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**SOCIAL MEDIA AND
ELECTRONIC
COMMUNICATION
POLICY**

May 2023

1. introduction

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

The Council has a website, Facebook page, **Instagram** and Twitter accounts and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel 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 these changes occur, this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

The Council Facebook / Instagram pages, and Twitter account intends to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within our Town and promote our community positively.

This policy applies to employees, Councillors, contractors and where appropriate, members of the public.

2. Communications from the Council

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful and relevant.
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, 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.
- If it is official Council business, it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council, committee Chair or Vice Chair or the to the Council.
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

3. Guidelines for Employees, Councillors, Contractors and Members of the Public

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Town Council's Facebook and Twitter pages are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of 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 and be generous with official Council posts but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page or Twitter site for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

The site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or 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/post via Facebook or Twitter 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 Clerk, staff, and/or members of the council by emailing.

4. Removing Content

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

- Obscene or racist content
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Potentially libelous 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
- Alleges 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 the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page. The Council may post a statement that '*A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed*'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

5. Town 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.

The Council may, at its discretion, allow and enable approved local groups to have a presence on its website for the purpose of presenting information about the group's activities. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the web site if it feels that the content does not meet the Council's 'rules and expectation' for its website.

6. Parish/Town Council email

All enquiries should be sent to reception@rydetowncouncil.gov.uk or directly to the relevant officer.

The reception@ email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

Council Officers are responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk or delegated officer, and/or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk. All new emails requiring data to be passed on, will be followed up with a Data consent form for completion before action is taken with that correspondence.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views and, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. NB any emails copied to the Clerk or Council Officers becomes official and will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act.

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.

7. SMS (texting)

Members should **not** contact the Clerk or Council officers via their personnel mobile phones. The Council discourages the use of SMS messaging to staff mobile phones, however, such messages are permitted on occasion where absolutely necessary and if there is an urgent need. This policy also applies to such messages.

8. Video Conferencing e.g., Skype

If this medium is used to communicate please note that this policy also applies to the use of video conferencing.

9. 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 communications is a major factor in delivering improvement.

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

As more and more information become available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation).

Members should also be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.