

Tendring
District Council



TENDRING DISTRICT
COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE
FOR MEMBERS

TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL

GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA

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+, Whatsapp)
- 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)

Correspondence, in all forms, should be consistent with this guidance.

Social Media

Social Media is a collective term used to describe easy ways to create and publish content on the internet. People generally 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 methods of communication can bring, but reminds all Members to use Social Media responsibly and with consideration to the Council's Social Media Policy and Communication Strategy.

Summary Principles:

- **These Guidelines should be considered in conjunction with the Council's Members' Code of Conduct**
<https://www.tendringdc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/TDC%20New%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20April%202018.pdf>
- **It relates to all use of Social Media, when acting in any capacity**

When making use of Social Media, Councillors 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 and messaging platform.**
- **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 will be taken by someone else, it is safest to assume that any online activity can be linked to your official role. Online activity and posts must not bring the Council into disrepute.**

Key Points

- ❖ Your online presence reflects on the Council and your role as a Councillor. 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 contractors and the public.
- ❖ You need to use sound judgement and control what you publish online. What you publish is widely accessible and will always be available, so consider the content carefully. Even if you delete it, someone may have taken a picture of it.
- ❖ Social Media activities should not host content which is defamatory toward others.
- ❖ Abuse of Social Media can be a criminal offence.

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

- ✓ **Do** – listen to what people are saying online, consider it and only respond if you feel it is appropriate
- ✗ **Don't** – publish anything you would not say in traditional media, for example during the pre-election period, or saying how you will vote on a particular issue
- ✓ **Do** – remember libel and copyright laws still apply to things you post on Social Media sites and the content you publish is widely accessible and may always be around
- ✗ **Don't** – bring the Council, or your Member role, into disrepute
- ✓ **Do** – make it clear whether you are speaking from a personal perspective or as a Member representing the Council or a Member representing your political party
- ✗ **Don't** – use Social Media during 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. and what you might share from others which may be seen as an endorsement

- ✘ **Don't** – disclose any information which you have received in confidence
- ✔ **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!
- ✘ **Don't** – 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
- ✔ **Do** – look to share content from the Council's corporate accounts, particularly at times of major incidents
- ✘ **Don't** - use social media when angry or under the influence of alcohol. Posting on Social Media during these times is not advisable.

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 Members' Code of Conduct.

As a District Councillor you are in a position where you are able to request information from officers that might not otherwise be publically 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 District 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.

Members should be able to use social media to promote their work without fear of harassment, bullying, defamation or other hate speech; this is finely balanced with comment (and criticism) based upon freedom of speech and political debate.

Should Members be concerned about comments made then they should refer to that platform's community guidelines and take appropriate action, such as reporting the comment or post, and potentially blocking users. In more serious cases you may wish to consider seeking legal advice.

If Members are concerned about their safety or security, or feel they are being harassed, you may also wish to report it to Essex Police using the 101 service. Members may also consult with the Council's Communications Manager.

Approved and adopted by the Standards Committee

on ***** 2022