



DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL Social media policy

Reviewed and Updated: October 2025

Introduction

Dunstable Town Council is committed to transparency, accountability, and meaningful engagement with our residents, businesses, visitors, and partners. We embrace digital and social media platforms to enhance two-way communication and ensure that community voices help shape the services we provide. This policy ensures everyone associated with the Council can use social media effectively, safely, and responsibly.

Social media is a key tool in our communications strategy and will be used thoughtfully, responsibly, and safely to support Council objectives and reflect our values.

Definition of Social Media

‘Social media’ includes, but is not limited to:

- Social networking platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, YouTube)
- Messaging services (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger)
- Blogs, vlogs, and podcasts
- Forums and discussion boards (e.g. online community groups)
- Microsites or campaign-specific websites
- Reviews and comments sections on third-party sites

Scope of this Policy

This policy applies to:

- All Dunstable Town Council employees and casual staff
- Contractors, agency, or freelance workers acting on behalf of the Council
- Third-party service providers engaging via council channels
- Volunteers and interns
- Elected members of the Council

All users must comply with this policy when representing or engaging in council-related activity on social media—whether via official or personal accounts.

Relevant Legislation and Guidance

All activity must comply with:

- **UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018**
- **Freedom of Information Act 2000**
- **Equality Act 2010**
- **Malicious Communications Act 1988**
- **Online Safety Act 2023**
- **LGA Guidance for Councillors on Social Media**
- Council's own **Code of Conduct, Safeguarding Policy, and Dignity at Work Policy**

SECTION ONE – PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

1.1 Official Use of Dunstable Town Council's accounts by Employees

Employees must:

- Represent the Council professionally and accurately
- Be aware that posts are publicly visible
- Avoid expressing personal opinions on official channels
- Report offensive, false, or harmful content immediately to platform and to the Marketing and Communications Officer

Community Forums and unofficial platforms

- Dunstable Town Council **does not routinely post in or manage** unofficial community forums (e.g. *Spotted Dunstable, Dunstable Chat*).
- In exceptional cases—such as public misinformation, major community impact issues, or urgent update, members (Councillors) or a representative officer may post factual, neutral information and direct users to verified channels (e.g. the Council's website, social media pages) for accurate information.
- All new official social media accounts must be approved by the Town Clerk and Chief Executive and the Marketing and Communications Officer.

1.2 Use of Personal Accounts by Employees

Employees must not:

- Disclose confidential or sensitive Council information
- Share internal decisions or documents
- Post comments that could bring the Council into disrepute
- Identify themselves as council employees in contentious conversations
- Accept friend/follow requests from vulnerable clients or minors
- Use personal accounts to routinely share or cross-post information about Council events or services as part of their role with the Council
- Employees are advised **not to engage in debate or comment** about Council matters in local community groups or forums (e.g. *Spotted Dunstable, Dunstable Chat*, etc.), even from personal accounts. Posts in these forums are often taken out of context, lack moderation, or can quickly escalate into public criticism or misinformation.
- Where employees **feel compelled to correct misinformation**, they should post factual, neutral information and direct users to verified channels (e.g. the Council's website, social media pages) for accurate information.
- Personal accounts should include disclaimers if commenting on public matters (e.g., “*Views my own, not those of my employer*”).

Staff are encouraged to:

- Regularly review privacy settings on social media platforms

- Avoid engaging in political, controversial, or emotionally charged topics while identifying as a Council employee
- Report abusive or inappropriate interactions involving their role
- Only where essential - helpfully and respectfully to public queries in local forums (e.g., *Spotted Dunstable*, *Dunstable Chat*) by providing factual information or directing residents to official channels (e.g., “You can find more about this on the Dunstable Town Council website”). Be clear you are commenting in a personal capacity
- If someone is asking for advice or information about a Town Council service or event in local groups such as *Spotted Dunstable* or *Dunstable Chat*, officers may respond in a polite and neutral tone to help ensure they receive accurate information—ideally linking to an official source or contact

SECTION TWO – SAFEGUARDING CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 Digital Safeguarding

All employees working with children, young people, or vulnerable adults must:

- Use only council-approved platforms and equipment to communicate, do not follow/add as friend.
- Avoid private/direct messaging or connections on personal accounts
- Immediately report online content or disclosures that raise safeguarding concerns

Key Resources:

- CEOP - ThinkUKnow
- NSPCC Online Safety
- UK Safer Internet Centre

Training in **Online Safety Awareness** is mandatory for relevant roles.

SECTION THREE – SOCIAL MEDIA CONDUCT

3.1 Acceptable Use by the Public

While we encourage open discussion, we will moderate and, where necessary, act against posts or messages that:

- Are abusive, harassing, or threatening
- Are discriminatory, hateful, or use slurs
- Include libel, slander, or defamation
- Breach copyright, data protection or court restrictions
- Spread misinformation or incite illegal acts
- Target individual employees or councillors with personal attacks

3.2 Our Response to Unacceptable Content

Inappropriate content will be:

- Removed without warning
- Reported to the platform and/or police if necessary
- Blocked from further engagement if appropriate
- The Head of Service will consider any requests to be unblocked and each will be considered separately with no precedent on future requests.

The Council reserves the right to take legal action against individuals responsible for defamatory or criminal content.

SECTION FOUR – EMPLOYEE BEST PRACTICES

When engaging on any social media platform (professionally or personally), employees should:

- Always assume content is public and permanent
- Be accurate, respectful, and constructive
- Avoid using council branding on personal accounts
- Not engage in arguments or trolling
- Report harassment or abuse via official channels

If in doubt, speak to the **Head of Community Services** or **Town Clerk and Chief Executive** before posting.

SECTION FIVE – USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY COUNCILLORS/MEMBERS

Elected members (Councillors) are always subject to the Council's Code of Conduct when acting, claiming to act, or giving the impression of acting in their capacity as a member of Dunstable Town Council including on social media.

Social media posts made in a personal capacity can still be subject to the Code if they reference Council business, engage with residents in that capacity, or could reasonably be perceived as representing the Council.

5.1 Responsibilities under the Code of Conduct

Councillors must ensure that their use of social media upholds the following principles of the Code of Conduct:

- **Respect:** Avoid offensive, inflammatory, or insulting language. Do not post content that targets individuals or groups in a derogatory or discriminatory manner.
- **Confidentiality:** Do not disclose confidential or exempt information obtained through Council work.
- **Impartiality and Objectivity:** Do not make statements that compromise, or appear to compromise, your impartiality—particularly in relation to planning, licensing, or quasi-judicial matters.
- **Integrity:** Do not use social media to secure advantage for yourself or others or to unfairly disadvantage others.
- **Accountability:** You are accountable for your public conduct online, even on personal accounts. Assume that anything posted may be screenshot and widely shared.

5.2 Personal Use of Social Media

Councillors are advised to:

- Clearly state when they are expressing **personal opinions** (e.g., by using a disclaimer such as “*Views are my own and not those of Dunstable Town Council*”)
- Avoid engaging in political or partisan debate when referring to Council matters on personal accounts
- Not use personal platforms to attack other members, staff, or residents
- Use privacy settings appropriately, but remain aware that content can still be shared publicly

5.3 Engaging with the Public

Councillors may engage with residents online but must:

- Treat residents with courtesy and professionalism, even during disagreement
- Direct residents to official channels (e.g., Council website or social media accounts) for accurate or service-specific information
- Avoid making commitments, promises, or policy statements that may misrepresent the Council’s position
- Be cautious about sharing or commenting on posts in local forums (e.g. *Spotted Dunstable, Dunstable Chat*) that involve Council issues—especially if the information is speculative or contentious

5.4 Allegations and Complaints

Any social media conduct by a councillor that may breach the Code of Conduct could be subject to a standards complaint. Examples include:

- Posting discriminatory, defamatory, or bullying content
- Bringing the Council into disrepute through public commentary
- Undermining the integrity of council officers
- Disclosing confidential Council business

Complaints will be handled under the Council’s adopted procedures for dealing with alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct.

5.5 Support and Guidance

Councillors are encouraged to:

- Attend any training on social media, public conduct, and digital safety provided by the Council or relevant bodies (e.g., LGA)
- Consult the **Monitoring Officer, Town Clerk and Chief Executive, or Head of Community Services** for clarification or support regarding online conduct
- Refer to the **LGA Social Media Guide for Councillors** for further best practice: <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/improving-digital-citizenship-practical-guide-councillors>

SECTION SIX – MONITORING AND REVIEW

6.1 The Council reserves the right to monitor activity on its own social media platforms to ensure safety and compliance with this policy. Activity on personal accounts may be reviewed only if it relates to Council business, breaches this policy, or affects an individual's professional role. This policy will be reviewed annually or in response to changes in legislation, best practice, or emerging digital risks.
