



BENTHAM TOWN COUNCIL

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Social Media Policy

For Council Staff and Councillors

1. Purpose

This policy provides guidance for employees, elected councillors, contractors and representatives of the Council when using social media for official Council business or in a personal capacity where Council affiliation may be identified.

The policy aims to protect the reputation and integrity of the Council, promote respectful and professional communication, ensure legal and ethical responsibilities are met, encourage constructive engagement with residents and stakeholders and clarify expectations for councillors and staff using social media.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Council employees, councillors, temporary staff, contractors, volunteers and consultants. It covers official Council social media accounts and personal social media use where Council business, colleagues, residents or Council matters are discussed.

Social media platforms include Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp groups, community forums, blogs and any similar online communication platforms.

3. Principles of Use

All users representing or associated with the Council are expected to act lawfully, professionally and respectfully at all times. Users must treat others with dignity and courtesy, communicate accurately and honestly, protect confidential and sensitive information, avoid conduct that could damage public confidence in the Council and uphold equality, diversity, and inclusion standards.

4. Official Council Social Media Accounts

Only authorised staff may manage official Council social media accounts.

Content shared on official accounts must be accurate, factual and appropriate. Communication should use clear and respectful language, avoid political bias or campaigning and comply with data protection and copyright laws. Wherever possible, content should also be accessible to all users.

The Council reserves the right to remove inappropriate comments, block abusive users and report unlawful content to the relevant authorities.

5. Respectful Use of Social Media by Councillors

Councillors are expected to maintain high standards of conduct online, consistent with the Councillor Code of Conduct and the principles of public office.

Councillors should engage respectfully with residents, staff and fellow councillors. They are expected to avoid bullying, harassment, discrimination or personal attacks. Councillors must distinguish clearly between personal opinions and official Council positions and should avoid sharing misinformation or confidential Council information. They should refrain from posting content that could bring the Council into disrepute and should consider the impact of comments carefully before posting or sharing them online.

Councillors must not use offensive, threatening or defamatory language, target individuals or groups with abusive behaviour, intimidate staff, residents or political opponents through social media, publish confidential or exempt Council information or misrepresent Council decisions or policies.

Where councillors identify themselves as members online, they are expected to behave in a manner consistent with their public role and responsibilities.

6. Personal Use of Social Media

The Council recognises that employees and councillors have the right to personal social media use.

However, users should avoid implying that personal views represent the Council. Confidential information must not be disclosed and users must not engage in unlawful, discriminatory, or offensive conduct. Personal social media use should not interfere with work responsibilities or professional duties.

Employees and councillors are encouraged to include a disclaimer such as:

“The views expressed are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Council.”

7. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All users must comply with data protection legislation, confidentiality obligations and information governance policies.

Personal data, sensitive information and confidential Council matters must never be shared without proper authorisation.

8. Managing Inappropriate Content

The Council may remove or report content that is abusive, threatening, discriminatory, defamatory, unlawful, misleading or in breach of confidentiality requirements.

Serious incidents may be referred to monitoring officers, Human Resources procedures, standards committees or the police and relevant authorities where appropriate.

9. Breaches of This Policy

Failure to comply with this policy may result in informal or formal action, removal of access to Council accounts, disciplinary procedures for staff, referral under the Councillor Code of Conduct or legal action where necessary.

10. Training and Support

The Council will provide guidance and training on responsible social media use, digital communication standards, online safety, respectful engagement, data protection and confidentiality responsibilities.

11. Review

This policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains current with legislation, technology and best practice.