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FAKENHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Social Media and Communications Policy

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1. Introduction

1.1

The Council recognises that social media and digital communications are valuable tools for engaging with residents, businesses, community organisations and partner agencies. They enable the Council to communicate efficiently, promote community initiatives and improve public access to information.

1.2

The Council currently communicates through its website, social media platforms and email. As communication technologies continue to develop, the Council may adopt additional communication channels where these are considered appropriate. This policy will be reviewed and updated to reflect any significant changes.

1.3

This policy forms part of the Council's Digital Governance Framework and must be read in conjunction with the following related policies:

- IT Policy (Core Digital Governance Framework)
- Information Transfer Policy
- Removable Media Policy
- Councillor Email Policy
- Data Protection Policies
- Records Management and Retention Policy
- Members' Code of Conduct

The IT Policy provides the overarching framework for digital security, acceptable use, monitoring, and incident management. Supporting policies provide operational or role-specific guidance and must not contradict the IT Policy.

Where overlap exists between policies, the requirements of the IT Policy shall take precedence.

Failure to comply with any of the above policies may result in formal action in accordance with the Council's disciplinary procedures and, where applicable, statutory obligations under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

1.4

Specifically this policy should also be read in conjunction with the Council's IT Policy, which sets out the Council's requirements relating to information security, acceptable use of Council systems, monitoring, messaging applications, artificial intelligence (AI) tools, and the misuse of digital systems.

2. Scope

2.1

This policy applies to all Councillors, employees, volunteers, contractors and other authorised users acting on behalf of the Council when using social media, email or any other electronic communication platform for Council business.

2.2

The policy applies to all Council-operated communication channels, including but not limited to:

- the Council website;
- official social media accounts;
- Council email accounts;
- text messaging (SMS);
- video conferencing platforms; and
- any future communication platforms adopted by the Council.

3. Policy Objectives

3.1

The Council's social media and communication channels are intended to:

- provide information about Council services, activities and decisions;
- promote community events and initiatives;
- encourage appropriate engagement with residents and stakeholders; and
- present the Town and the Council in a positive and professional manner.

3.2

All official Council communications will:

- be civil, courteous and relevant;

- comply with all applicable legislation;
- respect copyright and intellectual property rights;
- avoid the publication of personal or confidential information unless authorised;
- be politically impartial;
- where appropriate, be moderated by the Clerk.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1

The Clerk is responsible for the day-to-day administration and management of the Council's official communication channels unless delegated otherwise.

4.2

The Clerk may moderate official Council social media platforms on behalf of the Council.

4.3

Councillors communicating in a personal capacity must ensure that they do not imply they are speaking on behalf of the Council unless specifically authorised to do so.

4.4

Councillors, employees, volunteers, contractors and other authorised users must comply with the behavioural, confidentiality and information security requirements set out in the Council's IT Policy, together with the Members' Code of Conduct, where applicable.

5. Council Social Media

5.1

The Council's social media accounts are intended to provide information and updates relating to Council business and community activities.

5.2

Users engaging with the Council's social media channels are expected to:

- be courteous and respectful;
- remain on topic;
- respect differing opinions;
- avoid abusive, threatening or offensive language;
- refrain from using Council platforms for commercial advertising or promotion;
- comply with copyright legislation.

5.3

The Council's official Facebook page is maintained primarily as a means of publishing information to the community. It is not monitored continuously, and the Council cannot guarantee that comments posted on its Facebook page will be read or receive a response.

5.4

The Council does not monitor or respond to posts, comments or discussions on third-party social media pages or community groups, even where the Council is mentioned or tagged.

5.5

Facebook Messenger and other social media messaging functions are not monitored and must not be used to contact the Council.

5.6

The Council's official channels for correspondence are its published email address and postal address. Members of the public wishing to submit complaints, service requests, Freedom of Information requests, Subject Access Requests or other formal correspondence are strongly encouraged to do so using these official channels.

5.7

The Council does not monitor social media continuously and cannot guarantee that comments, posts or messages received through social media will be seen or responded to within any statutory or operational timescales. Use of social media to submit formal correspondence is therefore discouraged.

5.8

The Council reserves the right to disable comments or limit interaction on individual social media posts where this is considered necessary to protect the integrity of Council communications or to prevent misuse of its social media platforms.

5.9

Users should not publish personal, confidential or sensitive information when engaging with the Council through social media.

6. Public Participation and Moderation**6.1**

The Council encourages constructive discussion and welcomes respectful engagement through its social media channels.

6.2

The Council reserves the right to remove comments or content containing:

- obscene, offensive, abusive or discriminatory material;
- threats or personal attacks;
- potentially defamatory or libellous statements;
- material that infringes copyright;
- personal information published without consent;
- spam or commercial advertising;
- content, links or material unrelated to the original post;
- allegations of criminal activity or breaches of Council policy.

6.3

Where content is removed, the Council may publish a brief statement confirming that a post has been removed for breaching this policy.

6.4

Individuals repeatedly breaching this policy may be blocked from the Council's social media platforms.

6.5

Where a post alleges a breach of Council policy or the law, the Council may request that the individual submits a formal complaint or reports the matter to the appropriate authority to enable the matter to be considered through the appropriate process.

7. Council Website**7.1**

The Council's website provides information about Council services, meetings, policies and community information.

7.2

Where appropriate, enquiries received through the website may be referred to the Clerk for consideration and response.

7.3

The Council may permit approved community organisations to maintain information on the Council's website where this supports community engagement.

7.4

Community organisations remain responsible for the accuracy and maintenance of their own content.

7.5

The Council reserves the right to amend or remove any third-party content that does not comply with its requirements or is considered inappropriate.

8. Electronic Communications**8.1**

This section applies solely to the management and use of the Council's corporate email accounts (for example info@fakenhamtowncouncil.gov.uk).

8.2

The Clerk is responsible for monitoring the Council's corporate email accounts and ensuring correspondence is distributed appropriately.

8.3

Official communications issued on behalf of the Council will normally be sent by the Clerk or copied to the Clerk to ensure that an appropriate corporate record is maintained.

8.4

Personal information must only be disclosed in accordance with the Council's Data Protection Policy and relevant legislation.

8.5

Councillor use of email is governed separately by the Council's Councillor Email Policy.

8.6

The use of SMS (text messaging), video conferencing platforms, instant messaging applications or any other electronic messaging services for Council business must comply with the Council's IT Policy, particularly Section 11 - Messaging Applications and Electronic Communications.

9. Internal Communications and Confidentiality**9.1**

Councillors, employees, volunteers, contractors and other authorised users must comply with the behavioural, confidentiality and information security requirements contained within the Council's IT Policy and, where applicable, the Members' Code of Conduct.

9.2

Council information must only be shared with those who have a legitimate need to receive it and must be handled in accordance with the Council's information governance policies.

9.3

Users must exercise care when sending emails, ensuring that recipients are appropriate for the information being shared. The use of "Reply All" should be carefully considered and only used where all recipients have a legitimate need to receive the response.

10. Monitoring and Enforcement**10.1**

The Council reserves the right to monitor the use of its social media accounts and digital communication systems in accordance with the Council's IT Policy, relevant employment policies, and applicable data protection legislation.

10.2

Breaches of this policy will be managed in accordance with the individual's relationship with the Council and any relevant disciplinary, contractual or governance procedures.

10.3

The Council may remove content, suspend access to its communication channels or take any other action considered appropriate where this policy is breached.

11. Review**11.1**

This policy will be reviewed periodically and updated to reflect changes in legislation, guidance, technology or Council practices.

Reviewed at Governance & Finance 21st July 2026

Ratified at Full Council 29th July 2026

Review 2027