

Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council

Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council Digital Communication Policy

The Digital Communication Policy was adopted by Full Council at its Meeting held on 12th April 2023.

1. Introduction

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Kirkby Lonsdale Town Councillors on how to use online communications, collectively referred to as digital and social media. In addition, it includes guidelines on Councillor responsibilities when using such channels of communication. Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council will ensure that training is provided for members and officers in connection with this policy.

2. The principles of this policy apply to Kirkby Lonsdale Town Councillors

3. Defining Digital communication and Social Media:

- a. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing information on the internet.
- b. This policy covers all forms of digital activity, social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):
 - Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council's website
 - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social networking sites
 - YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
 - LinkedIn
 - Blogs and discussion forums
 - Email
 - Virtual Telephone Conferencing Technology (eg: Zoom, Microsoft Teams)

4. The Purpose of the Policy:

- a) Digital and Social media communication platforms provide Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities, providing updates, news and relevant information from other

sources. Digital communication and Social media plays a key role in communicating quickly and efficiently across the community, increasing accessibility in both participation and dissemination.

- b) The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.
- c) The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.
- d) Individual Kirkby Lonsdale Town Councillors are responsible for what they post in a Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council and personal capacity.
- e) Kirkby Lonsdale Councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

5. Digital and Social media Communication Platforms may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Holds Virtual Public meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Promote good news stories with a linked website or press page
- Advertise job vacancies
- Share information from partner agencies such as County Council, District Council Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Announce new information
- Post or share information from other Town Council related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other Councillors
- Share any other information that is relevant to the community

6. Code of Practice

- a) When using digital communication and social media (including email) Kirkby Lonsdale Town Councillors must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.
- b) Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.
- c) Kirkby Lonsdale Town Councillors must not:
 - Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
 - Present personal opinions as that of Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council
 - Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council

- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council in their capacity as a Town Councillor
 - Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
 - Engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
 - Use an individual's name unless given permission to do so
 - Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
 - Post any information that infringes the copyright of others
 - Post any information that may be deemed libel
 - Post online activities that constitute bullying or harassment
 - Bring the Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
 - Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
 - Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence
- d) Publishing untrue statements about a person, which is damaging to their reputation, is libel and can result in a court action and a fine for damages.
- e) This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.
- f) Posting copyrighted images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.
- g) Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation and is an offence.
- h) Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.
- i) Kirkby Lonsdale Town Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council or committee meeting may constitute predisposition, predetermination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Kirkby Lonsdale Town Councillors or residents should report them to the Town Clerk.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

7. Responding to Digital and Social Media Comments

Residents and Councillors should note that not all communication requires a response.

- a) There will not be immediate responses to digital and social media communications as they may require further discussion by the Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council. All responses will be agreed upon by a quorum of the Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council.
- b) The Town Clerk and the moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.
- c) If a matter needs further consideration, it may be raised as a full agenda item at the next Town Council meeting. Again, the poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.
- d) If the moderator feels unable to answer a post for example, of a contentious nature this shall be referred to the Town Clerk. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Town Clerk directly.
- e) Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Town Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.

8. Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council Website:

The Council will appoint a nominated 'Webmaster' to maintain and update the KLTC Council website. The KLTC website conforms to accessibility guidelines.

The KLTC website may be used to:-

- Post notices, Agendas, and minutes of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Post good news stories
- Link to appropriate websites or press pages if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct
- Advertise vacancies
- Retweet or 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, library, district council etc.
- Announce new information appropriate to the Council
- Share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups
- Post other items as the Council see fit
- Facebook and/or Twitter etc. may be used to support the website and its information as above

9. Email Communication:

- a) Kirkby Lonsdale Town Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address

which is used for Council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.

- b) Any email account used for Town Council business and correspondence will be subject to any request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- c) Kirkby Lonsdale Town Councillors are responsible for ensuring the security of all devices, apps and packages used to create and/or download Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council business and all devices should be password protected.

10. Handling Media and Social media Enquiries

- a) The Clerk will coordinate all media enquiries into the Town Council office. In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate for the Chair/Deputy Chair to respond to the enquiry. Members of the Town Council who are directly approached by the media should not attempt to answer questions themselves without establishing the full facts and should confer with the Clerk/Chair/Deputy Chair before responding.
- b) Members of the Council who are directly approached by the media/ social media may respond in accordance with the guidance contained in this policy. The Council should not pass comments on leaks, anonymous allegations or allegations about individual staff and Members. *The phrase “no comment” should not be used as a response to a media enquiry.* The Council is open and accountable and should always explain if there is a reason why it cannot answer a specific enquiry.

11 Press Releases and Letters or Emails to the Media/ Social media

The use of press releases is a key technique for publicising Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council activities, decisions and achievements.

There are two types of press releases:

a) Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council Press Releases

An official Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole; in most cases, it will be written and issued by the Clerk. Official Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council releases will follow a corporate style appropriate for the media being targeted and a central record will be maintained. All releases will accurately reflect the corporate view of Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council, contain relevant facts, and may include an approved quotation from an appropriate Councillor. Releases will not promote the views of specific political groups, publicise the activities of individual Councillors, identify a Member’s political party or persuade the general public to hold a

particular view. All official Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council releases will be placed on the Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council's website within two working days of issue.

b) Press Releases issued by Kirkby Lonsdale Town Councillors

Kirkby Lonsdale Town Councillors should not issue press releases on behalf of Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council unless mandated by the Full Council. Other press releases issued by Kirkby Lonsdale Town councillors are personal and these types of releases may or may not be political and should not include the name of any Officer, use the Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council logo or the Council telephone number as a point of contact. It must make clear that these are the personal views of the Councillor and not of the Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council. It would be beneficial for copies of intended releases, especially those of a factual nature, to be provided to the Clerk. Councillors seeking advice are advised to contact the Clerk.

12 Responsibilities

- a) The Town Clerk is the designated 'Council' owner of the Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council digital communication and Social Media channels agreed upon by the Council. Councillors officially appointed by the Council may assist the Town Clerk to disseminate information. However, all must ensure they follow this policy. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Town Clerk.
- b) The Kirkby Lonsdale Town Council's "Digital and Social media moderator" acts as the moderator of the Town Council's social media output and is responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Digital and Social Media Policy.
- c) The moderator will have the authority to remove any posts made by third parties from the Council's Digital and social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature. Where appropriate, the moderator will have the authority to report any such posting to any other appropriate agency including Cumbria Police and Cumbria County Council's Safeguarding Unit.
- d) Individual Councillors are at liberty to set up their own accounts, but they should ensure they comply with this policy and ensure the 'personal view' disclaimer is used.
- e) The Town clerk has the responsibility to coordinate any digital meetings via virtual telephone conferencing technology and email digital meeting links to members of the public.

13 General application of this policy

- a) All employees, whether Authorised Users or not, are required to adhere to this policy and guidance which forms part of the policy even when they are using social media for personal use. Employees should note that any breaches of the policy and guidance, for example, bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the organisation, may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.
- b) If you discover defamatory, confidential, obscene or otherwise unlawful material that you consider affects the Council or any of its employees (whether in a public forum or via direct message) you should draw it to the attention of the Town Clerk or in the case of the Town Clerk to the Chair of the Council immediately. You must take their advice [and that of the Council's legal team where necessary] before taking any action on the social media site in question.

15 Equality Impact

- High Relevance
- Low Impact

This policy and associated processes are designed to protect people from discrimination and harassment whilst broadening accessibility to information and communications.

This policy will be reviewed annually.

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