



Northleach with Eastington Town Council

Social Media Guidance

1. Introduction

Northleach with Eastington Town Council (“the Council”) recognizes the importance of social media in promoting effective communication, engaging with constituents, and enhancing the reputation of the Council and its councillors. However, it is essential to maintain civility, respect, and good governance in all online interactions. This policy aims to ensure that councillors, council staff, and members of the public uphold these principles while using social media platforms.

This policy does not seek to limit freedom of expression. Councillors are generally free to express their ideas and opinions without censorship or interference. Councillors are personally responsible for their conduct online and should always be mindful of the Nolan Principles and the Members Code of Conduct.

2. ‘Acting in capacity’ as a Councillor

A Councillor may wish to consider the following when using social media:

- (a) Keep separate accounts for professional and private matters. By having one account which incorporates both a Councillor’s professional and personal life, Councillors are increasing the risk of being found as acting as a councillor if a complaint is made.
- (b) If a Councillor wishes to keep just one account, be clear on what the account is used for. For example, if the account is personal, keep it private and refrain from using Council or Councillor terminology or referring to your role as a Councillor.
- (c) While a Councillor may make a distinction on social media about what is a personal account/content and what is their Councillor account/content, that does not mean what a Councillor posts on a personal account is private, and it could be shared by other people in public forums or used by the media.
- (d) Councillors should take particular care to ensure that, in any comment or post they create, they do not imply that they are speaking on behalf of the Council as a whole. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only. Avoid the use of the Council logo or other official identifiers.

3. General responsibilities

- (a) Councillors should never post anything on social media that they would not be prepared to discuss in public meetings, with the local media, or with their constituents.
- (b) Councillors should be mindful of the safety of themselves, their families, and others. Any information posted to social media is public including pictures, profile information, friends lists, and comments. Individuals will be able to see your information and link you to other people, which may include vulnerable children and adults.
- (c) Councillors should only share accurate information from reliable sources and should be mindful of 'fake news' stories and outlets. It's evidenced that anonymous profiles can contribute to the spread of misinformation or fake news, as well as cyberbullying, trolling and hate crime.
- (d) Councillors should be trustworthy and not use social media to divulge any confidential or exempt information which has been shared with them.

The Local Government Association has published social media guidance for councillors at <https://www.local.gov.uk>, which you may find useful.

4. Potential legal issues

In addition to a potential breach of the Code of Conduct, misuse of social media may give rise to other consequences. The following issues, which may lead to criminal or civil legal proceedings, may also arise:

- data protection
- publication of obscene material
- incitement
- copyright
- harassment
- discrimination
- bias
- defamation

5. Unacceptable Behaviour

The intimidation, abuse, bullying and harassment of councillors and council staff, in person or online, is unacceptable, whether by councillors, council staff, or members of the public. Such behaviour undermines the effective functioning of councils, hinders councillors from representing their constituents, discourages people from getting involved, and erodes trust in local democracy. The Council will deal with any such occurrences in line with its policies on Unreasonable Behaviour and Dignity at Work.

6. Version control: This document was adopted on 13 September 2023.