

## **FRINTON & WALTON TOWN COUNCIL**

### **GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS AND EMPLOYEES WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA**

These Guidelines were drawn up by Tendring District Council and were amended and adopted by Frinton & Walton Town Council at a Full Council Meeting on the 01.06.22.

#### **What do the Guidelines Cover?**

These Guidelines cover all Social Media platforms, including but not limited to:

- Social Networking Sites (Facebook, Myspace, Foursquare, LinkedIn, Google+)
- Micro-blogging sites (Twitter)
- Blogs (including personal blogs as well as comments)
- Video and Photo Sharing Websites (Flickr, YouTube)
- Forums and discussion Boards (Google Groups, Yahoo! Groups)
- Email between councillors and other parties

#### **Social Media**

Social Media is a collective term used to describe effortless ways to create and publish on the internet. People use the term to describe how organisations and individuals share content – text, video, and pictures – and create conversations on the web. Examples of Social Media tools include blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Flickr, Tumblr, and YouTube. The Council recognises the benefits that these new methods of communication can bring but reminds all Members to use social media responsibly.

#### **Summary Principles:**

- **These Guidelines should be considered in conjunction with the Council's Members' Code of Conduct**
- **It relates to all use of Social Media, when acting in any capacity**
- **When making use of social media, Councillors and employees should make use of stringent privacy settings if they do not wish them to be accessed by press or the public**
- **You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of Social Media**
- **Treat others with respect**
- **Comply with equality laws**
- **Do not disclose confidential information**
- **Do not disclose any personal or sensitive information**

- **If using third party material, ensure you have the requisite permission and that it is accurate.**
- **Since the judgment of whether you are perceived to be acting as a Councillor or in your employed role will be taken by someone else, it is safest to assume that any online activity can be linked to your official role.**

### Key Points

- ❖ Your online presence reflects on the Council and your role as a Councillor and employee. Be aware that your actions captured via images, posts or comments can affect your ability to take part in Council business.
- ❖ Comments posted on personal blogs should have clear disclaimers that the view expressed by you in the blog are your views alone and do not represent the views of the Council. Be clear and write in the first person. Make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the Council.
- ❖ Comments on personal blogs, other blogs, forums, and social networking sites should be respectful to the Council, its staff, and other people.
- ❖ You need to use sound judgement and control what you publish online. What you publish is widely accessible and will be around for a long time so consider the content carefully.
- ❖ Social Media activities should not host content which is defamatory of others.
- ❖ Abuse of Social Media can be a criminal offence.

The Council has produced the below simple guidelines to help Members and employees: -

- ✓ **Do** – listen to what people are saying online, consider it and only respond if you feel it is appropriate
- ⚠ **Do not** – publish anything you would not say in traditional media
- ✓ **Do** – remember libel and copyright laws still apply to things you post on Social Media sites and what you publish is widely accessible and may always be around
- ⚠ **Do not** – bring the Council, or your member role or employed role, into disrepute
- ü **Do** – make it clear whether you are speaking from a personal perspective or as a member or employee representing the Council or a Member representing your political party
- ⚠ **Do not** – use social media during Council/Committee meetings if you are a Member of the Committee or taking part in the meeting, if it interferes with or distracts from the business of the meeting
- ✓ **Do** – think about how the public might perceive who you follow on Twitter or befriend on Facebook etc
- ⚠ **Do not** – disclose any information which you have received in confidence

- ü **Do** – be respectful in your communications with others. Avoid personal attacks and disrespectful, rude, or offensive comments (which can be a criminal offence). Think before you publish!
- û **Do not** – assume that everyone shares your sense of humour. Others may be offended by the joke you thought was hilarious, or may not realise when you are being sarcastic or ironic
- ü **Do** – use Social Media when sober. Drinking alcohol and tweeting is not a clever idea.

**Remember** – Although Freedom of Expression provides Councillors with a greater degree of protection when acting as a Councillor, inappropriate use of Social Media could amount to a breach of the Member Code of Conduct.

As a Councillor you are in a position where you can request information from officers that might not otherwise be publicly available, and you will also be included on information sent out to all Members. This may be privileged information that is provided to you to ensure you are aware of local issues and to enable you to fulfil your role as a Councillor. You must consider how you use this information since it may be that it is private or privileged. You should check before posting this information on social media.

Agreed by Full Council: June 2022

Review Frequency: 3 yearly

For Review: June 2025

