

HUNGERFORD TOWN COUNCIL

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Social Media Policy (Originally adopted 08/05/2018)

1. Introduction

The objective of this document is to provide Councillors and Officers with an overview of social media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of its use. In addition, it includes guidelines on responsibilities when using such channels of communication. It should be read in conjunction with other Town Council policies, including the Equal Opportunities Policy, Grievance Policy, Data Protection Policy, and the adopted Code of Conduct.

2. What is Social Media?

2.1 Definition

Social media is a generic term for the sharing of opinions, discussions, stories, videos, pictures, and other information electronically. The key feature of social media is its accessibility via various devices, such as computers, tablets, and phones.

Examples include:

- Social Networks & Content Sharing: Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn, Twitter (X), YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Bluesky
- Collaborative Tools: Wikis, Google Docs, MS OneDrive,
- Forums & Messaging: Reddit, WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram

This list is not exhaustive

2.2 Characteristics:

- Supports text, video, photographs, and audio.
- Enables communication across multiple devices in real-time or asynchronously.
- Encourages varying levels of engagement: creating, commenting, or simply viewing.
- Broadens and accelerates the flow of information.

2.3 Risks of Social Media:

While social media is an invaluable communication tool, it presents challenges:

- Public Exposure: Content shared is often visible globally and may persist online indefinitely.
 - Misinformation Risks: There is no assurance of truth; misinformation and harmful gossip are prevalent.
 - Group Bias: Closed groups may amplify single viewpoints.
 - Reactive Posting: Immediate responses can escalate conflicts or spread unintended messages.
 - Time Drain: Excessive engagement can reduce productivity.
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3. The Town Council and Social Media

3.1 Benefits of Social Media:

Social media provides a powerful platform for resident engagement, service promotion, and public information dissemination. It works best when integrated into a comprehensive communication strategy.

3.2 Objectives:

This policy ensures:

- Effective engagement with individuals and communities.
- A consistent and professional approach to social media use.
- The security and integrity of Council information.
- Compliance with existing policies, guidelines, and legislation.
- Protection of the Council's reputation.
- Correct handling of complaints and allegations on Social Media.
- A zero-tolerance approach towards hate speech and discrimination.
- Adherence to Copy Right Law

3.3 Official Accounts:

The Council maintains the following platforms:

- Facebook: "Hungerford Town Council"
- X (formerly Twitter): @Hungerford_TC
- YouTube: "Hungerford Town Council"
- Instagram: "Hungerford Town Council"

These accounts are limited to disseminating Council-related activities and official information from trusted sources such as West Berkshire Council.

3.4 Guidelines for Personal Use:

Councillors and Officers may have personal social media accounts. However, they must:

- Clearly distinguish personal accounts from official Council communication.
- Avoid representing personal opinions as those of the Council.
- Comply with the Council's adopted Code of Conduct and avoid sharing confidential or derogatory information.

3.5 Professional Conduct:

All social media activity by Councillors and Officers should reflect positively on the Council.

- Avoid exaggeration, speculation, or inflammatory language.
- Ensure accuracy and clarity when sharing information.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Account Ownership:

The Town Clerk will act as the designated owner of the Council's social media accounts, under the oversight of the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

4.2 Administration:

The Town Clerk will appoint an administrator responsible for:

- Monitoring accounts.
- Updating and maintaining content.
- Ensuring the adherence to copyright laws, so that content shared by the Council does not infringe on intellectual property rights.
- Managing responses.
- Establish procedures for addressing complaints or allegations made on social media, directing individuals to appropriate channels for formal complaints or safeguarding concerns.
- Clearly state a zero-tolerance approach towards hate speech and discrimination, detailing the process for reporting and addressing such incidents.

5. Monitoring

The Council reserves the right to moderate and, if necessary, remove content that breaches this policy or applicable laws. Posts may be restricted or deleted if they:

- Are irrelevant or off-topic.

- Promote political campaigns or ideologies.
 - Use offensive, discriminatory, or profane language.
 - Breach the Equality Act 2010, including discrimination against protected characteristics.
 - Encourage illegal activities or compromise public safety.
 - Violate copyright, intellectual property rights, or privacy.
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6. Measuring Success

The success of the Council's social media efforts will be evaluated based on engagement metrics, such as:

- Follower and engagement growth.
 - Shares, likes, and comments.
 - Subscriber count on content-sharing platforms.
- The Town Clerk will report these metrics annually to the Finance & General Purposes Committee.
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7. Legal Requirements

The following UK legislation governs the use of social media by the Council:

- Data Protection Act 2018 (incorporating UK GDPR)
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Equality Act 2010
- Defamation Act 2013
- Computer Misuse Act 1990

Compliance with these laws ensures social media use is ethical, secure, and transparent.

This Social Media Policy is reviewed periodically to ensure alignment with technological advances and legislative updates.
