



PORTLAND
TOWN COUNCIL

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ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Policy Number	Version	Owner	Date Adopted	Review Date
019	Draft Electronic Communication and social media policy 24-04-23	Council		May 2025

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables Portland Town Council to interact in a way that improves the communications both within the Council and between the Council and the people, organisations, and community it works with and serves.

The Council has a website (www.portlandtowncouncil.gov.uk), has administration access to the Portland Town Council Facebook page (www.facebook.com/portlandtowncouncil), and uses email to communicate.

The Council will always try to use the most effective channels for its communications. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

The council website and Facebook page are available to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities on Portland and promote our community positively.

Objectives

The objectives of our website and social media communications are:

- To communicate the work of Portland Town Council
- To provide information to residents about local news and events
- To enable members of the public to engage with the Council
- To support and encourage the work of community groups and volunteers
- To promote Portland as a visitor destination and foster a sense of pride in the place we live.

In order to achieve these objectives, Portland Town Council may share information and posts from other organisations such as but not limited to Dorset Council, Island Community Action (ICA), Dorset Police, Portland Community Partnership, Drop-In etc.

Website and Social Media Posting

To protect the council from sharing false, misleading, plagiarised or otherwise inflammatory information, the following process should be applied when posting to the website or social media:-

- Posts relating to the work of Portland Town Council may be shared freely. However, they must meet the criteria below.
- Posts from approved organisations may be shared freely, as long as they are relevant and meet the above objectives. In this instance, councillors or officers should contact either the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, or the PCV Manager.
- If information is available and has not otherwise been requested to be posted, the Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk or PCV Manager may share posts from approved organisations if they feel that they are appropriate and help to support the above objectives.
- Photographs showing people will only be published with express consent from featured individuals.

Communications Criteria

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- be civil and relevant;
- not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, discriminatory, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright;
- not contain any personal information without consent;
- if it is official Council business, it will be moderated by either the Clerk to the Council or the Deputy Town Clerk;
- not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

Personal Social Media Accounts or Online Fundraising Accounts

- These are very much a part of modern communications. Staff and Councillors should however work to the following guidelines:
- If staff or councillors blog or tweet personally, and not in their role as a councillor, they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the council. They should not include web links to official council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the council.
- Council on-line funding platforms will only be used when endorsed by resolution of the Council or Finance and Governance Committee.
- Councillors using online funding platforms may only do so on behalf of the Council, when this has been expressly sanctioned by formal Council resolution.
- Staff and councillors must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others.
- Staff and individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address, which is used for council business. Both staff and councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.

Communications

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, the following guidelines should be regarded:

- be considerate and respectful of others - vulgarity, threats or abusive language will not be tolerated;
- differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted;
- share freely the official Council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due;
- stay on topic;
- the Council's Facebook page is not to be used for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

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

authorities. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.

Sending a message or posting 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 these channels. Instead, please make direct contact:

- with the Council's office (office@portlandtowncouncil.gov.uk)
- to members of the council by sending an email or letter
- via the Council website (<https://portlandtowncouncil.gov.uk>)

The Council retains the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- obscene, discriminatory, or racist content;
- personal attacks, insults, or threatening language;
- potentially libellous or defamatory 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;
- allegations of a breach of a Council's policy or the law;

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate.

This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on social media not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Offenders may be blocked.

Council Website

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Councillors for consideration and response. We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

Council email

The Town Council office has an email address – office@portlandtowncouncil.gov.uk. The email account is monitored mainly during office hours and we aim to respond to all questions as quickly as possible. During busy times, there may be a delay.

Any emails sent to the Clerk, Officers or councillors in their official capacity will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act 2000. These procedures will ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Do not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council, this includes names, addresses, email, IP addresses and cookie identifiers.

Internal communication and access to information within the Council.

The Council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of social media and electronic communication is a major factor in delivering improvement.

Data Protection

Councillors and staff are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Data Protection Act 2018 in all their work on behalf of the Council.

It is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely and in line with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information inappropriately. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures. Members should also be careful only to copy essential recipients on emails.