



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

This policy relates purely to the council's social media account, i.e. the Facebook page/account (other aspects of social media, e.g. staff and councillors' use of other social media is covered by other policies/procedures).

The aim of this policy is to set down rules and regulations to ensure the proper use of the account (both internally and externally, e.g. public comments) as the council has a duty of care towards its employees and councillors.

Social media enables the council to communicate directly with the community and publicise events, meetings etc. It also enables people to express their opinions in accordance with the right to free speech.

However, the right to free speech is not an absolute right and must be balanced with legislation covering matters such as defamation, harassment, the Communications Act, Computer Misuse Act and what is generally acceptable/reasonable.

Social media is not the appropriate vehicle to submit complaints. The council has a complaints policy which is readily available.

Day to day administration

The council's Facebook account will be administered by the administration staff only. Councillors should not administer or run any other other facebook accouts on behalf of Hemsworth Town council or its responsibilities, eg. . Other than the town clerk / deputy town clerk, no other persons will have access.

There will just be two council Facebook accounts. One for the waterpark and Cafe, The second one will be for all other areas and services including but not limited to Community centre, Sandygate, Fitzwilliam old peoples centre, All the council's services, properties, events, Trusts etc will be publicised via these Facebook accounts.

Even though the accounts are primarily for council use, other community events/information can be publicised.

Messages will be sent in response to anyone sending an initial private message to the Facebook account. If a simple/quick response does not satisfy the enquiry then the person will be asked to email the council for further/fuller details/information.

Persons wishing to submit a complaint will be referred to the council's complaints procedure.

No religious or political views will be expressed by the administrators. It is a vehicle purely for the communication of information from the council to the community and the wider district.

The Facebook account will not be used for playing games, adding applications, or anything of a personal nature. Contravention of this rule could result in the instigation of disciplinary procedures.

What it and is not acceptable

The council accepts there will be times when people will be unhappy with some of the decisions it makes. Criticism is a fact of life, especially for public bodies. Respectful public debate is laudable and the council encourages it.

However, the council does draw the line at posts or messages that cross the line in terms of acceptability. This includes targeting members of staff or councillors with direct, unacceptable, criticism. The council reserves the right to take action in relation to social media posts or messages which:

- Are abusive, harassing or threatening
- Use sexist, racist, homophobic, bigoted or other unacceptable/profane language
- Are intended to cause concern/harm
- Are defamatory
- Breach any other legislation (e.g. hate crime)
- Contain 'spam'
- Contain inappropriate material
- Incite someone to break the law
- Pejoratively refer to any individual (by name, role or description)
- Cause offence in any other way

Dealing with unacceptable behaviour

In the first instance, (and assuming it is not a particularly egregious case), the administration team will issue a warning to the author in private via a direct message, (or via email, if appropriate) and any inappropriate material will be removed immediately from the Facebook page.

If it is not possible to identify and/or contact the author, in the case of unacceptable content continuing to be published, any posts, messages or content considered to be unacceptable will be removed.

If unacceptable behaviour continues, the author will be blocked for a specified period from using the council's Facebook page. Any decision to block an author will be taken by the town clerk.

If a block is imposed, the town clerk will write to the person concerned, explaining the reasons and setting out the terms of when the block will be reviewed and/or lifted.

The council may also report the matter to the police where behaviour amounts to abuse or harassment or a criminal offence is suspected.

The council reserves the right to take whatever legal action that may be necessary in the case of defamatory posts/messages.

Review

Due to the ephemeral nature of social media, this policy will be kept under regular review.

Queries relating to the application of this policy should be sent to the town clerk – clerk@hemsworthcouncil.co.uk