

Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

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

Communications from the Council will:

- 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;
- Be moderated by the Town Clerk or either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council where it is official Council business;
- Not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising using social media.

To ensure that all discussions on the Council page are productive, respectful and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask anyone using social media or contacting us via our website or by email to:

- Be considerate and respectful of others - vulgarity, threats or abusive 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;

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- 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. We will, however, 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 Town Clerk and/or Members of the council by email, telephone or letter.

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

- Obscene or racist content;
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language;
- Potentially libellous 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/theme under discussion;
- Commercial promotions or spam;
- Allegations of a breach of a Council's policy or the law

The Council's response to any communication received that does not meet 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 and 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.

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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 and maintain a presence on our website for presenting information about the group's activities. The local group will be responsible for maintaining the content and ensuring that it meets the Council's expectations for the website. The Council reserves the right to remove any or all of a local group's information from the website if it feels that the content does not meet these expectations. Where content on the website is maintained by a local group it will be clearly marked that such content is not the direct responsibility of the Council.

Town Council email

The Town Clerk has his own council email address (clerk@carncrofttowncouncil.org). The email account is monitored mainly during office hours (Tuesday to Friday) and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An '*out of office*' message will be used when appropriate.

The Town Clerk is responsible for dealing with email received and passing on any relevant mail to Councillors or external agencies for information and/or action. All communications on behalf of the Council will usually come from the Town Clerk, and/or otherwise will be copied to the Town 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 residents expressing their personal views, but it must be made clear that they are not then acting on the Council's behalf. Any emails copied to the Town Clerk become official and will be subject to the **Freedom of Information Act**.

SMS (texting)

Councillors and the Town Clerk may use SMS as a convenient way to communicate at times – this policy will apply to such messages.

Video Conferencing e.g. Skype

If this medium is used to communicate, this policy will also apply.

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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.

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 electronically 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 as set out in the Council's **Information and Data Protection Policy**.

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.