# OTTERY ST MARY TOWN COUNCIL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

### 1. Introduction

1.1 The objective of this policy is to provide Officers and Members an overview of Social Media and outline Ottery St Mary Town Council's (`the Council`s`) position on various aspects of their use. In addition, it includes guidelines on Officers and Members responsibilities when using such channels of communication.

### 2. Definition of Social Media

2.1 Social media is a term for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other in various ways through sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.

2.2 Social media has the following characteristics:

• Covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs and audio.

• Allows messages to flow between many different types of device; computers, phones and tablets.

• Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or just view information.

• Speeds and broadens the flow of information.

• Provides one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications.

• Allows communication to take place in real time or intermittently.

• Examples of popular social media tools include Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn and YouTube.

### 3. Purpose of the Policy

3.1 Social media provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities by providing updates, news and

information. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with harder to reach groups, such as the younger population and business community.

3.2 The Council will make use of approved social media tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control its use in order to minimise the risks detailed below.

**4. Aims**

4.1 Social media can be used by the Council as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity.

4.2 As with any online activity there are often risks associated; the following types of risk have been identified with social media use:
•Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection from infected sites.

•Disclosure of confidential information.

•Damage to the reputation of the Council.

•Social engineering attacks (this is the act of manipulating people into disclosing confidential material or carrying out certain actions. Social engineering is often conducted by individuals fraudulently claiming to be a business or client).

•Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation.

•Breach of safeguarding.

4.3 In light of these risks, the Council needs to regulate the use of social media and ensure that such use does not damage the Council, its employees, partners and the people it serves.

4.3 The aim of this Policy is to ensure:

•Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of council based services through the use of social media.

•A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media.

•That Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media.

•That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.

•That the Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected.

•That communication by use of social media is effective, timely, appropriate, useful, engages with a wider audience and utilises cross-promotion of other Council communication tools (e.g. website, press releases, Facebook, Twitter etc.)

4.4 Social media activity isn't something that stands alone; to be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned projects, promotions and activities can be plugged in to social media platforms to increase reach and exposure

## 5. Policy Statement

5.1 It is acknowledged that there is considerable potential for using social media which can provide significant advantages. The responsible, corporate use of social media is actively encouraged. The following applies equally to Officers and Members.

5.2 This policy provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems/networks.
5.3 Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, and ensure that its use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

5.4 The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of the Council:

- Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy.

- Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media on behalf of the Council.

- Never give out personal details such as home address and telephone numbers.

- Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's Data Protection Policy.

- Respect copyright, fair-use and financial disclosure laws.

- Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important to ensure that you are confident about the nature of the information you publish. Permission must be sought if you wish to publish or report on meetings or discussions that are meant to be private or internal to the Council. Don't cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers without their approval.

- Don't use insulting, offensive or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace. Show consideration for others 'privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory –such as politics or religion.

- Don't download any software, shareware or freeware from any social media site, unless this has been approved and authorised by your line manager.

- Use of the Council's Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn accounts(which may be set up in the future) must always reflect the
Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal opinion, particularly when used by a Member. If unsure, say nothing. Any postings must be non-party political.

## 7. Guidance for Officers

7.1 Where Officers use social media in a professional capacity to represent the Council, the Council's corporate identity will be used and not that of any individual officer. The Council`s email addresses will be used. The use cannot be party political.

7.2 Officers using social media in a personal capacity must ensure that this use is strictly personal, and not professional or political.

7.3 As members of the public may nevertheless recognise Officers as employees of the Council it is important that Officers ensure that their personal use of social media is not damaging to the reputation of the Council.

7.4 If an officer receives any threats, abuse or harassment from members of the public through their use of social media then they must report such incidents to the Chief Executive Officer or in the case of the Chief Executive Officer being subjected to this type of behaviour for him/her to report it to the Mayor.

7.5 Officers should not spend an excessive amount of time while at work using social media and should ensure that its use does not interfere with other duties.

7.6 The Council reserves the right to monitor employees 'internet usage, and access may be withdrawn in any case of misuse.

7.7 Failure to comply with the guidelines could result in disciplinary action being taken.

## 8. Guidance for Members

8.1 Members should ensure that they are familiar with the guidance that is set out within this policy and that their use of social media does not put the Council's information and security systems at risk, or be damaging to the reputation of the authority. Members should also be familiar with the Members 'Code of Conduct which outlines key information and guidance on best practice issues such as information handling and security.

8.2 Members are at liberty to set up accounts using any of the tools available but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view.

8.3 Members should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language