

Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

The Council has set up social networks to provide information on news, events and jobs for residents, businesses and visitors. They should not under any circumstances be used for party political purposes.

The Council's social networks will usually only be monitored during normal opening hours and will be controlled and managed by the Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk or Administrator.

2. Moderation

Social media content is subject to the same rules of fairness, openness and transparency as the Council's uses in all their communications. When dealing with errors or controversial comments about them, the Council will not remove criticism unless it contains profanities, abusive or offensive comments etc. Instead, responses will concentrate on correcting factual errors and responding to legitimate criticism which will be managed by the Town Clerk. However, we reserve the right to delete posts that feature any of the following:

- Offensive material such as swearing, sexism, racism and sexually orientated offensive comments
- Posts that are libel or defame someone
- Posts that contain incorrect information that could mislead others
- Posts containing personal information that it would be unwise to share in public

3. Conduct of the Council

Post should always be tasteful, tactful and relevant.

Under no circumstances should messages be posted that:-

- Are unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive
- Contain profanities or use abusive language
- Could be classified as 'spam', i.e. frequently posting the same, or very similar messages
- Disclose personal information subject to the General Data Protection Regulation 2018, such as contact details unless it is required for the actual 'post' (i.e. job adverts)
- Advertise products or services of a third party
- impersonate someone else

The Council will ensure, as far as possible, that all photographs used are properly obtained and necessary approvals have been received.

4. Social Networking – Use by Employees

Social networking sites must only be accessed during breaks.

The exception to this is any employee who has permission to post news to the Council's website or Facebook pages, however, adverse or negative comments regarding the Council, its policies, services, employees or councillors is prohibited.

Regardless of when or where you access social networking sites you must not:

1. Post messages on the Town Council's social media that could be regarded as being for party political purposes.
2. Share any Council information which includes names of colleagues including senior managers or elected members

3. Share or distribute photographic images or videos obtained of colleagues or taken initially for council purposes.
4. Refer to the council, its employees, its services or any of its practices in derogatory terms.
5. Make comments and/or use abusive or profane language that could reflect adversely on the reputation of the Council.

Infringements of the points above will result in an investigation under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and may result in dismissal. In respect of volunteers and students on placement, their engagement with the Council will be terminated and the School/College/Training provider will be informed of the circumstances.

5. Social Networking – Use by Councillors

The Council recognise that some Councillors use social networking as a way to inform residents about their work and the work of the Council. Councillors should not:-

1. Post messages on the Town Council's social media that could be regarded as being for party political purposes.
2. Share any Council information which includes names of employees or elected members unless it is pertinent/essential to the discussion.
3. Share or distribute photographic images or videos obtained of colleagues or taken initially for council purposes.
4. Refer to the council, its employees, its services or any of its practices in derogatory terms.
5. Make comments and/or use abusive or profane language that could reflect adversely on the reputation of the Council.

Councillors should abide by the Members Code of Conduct for Bishop Auckland Town Council.

6. Defamation

Statement should not be made that could be interpreted as defamatory.

In law this means a statement that lowers the reputation of a person or organisation in the eyes of a reasonable person. Legal action could be brought against an employee and the Council if such statements are published. The Council will therefore take down any statement that could be deemed to be defamatory.

All employees and Councillors should be aware that infringements of this policy may lead to litigation under criminal and civil law.

7. Asking the Council to follow, like or share messages

The Council may follow, like or share messages, mostly our partners, other organisations we work with and local media. This allows us to monitor and disseminate important information that we may need to make residents aware of. To enable us to do this we cannot follow or like a large number of other people as we would risk missing key messages. Liking or following someone does not necessarily mean that we support or endorse them or their views.

8. Use and monitoring of social media during pre-election periods (purdah)

In the six week run up to a local election – councils have to be very careful not to do or say anything that could be seen in any way to support any political party or candidate. During this time the Council will continue to post messages using social media, however members will not be named. In addition responses to posts that feature an opinion on a particular political party/representative will be removed.