



**Loughton Town Council – Social Media Policy**  
*Reviewed at the RGS meeting on 8 April 2026*

## **1. Introduction**

Loughton Town Council (LTC) recognises that social media is a valuable tool for engaging with residents, sharing information, and promoting council services. Social media platforms—such as Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, and community forums—enable two-way communication and help the Council reach a wider and more diverse audience.

This policy applies to all employees, councillors, and authorised representatives using social media on behalf of LTC. It also provides guidance for personal use where it may impact the Council.

This policy ensures that social media is used responsibly, legally, and in a way that protects the Council's reputation and the public and ensures that anything that appears on a LTC social media channel reflects on the Council and its reputation.

## **2. Purpose of the Policy**

The aims of this policy are to:

- Provide clear rules for the professional use of social media
- Protect LTC from security, legal, and reputational risks
- Ensure consistent, accurate, and appropriate communication
- Support officers and councillors in understanding their responsibilities
- Ensure compliance with relevant legislation, including data protection, copyright, and local government publicity rules
- Prevent the Council being brought into disrepute or associated with inappropriate content or platforms

## **3. Using Social Media on Behalf of LTC**

### **3.1 General Conduct**

When posting on LTC channels, users must:

- Communicate respectfully, professionally, and accurately
- Avoid racist, sexist, inflammatory, or offensive language
- Avoid posting anything that could cause “*harassment, alarm or distress*”
- Ensure spelling, grammar, and tone are appropriate
- Avoid “text speak” except where audience-appropriate
- Never disclose personal information about staff, councillors, or residents
- Follow LTC’s data protection, safeguarding, and confidentiality requirements

### **3.2 Legal Compliance**

Users must be aware of legal risks, including:

- Defamation
- Malicious falsehood
- Copyright infringement
- Data protection breaches
- RIPA and Human Rights considerations

Misuse may cause LTC to be fined, become liable for civil damages... and potentially cause service users harm or distress. Any concerns about legality must be referred to the Town Clerk before posting.

### **3.3 Political Neutrality**

In line with the Local Government Act 1986:

- LTC social media must not be used for party-political purposes
- Posts must not promote or appear to support any political party or candidate
- During the pre-election period (purdah), additional restrictions apply

This includes avoiding political imagery, retweets, likes, or comments that could be interpreted as political endorsement.

### **3.4 Account Management**

- Only authorised officers may access LTC social media accounts
- Officers must use their LTC email address, not personal accounts
- Users must log out after use to prevent accidental posting
- Any threats, abuse, or harassment received must be reported to the Town Clerk immediately

#### **4. Personal Use of Social Media**

Employees and councillors may use personal social media accounts, but must:

- Never use personal accounts for LTC business
- Avoid giving the impression they speak for the Council
- Use disclaimers if identifying themselves as council employees
- Avoid posting anything discriminatory, offensive, or damaging to LTC
- Avoid sharing confidential or sensitive information
- Redirect complaints or enquiries to official LTC channels
- Report trolling or targeted harassment to the Town Clerk
- Closed or private accounts can still be copied and screenshotted, so caution is essential.
- Personal social media use during work hours is only permitted during breaks.

#### **5. Risks and Compliance**

Incorrect use of social media can lead to:

- Legal breaches (e.g., RIPA, Data Protection Act, copyright law)
- Reputational damage
- Financial penalties
- Harm or distress to service users

Failure to follow this policy may result in disciplinary action.

#### **6. Councillor Guidance**

Councillors should:

- Engage respectfully and constructively with residents
- Listen, respond appropriately, and correct mistakes promptly
- Avoid extremist or inflammatory views
- Share helpful, factual information
- Maintain a clear distinction between personal and official roles
- Stay within the Members' Code of Conduct
- Avoid political content on LTC channels
- Use social media *“in the spirit in which it is intended – to engage, openly and honestly.”*

## **7. Content Standards for LTC Channels**

Posts should:

- Be factual, timely, and relevant
- Promote council services, events, and community information
- Encourage constructive engagement
- Avoid jargon and overly formal language
- Credit original sources when sharing content
- Avoid sharing unverified information

## **8. Reporting and Escalation**

Users must immediately report to the Town Clerk:

- Threats, abuse, or harassment
- Suspected legal issues (e.g., defamation claims)
- Data breaches or accidental disclosure
- Hacked or compromised accounts
- Posts made in error
- Any complaints mentioning libel MUST be reported to the Town Clerk immediately.

## **9. Review of Policy**

This policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains compliant with legislation, best practice, and technological developments.