corporate position and views, they must make this clear.
16. The Council's Town Clerk, or others as designated by the Town Clerk, may contact the media if the Council wants to provide information, a statement or other material about the Council.
17. Subject to the obligations on councillors not to disclose information referred to in paragraph 5 above and not to misrepresent the Council's position, councillors are free to communicate their position and views.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

1. This policy is intended to help all employees and councillors make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as posts, blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube.
2. Social Media provides alternative channels (to written correspondence, telephone and face to face conversations) for the Council to inform and respond to questions raised by people who live in, work in and visit Selby Town.
3. This policy outlines the standards required by employees and councillors when using social media in relation to the Council's activities, the circumstances in which the Council monitors an individual's use of social media and the action it will take in respect of breaches of this policy.
4. This policy supplements the Council's Email and Internet Policy and, at present, relates to content on the all the Council's Facebook Pages and Twitter accounts (this includes Town Council, Markets and Town Hall).

Using Selby Town Council's social media sites

5. Only the Town Clerk and RFO are permitted to post material on the Town Council website or social media platform in the Council's name and on its behalf.
6. Officers are responsible for posting material on their relevant website, web page or social media platforms.

Using social media

7. The Town Council recognises the importance of social media in shaping public thinking about our council and community. We also recognise the importance of our employees and councillors joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.
8. Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the council, employees and councillors must have read and understood this policy and the council's other media and communications policies.
9. Whenever you are permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, you must adhere to the following:
 - a. Do not upload, post, tweet/retweet or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.

- b. Any employee or councillor who feels they have been harassed or bullied or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague acting on behalf of the council onto a social media website should inform the Town Clerk or the Chair of the Council or, in their absence, the Vice Chair.
- c. Commercial sensitive, personal, private or confidential information should never be disclosed. If there is uncertainty about whether the information intended to be shared falls within one of these categories, this should be discussed with the Town Clerk.
- d. Items published by central and local government bodies or public health organisations, which give information or advice essential to residents, can be shared. This includes surveys and questionnaires which are deemed to be of value to residents and to Selby Town Council in its policy making and planning.
- e. Third party content: advertisements for commercial interests will not generally be shared, posted or hosted on the Council's sites. Details of community events run primarily by not-for-profit organisations are acceptable; however, the posting of any fund-raising appeals or events must be agreed by the Chair of the Council.
- f. Any content belonging to a third party should not be uploaded, posted or forwarded unless the third party gives consent, or the information is already in the public domain.
- g. Before linking to a third-party website, any terms and conditions of that website should be checked to ensure linking is permitted.
- h. Do not escalate heated discussions. Refer complaints and inquiries to the Town Clerk giving contact details.
- i. Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory.
- j. Councillors need to be aware that if they publish contact details they can be accessed and used widely by people.
- k. Councillors and employees must never publish anyone else's contact details without their permission.

Monitoring use of social media websites

10. Employees should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

11. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against individual councillors or the Council.

12. In particular, a serious case of uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):

- a. Pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature)
- b. False and defamatory statement about any person or organisation
- c. Material that is offensive, obscene, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, councillors or employees
- d. Confidential information about the Council or anyone else
- e. Any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the Council); or
- f. Material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

13. Any such action will be addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure and for employees may result in dismissal.

14. Where evidence of misuse is found the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedure, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

15. Anyone who notices any use of social media by other employees in breach of this policy is asked to report it to the Town Clerk or the Chair of the Council.

Policy for the use of Facebook

The following text has been added to the Town Council Facebook page and may serve as guidance for other social media sites.

“The Selby Town Council Facebook page intends to:

Provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within Selby Town Parish and promote positive comments from residents within the parish.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Selby Town Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council’s goals, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others, vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated

- Differing opinions and discussions of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including Selby Town Councillors or employees, are not.
- Share freely and be generous but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Facebook page for commercial purposes or to market products.

This site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people.

Sending a message/post via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through the Facebook channel. Instead, please contact the council through the Town Clerk admin@selbytowncouncil.gov.uk

We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam

Non-compliance will not be tolerated and may result in a ban.

Selby Town Council is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by any subscriber in any forum; opinions expressed in comments on Selby Town Council social media forums do not necessarily represent those of Selby Town Council.

Selby Town Council is not responsible, liable for and does not endorse the privacy practices of Facebook or any linked websites. Your use of Facebook and any linked websites or downloaded from those websites is at your own risk.

Selby Town Council assumes no responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of any use or reliance upon the information and material contained within or downloaded from these websites.

By choosing to comment and/or utilise any Selby Town Council social media site, users are deemed to agree to this policy."

EMAIL AND INTERNET POLICY

Introduction

1. Employees and councillors need to be aware that communications via email and internet usage undertaken in the name of the Council or on Council systems carry inherent risks including potential defamation, the spreading of viruses, cyber-attack, breach of contract, breach of copyright, breach of data protection legislation, breach of privacy and unlawful discrimination.
2. At the same time, the Council's right to monitor email and internet usage must be exercised in accordance with the law, in particular the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act, as monitoring is usually intrusive, and employees have a right to some privacy within the workplace.

General

3. The Council provides employees and councillors with email and internet access as required for the performance and fulfilment of job responsibilities and therefore usage should be restricted to these activities.
4. Employees are expected to use email and the internet sensibly and in such a manner that it does not interfere with the efficient running of the organisation.
5. Employees should download files only onto computers with virus checking software and should check how long the download will take. If there is any uncertainty as to whether or not the software is virus free or whether or not the time taken to download is reasonable, the Town Clerk or the Council's IT support should be consulted.

Email etiquette

6. The following points should act as a guide to appropriate email usage:
 - a. It is good practice to use the agreed email signature, including waiver clause
 - b. Emails must be written using appropriate business language
 - c. Emails must not contain or circulate any offensive, libellous, indecent or obscene material or anything that breaches the Council's Equality Policy
 - d. Emails must adhere to rules regarding confidentiality
 - e. Users must be aware of the possibilities of importing viruses into the system and should not open suspect attachments or click on links unless absolutely certain that they are safe
 - f. The recipient's email address should be double checked to ensure it is correct
 - g. All users should check whether it is appropriate to "reply all" or copy "to all"

Unacceptable use of the internet

7. The following is deemed to be unacceptable use of or behaviour on the internet.

- a. Allowing non-authorised users to access the internet using an employee's log-in or while logged on
- b. Visiting internet sites that contain obscene, hateful, pornographic or illegal material or passing on such material to colleagues or external people
- c. Using the computer to perpetrate any form of fraud, or software, film or music piracy
- d. Using the internet to send offensive or harassing material to other users
- e. Hacking into unauthorised areas
- f. Publishing defamatory and/or knowingly false material about the Council, its employees, councillors or members of the public on social networking sites, blogs, Wikis or any other online publishing format
- g. Undertaking deliberate activities that waste staff effort or networked resources
- h. Introducing any form of malicious software into the Council's network
- i. Gambling online
- j. Any other area that the Council reasonably believes may cause them problems

Personal use of email and the internet

8. The Council understands that on occasions employees and Councillors may need to send or receive personal emails using their Council address. Similarly, employees may need to use the internet for personal purposes.

9. When sending personal emails, employees or Councillors should show same care as when sending Council related emails. Employees may access the internet at work for personal purposes provided that:

- Such use is limited to before/after work hours or during lunch break
- The internet is not used to access offensive or illegal material
- They do not enter into any contracts or commitments in the name of or on behalf of the Council

10. Employees are prohibited from using their own personal devices or software to access council network systems.

Monitoring and privacy

11. The Council reserves the right to monitor employees' email:

- a. If the employee is absent for any reason and communications must be checked for the smooth running of the organisation to continue. If the

employee has their laptop at home, they must forward their emails to admin@selbytowncouncil.gov.uk if they are absent for any reason.

- b. If the Council suspects that the employee has been viewing or sending offensive or illegal material, such as material containing racist terminology or nudity (although the Council understands that it is possible for employees inadvertently to receive such material and they will have the opportunity to explain if this is the case).
- c. If the Council suspects that an employee has been using the email system to send and receive an excessive number of personal communications.
- d. If the Council suspects that the employee is sending or receiving emails that are detrimental to the Council.
- e. When monitoring emails, the Council will attempt to do this without opening emails that are clearly marked as private or personal, but Council reserves the right to open these should Council believe it is necessary
- f. The Council reserves the right to retain information that it has gathered on employees' use of email for a period of one year

12. The Council considers the following to be valid reasons for checking an employees' internet usage.

- If the Council suspects that an employee has been viewing offensive or illegal material, (although the organisation understands that it is possible for employees inadvertently to view such material and they will have the opportunity to explain if this is the case).
- If the Council suspects that the employee has been spending an excessive amount of time viewing websites that are not work related.
- The Council reserves the right to retain information that it has gathered on employees' use of the internet for a period of one year

13. Emails and internet use may also be monitored for the purposes of the prevention or detection of crime, apprehension or prosecution of offenders and collection or assessment of any tax or duty.

14. The Council is subject to Article 8 of the Human Rights Act, which creates a right to respect for private and family life. Care will be taken to ensure that any monitoring is not excessive. The extent of any monitoring will be made clear, and a privacy impact assessment may be undertaken.

15. Employees are advised that if monitoring identifies potential breaches of this policy, this may lead to formal disciplinary action. Serious breaches may amount to dismissal for gross misconduct.

Responsibilities

The Council's email account is monitored by officers during office hours, Monday – Friday 10am – 4pm. Officers aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as they can and within 5 working days.

The Town Clerk is responsible for dealing with emails and passing them to relevant Councillors or external agencies to deal with. The recognised procedure for the sending of e mails from the Council to local residents, businesses and organisations is that they will be sent by the Town Clerk to the Parish Council. This procedure was adopted to ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

APPENDIX A

Press and Social Media Procedure and Guidance

This procedure does not seek to be either prescriptive or comprehensive but sets out to provide guidance on how to deal with some of the practical issues that may arise when dealing with the Press and Media.

This document has been prepared as a guidance note for officers and councillors. It represents the policy of the Council in respect of its relationships with the Press and Media.

Town Clerk and Officers of the Council

In the absence of the Town Clerk, media consultations will be handled by officers of the Council in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

Where such questions are put to the Town Clerk they should refer the enquirer to the Leader of the Council, Mayor or a Committee Chairman as considered appropriate.

No other officer of the Council, unless authorised or given delegated authority by the Town Clerk, would be permitted to speak or communicate with the Press and Media on any matter affecting the Council or its business.

Members of the Council

When speaking or providing written material to the Press and Media, Councillors should make clear the capacity, in which they are providing the information. For example: -

- As Mayor
- As Chairman of a Committee
- As a Political Group Leader
- As an individual (i.e., a letter to press for publication)
- As spokesperson or as a Press Officer for a political party
- Never use the prefix “Councillor” when writing to the press as an individual. This implies you are stating Council policy. A copy of any written material sent to the Press and Media by a Member, as representing the Council, must be forwarded to the Town Clerk.
- Take particular care if the press or media approach you for comment on a controversial subject, and do not be led into stating something you did not really mean to say. If unsure about any particular policy, simply state “no comment” and ask the press to contact the council offices.

Dealing with the Press

When dealing with the Press verbally, councillors and officers should be aware of the following:

- Be informed and certain of all your facts
- Ensure that when making comments on behalf of the Council that you are aware what Council policy is and that your comments reflect that Policy
- Be calm
- Ensure that their comments and views will not bring the Council, Councillors or its staff into disrepute and ensure that comments are neither libellous nor slanderous

Issues to be Aware of

Councillors and officers not used to dealing with the press may be surprised when they see that statements made in all innocence look very different in print than from how they were spoken. It is advantageous to write out a statement or position beforehand.

Meetings of Council and Committees

Copies of Agendas sent to Councillors for meetings of the Council, or its Committees will be e-mailed to the Press and Media upon request. The agenda is also published on the Council's website.

Facilities will be provided at meetings for the Press to take notes of proceedings.

As provided in the Council's Standing Orders both the Press and Public may be excluded from a meeting whilst certain confidential matters (as provided for in the relevant legislation) are under discussion.

Press Releases

- All press releases made on behalf of the Council will be prepared or overseen by the Town Clerk and Leader of the Council following any meetings of Committees, Sub-Committees, Working and Steering Groups
- The Town Clerk, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, is also authorised to publish press releases on any urgent matters where there is insufficient time for a council meeting.

APPENDIX B

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

General advice

- a. Recognise that posts are more likely to be seen at these times - Weekdays and Saturdays: 1-3pm, Sunday: 1-4pm
- b. News stories should be shared as soon as possible to get the most response
- c. When writing posts; start the sentence with the most important information first. Use simple syntax (i.e., avoid using contractions and commas) and keep it short
- d. Use hashtags relevant to the area/subject. Try and use hashtags other people are using instead of inventing your own (e.g., #Selby will reach more people than #SelbyTownCouncil).
- e. Emojis (when used in the right context) can help draw attention to the text
- f. Always use images as part of your posts (where appropriate) – squares work best on Facebook/Instagram. Landscape works best for Twitter.

Facebook specific advice

- a. Aim to fit text within 2-3 lines
- b. If you are writing a larger amount of text. Try and start the first sentence with something snappy to grab people's attention.
- c. Try and post a link without having the web address in the post (can depend on what device you use)
- d. Use no more than 4-5 emojis
- e. Use no more than 4 hashtags
- f. Schedule Facebook posts to ensure they are within the times stated above (unless it is something to be posted immediately).
- g. The public facing Facebook page is the furthest reaching tool when it comes to advertising events etc
- h. Facebook is the most widely used with 51% of adults using it more than once a day

X (Twitter) specific advice

- Keep text simple and direct
- Use hashtags where applicable. Hashtags are a lot more relevant on Twitter. (Twitter recommends using around 3).
- Use as many emojis as you please. Twitter is more personality driven.
- Only ¼ of adults use Twitter regularly, the rest use it less than once a week.

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Cross Reference Documents	Information Technology Security Policy