Councillors' social media guidance

> **Although the best use of social media is conversational in tone, publishing opinions and material online is still publishing, which means what you've 'said' is written down and permanent.**

While there's no additional legal or ethical burden around using social media, the usual legal rules (such as complying with the council's code of conduct) still apply and must be considered when using social media.

The key to whether your online activity is subject to the council's code of conduct is whether you are giving the impression that you are acting as a councillor.

Since the judgment of whether you are perceived to be acting as a councillor will be taken by someone else, it's safest to assume that any online activity can be linked to your official role. This is particularly true if you hold a lead member role and you are commenting on policy or decisions within your portfolio.

If the content of your online activity is objective, balanced, informative and accurate, and you maintain and demonstrate an open mind on any matters on which you may be called upon as a member to make a decision, you substantially reduce the possibility of a successful legal challenge to the content being made.

To make sure you comply with the council's code of conduct and to ensure your use of online media is well received, we suggest the following advice:

✓ Do

- **Set appropriate privacy settings** for your social media pages or blog – especially if you have a private, non-political blog.
- **Keep an eye out for defamatory or obscene posts** from others on your pages or blog and remove them as soon as possible.
- Be aware that **the higher your profile** as a councillor, the more likely it is you will be seen as acting in your official capacity whenever you post online.
- Be aware that by publishing **information that you could not have accessed without your position as a councillor**, you are likely to be seen as acting in your official capacity.

- Make sure that any **comments on policy or decisions** within your portfolio reflect your role as lead member.
- **Use a disclaimer.** Whenever you publish content online, make it clear that what you are saying is representative of your views and opinions, and does not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of Tewkesbury Borough Council. However, remember that it is still very difficult for the audience to separate you from your official role at Tewkesbury Borough Council, particularly if you are a lead member. For example: "The views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of Tewkesbury Borough Council."
- **Treat others with respect** – avoid personal attacks or offensive comments.
- Refrain from publishing anything you have **received in confidence**.
- Ensure you **don't bring the council or your councillor role into disrepute**.
- Comply with **equality laws**.
- **Help to promote the council's messages** to your social media followers by sharing content from the council's corporate accounts on your own pages.

✗ Don't

- Post in **haste.**
- Post comments that you would **not be prepared to make in writing or in a public meeting.** Statements spreads faster online than through any other form of communication.
- **Publish an untrue statement** about a person which is damaging to their reputation as they may take libel action against you.
- Use council facilities for **personal or political posts.**
- Publish **personal data of individuals** unless you have their written permission.
- **Copy and paste posts** from the council's corporate accounts to your own pages. (Instead, please support our corporate accounts by sharing our posts.)
- **Mislead your followers** by implying collective council achievements are your own individual achievements.

> **If you are ever unsure or would like further advice, please contact the council's communications team.**