



HEXHAM TOWN COUNCIL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Town Council to interact in a way that improves communication both within the Council and between the Council and the people, businesses and agencies it works with and serves.

The Council has a website (www.hexhamtowncouncil.gov.uk), Facebook page, Twitter account and uses email. In the future other channels of communication may be added and the policy applies to any other type of communication such as SMS (texting) and video conferencing.

The Council will ensure that training is provided for members and officers in connection with this policy.

This policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which should also be considered, such as the Code of conduct, and individual Councillors and Council staff are responsible for what they post in both a Council and personal capacity.

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Promote good news stories with a linked website or press page
- Advertise job vacancies
- Retweet or share information from partner agencies such as Northumberland County Council, Police, Hexham Community Partnership, etc.
- Announce new information
- Refer resident queries to the Town Clerk and Councillors
- Share any other information relevant to Hexham

Communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- 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 the Council does not own the copyright

- Not contain any personal information
- If it is official Council business it will be moderated by either the Chair/Vice Chair of the Council or the Town Clerk
- Not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising

The website and social media is not monitored 24/7 and the Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, the Council will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or organisation(s).

Sending a message or post via Facebook or Twitter will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Council is not obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Correspondence should be written or emailed to the Town Clerk or Councillors directly.

The Council retains the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist comment
- Personal attacks, insults or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarised material or any material in violation of any laws, including copyright
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the content
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law

The Council's response to any communication received as above will be to either ignore it, inform the sender of the Council's policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given the limited resources available. Any information posted on the Facebook page as above 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*".

Code of Practice

When using social media, including email, Councillors and Council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Town Councillors and Council staff must not:

- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Present personal opinions as that of the Town Council
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council

- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Council
- Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- Use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post any information that infringes copyright of others
- Post any information that may be deemed libel
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Bring the Town Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages. This also applies if someone publishes something libellous on the Council's social media site.

Councillors' views in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or Committee meeting may constitute predisposition, predetermination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at the meeting(s).

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Town Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Town Clerk. Where appropriate, the Town Clerk will have the authority to report posts of a defamatory or libellous nature to any other appropriate agency including Northumbria Police and Northumbria County Council's Safeguarding Unit.

Email

The email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday, with the aim of responses being sent as soon as possible. An "out of office" message should 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 Clerk or otherwise copied to the Clerk. Individual Councillors may communicate directly with parishioners in relation to their own personal views and, if appropriate, copy to the Clerk. It should be noted that any emails copied to the Clerk become official and will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

Councillors and staff must not forward personal information on to other people or groups outside of the Council if this includes names, addresses, email addresses, IP addresses or cookie identifiers.

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End of Policy