DESBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL
Social Media Policy

This policy provides Councillors, volunteers, and staff, an overview of Social Media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use. In addition, it includes guidelines on Officer, Volunteer, and Councillor responsibilities when using such channels of communication.

Social media is a term for web content based on user participation and user-generated content. They include social networking sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction. Social media has the following characteristics:
• covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs, audio;
• allows messages to flow between many different types of device;
• 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 take place in real time or intermittently.

Examples of popular social media tools include: Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, You Tube, Pinterest, Instagram, and Linked In. Groupings of interest are a natural feature of the development of such systems with people with similar interests being attracted to share information.

Whilst these tools are very useful to share information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of:
• the information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world. In many cases it is not even necessary to register to view the content. Registering is only required should you wish to participate and post to the site;
• groups on specific themes can set up easily and posts then edited by the owners of that group to reflect their single interest, ensuring theirs is the only voice heard;
• there is no guarantee of truth, and it is more likely that ill informed comment and gossip will be found than useful information;
• the nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is all too easy to respond instantaneously which can result in unintentionally inflaming a situation. Information can then be shared with other sites and be spread far beyond the intended audience: friends of friends may not be our friends;
• it is very easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages that would outweigh any value gained in the first place.

The Council will not use any social media platform, and no-one is authorised to post material on any social media website in the Council's name or on its behalf. The Council will use the Council's own website to provide commentary (in accordance with the law and Regulations) and to provide information. The Council will not use its website to link directly to the social media of any organisation or individual.

Individual Councillors, volunteers, and staff may of course have personal accounts on social media and may use these for their own purposes. So long as they do not refer to Council business at all then there should be no problem. It is when a personal account, or previously personal account, is used to discuss an issue of relevance to the Council or a Council issue that problems may ensue.

Individual Councillors, volunteers, and staff are very strongly advised to refrain from using personal accounts to refer to Council issues. To do so may render all the activity on that account liable to judgement in accordance with the Code of Conduct, Disciplinary Policy, and the law as it applies to the Council.

Individual Councillors, volunteers, and staff 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.

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

All staff, volunteers, and Councillors
- Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy, and the Council's Code of Conduct.
- Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.
- Never give out personal details of others such as home address and telephone numbers.
- Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection legislation.
- When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the Council. Avoid use of the Council e-mail address, logos or other Council identification, and do not post or comment on items of relevance to the Council.
- Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong.

All staff and volunteers
- Staff and volunteers must not use Social Media accounts in relation to the Council's business.

Councillors
- Councillors must be aware that any use of social media in which reference is made to the role as a Councillor, or to Council business (however tenuous) may be deemed to make the whole account and every comment in it a "Council" account and therefore the standards of the Code of Conduct will be applied.
- Councillors 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. Councillors 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.
- Know your obligations: you must comply with other Council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach Council confidentiality and proprietary information policies.
- Where Councillors choose to use personal accounts for the Council's business they must make it clear that what they say is representative of their personal views only. Where possible a standard disclaimer should be used such as: "*Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent the Council's policies or opinions*".