



## **HOWDEN TOWN COUNCIL**

### **SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY**

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables Howden 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 ([www.howden-tc.gov.uk](http://www.howden-tc.gov.uk)) and its own Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/HowdenTownCouncilPage/](https://www.facebook.com/HowdenTownCouncilPage/)).

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 Facebook page is available to provide information and updates regarding activities and opportunities within the Town and promote our community positively.

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 the Clerk
- not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising

In order to ensure all the discussions on the Council page 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 Council members or staff, will not be permitted
- share freely 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 for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products



Social media pages and social media comments and / or messages are not monitored 24 hours a day 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 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 Clerk ([clerk@howden-tc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@howden-tc.gov.uk)) and/or members of the Council by sending an email or letter. Contact details can be found on the Council website.

We retain the right to remove comments or content that include:

- obscene 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. Any information posted on social media not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked. If the post alleged 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.

#### 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.

#### Town Council Email

The Clerk to the Town Council has a specific email address ([clerk@howden-tc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@howden-tc.gov.uk)). The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message is used when appropriate.

The Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to members of external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Clerk, and / or otherwise will always be copied to the Clerk.

Any emails sent to the Clerk or Councillors in their official capacity will be subject to The Freedom of Information Act 2018.

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 continues to look at ways to improve ways of working and the use of social media and electronic communication is a major factor in delivering improvement.

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 becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors are expected to maintain and awareness of the confidentiality of information they may 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.

Members should be careful only to cc essential recipients on emails but ensure copying in all who need to know and ensuring all email trails have been removed.

Policy Approved: Full Council March 21<sup>st</sup> 2023