

## Introduction

Online social media websites offer unparalleled access to the views and opinions of the electors of Arlesey Town Council (ATC) as well as the opportunity to communicate town council business more widely in the community and interact more dynamically with the electorate.

There is, however, a risk of reputational damage to ATC if its social media footprint is not carefully managed. Guidance is thus required to ensure that the council is not brought into disrepute through poorly managed communications, sending of conflicting messages, the management of abuse and slander or any other challenging online situation.

There is further reputational risk to the council if individual councillors are not consistent in their social media strategies when representing the council.

This document provides guidance on the usage of the ATC owned social media accounts and the personal social media accounts of Councillor's.

## Aims of the ATC social media policy

The aim of this policy document is to give guidance to the administrators of ATCs social media accounts and wider councillors of their responsibilities when using social media as a representative of ATC. More specifically it should ensure that:

- A consistent approach is taken by councillors when representing ATC using social media
- Relevant council material remains secure and council business is not compromised through use of social media
- ATC's social media footprint acts to enrich its existing online offerings
- Councillors are aware of how their personal social media accounts should be managed to not conflict with ATC interests.

## ATC's Social Media Footprint

As an initial proof-of-concept ATC will manage two social media accounts:

- "Arlesey Town Council" Facebook Group Account
- "@ArleseyTC" X account
- ATC Town Clerk account – to enable sharing of Town Council page posts on community group pages and membership of said groups.

Further social media accounts may be adopted in the future but would require an amendment to this social media policy and sanctioning by the corresponding PR committee in advance.

## **The role of ATC's Social Media Accounts**

ATC's social media accounts will be used to communicate ATC business to the community. Initial communications will include:

- The notification and links to ATC meeting minutes hosted on [www.arlesey-tc.gov.uk](http://www.arlesey-tc.gov.uk)
- The notification of upcoming meetings and dissemination of materials including promotion of ATC events/activities and council facility hire/activity.
- Advising electors and other bodies of when and how to formally contact ATC on specific issues
- Other factual notices associated with ATC (e.g. Casual Vacancies and Election Notices)
- Discretionary reposting/retweeting of other social media items that include ATC.
- Communicating community partner information on events and activities benefitting Arlesey residents e.g.: Beds Connect police activity information and Central Bedfordshire Council public notices.

ATC's social media accounts will not be used for any of the following:

- Advertising commercial enterprises
- Formally answering the questions of electors or offering formal advice to the electorate
- Offering subjective opinion on local issues

If the council is asked to publish materials outside of either of these lists, the delegated members or staff responsible for administering the accounts should use their discretion as to whether it is appropriate to post the material acting as ATC.

For guidance, the content posted to ATC's social media holdings should not be any more intrusive than the information available from [www.arlesey-tc.gov.uk](http://www.arlesey-tc.gov.uk).

## **Setting up ATC's social media accounts**

Accounts are already operational, the username/password combinations will be controlled by the Town Clerk, and the Council's approved Website administrator (Eyelid Productions).

The imagery used on the banners of the Facebook group and X feed will be selected by the Town Clerk.

## **Managing ATC's social media accounts**

The Town Clerk will be the 'Manager' of the social media accounts and as such will determine, in consultation with the Chairman of Public Relations Committee or Chairman of Full Council in the absence of a Public Relations Committee, the content of the page. The Town Clerk will determine the suitability of any 'posting'.

Should the Facebook page later undergo conversion to a 'group', public users will be required to request to join the Facebook group, stating their interest in Arlesey (e.g. resident, local business etc.) through the in-built functionality of Facebook. The administrative members of the group can then allow or deny individual access to the group as deemed fit and at their sole discretion. This is common practice for 'closed' social network groups. Initially the council will administer an 'open' twitter account meaning that anyone can follow the twitter feed. This policy can be revisited if deemed inappropriate in the future.

Posts to the ATC Facebook page/group will be subject to approval by the administrators. When points are raised on social media which require formal contact with the council, the accounts will be used to encourage electors to contact the Town Clerk directly using the recognised methods of contact (e-mail, telephone and post).

When issues are raised that might require discussion at a council meeting, the member/s responsible for the day to day running of the account will alert the Town Clerk and discuss the possibility of raising the issue at a council/committee meeting via an agenda item.

Abusive, discriminatory or libellous comments and behaviours will not be tolerated toward the accounts. If group members engage in these kinds of behaviours, their accounts will be removed and blocked from contacting the ATC accounts.

The accounts will be managed on a 'best efforts' basis by the council, no service level agreements will be stipulated between the council and the electors on the use of social media.

Both accounts will contain the following introductory text describing the ways the electors should utilise the account:

*"Arlesey Town Council's Facebook page/group shares current and recent developments on Town Council business with the local community. The Arlesey Town Council X feed '@ArleseyTC' will also share this information to the open source community.*

*Residents of Arlesey or those with an interest in Arlesey can freely access the Town Council's Facebook page or follow the Twitter handle Posting on the Town Council's Facebook page is currently restricted to administrators only.*

*This page/group/feed will not be used for the advertising or promotion of commercial enterprise or the sale of goods.*

*Commenting on the posts delivered in the page/group/feed does not guarantee a reply from a Town Council member. The supported, official method of contacting the Town Council remains through post (to Town Council Office, High Street, Arlesey SG15 6SN) or by email to [clerk@arlesey-tc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@arlesey-tc.gov.uk). Arlesey Town Council's Social media sites will **not** be a recognised method of formally contacting the council.*

*This page/group/feed enacts a zero-tolerance policy toward abuse or discrimination of any kind, those exhibiting these behaviours will be removed from the page/feed and their posts will be deleted. Similarly, the posting of any material that could be considered offensive to other users of the group will be deleted."*

The accounts will, initially, be managed using personal hardware or via the Town Council office equipment. In time, if required, the Council may consider the purchase of a Council owned device with which to manage the account.

It is the responsibility of the members delegated authority for the running the account to action the joining of new members if the page becomes a 'group' or removal of those not compliant with the above statement.

## **The Personal Social Media Footprint of Councillors**

In the modern age of social media ubiquity, it is expected that a number of councillors will maintain a number of personal social media accounts.

When managing their own accounts councillors must ensure that their comments will not adversely affect the council or its business, be damaging to its reputation or otherwise violate any council policies.

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviours as representatives of ATC:

- Councillors are personally responsible for the content posted to their social media accounts
- Councillors should handle any data in accordance with Data Protection legislation
- When using personal social media accounts, councillors must make it clear that they are not speaking on behalf of the council, or that they are expressing the council's views.
- Councillors must comply with other council policies when using social media. E.g. they should be careful not to breach Council confidentiality and proprietary policies.
- Councillors should not publish any material or comment that could undermine public confidence in them as councillors or in the position of trust they hold within the community.

## **Social Media During Council Meetings**

Some Town and Parish Councils currently post updates to social media of council meetings as they are in progress. Initially, ATC will not adopt this policy and will encourage councillors to wait until after the meeting has concluded before posting comments about the meeting on social media.

Adopted by ATC – 18<sup>th</sup> November 2025