



Social media policy 2024-27

Contents

Social media policy 2024-27	1
1. Introduction	2
2. Purpose	3
3. Aims of the policy	3
4. Service standards	3
5. Performance Monitoring	5
6. Officer conduct on social media	5
7. Personal use of social media	6
8. Action over social media use	6
9. Governance and security	7
Appendix A	8

1. Introduction

Social media is a key communications platform for Hart and enables us to be more active and engaged with residents, partners and stakeholders. Our communication should be a two-way process, so everyone's views can help shape the services we provide.

The Communications team manages the corporate social media accounts:

Facebook

Our most popular channel, Facebook is used for news releases, photographs, reels and video content. We use the channel to advertise service changes and promote events, as well as warn and inform in emergencies.

X formerly known as Twitter

X is used to signpost links to news releases and other information on our website. We also publish pictures and video content on this channel. In addition, we warn and inform during emergencies or severe weather and publicise live information about events.

Instagram

We use our Instagram account to promote news and activities through images, stories and video.

LinkedIn

We use our LinkedIn account to share relevant information to organisations and post job vacancies.

YouTube

We post or share video content about our services and activities on our YouTube account and link to it from our other social media channels.

We [live stream our Council meetings](#) on a separate YouTube channel.

Everyone Active manage two Leisure Centres in the district. They use Facebook to communicate to residents about classes, events and activities.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this social media policy is to set out:

- what we'll do when the public contact us
- our house rules for acceptable conduct
- guidelines for connections on social media
- responsibilities for staff using social media

3. Aims of the policy

We want our social media to:

- act as the voice of Hart and promote understanding of key messages
- reflect the objectives set out in our Corporate Plan
- increase opportunities for Hart to interact and consult with the public
- provide timely updates in cases of emergency, disrupted service or other unusual events

Our [Communication and Engagement Strategy](#) sets out our approach to delivering key messages across a wide range of channels, including social media. The strategy sets the framework for the planning, creation, delivery and governance of news, updates and information to our residents, councillors, businesses and other key partners. It allows us to protect and promote our reputation and establish a strong brand and tone of voice.

4. Service standards

The public can expect regular updates from our social media accounts, covering:

- service information and updates
- news and events
- invitations to get involved in consultations
- re-tweets and shares from our partners

We monitor social media regularly throughout the working day and will respond as soon as we can. If we need longer to look into enquiries, we'll contact the member of public to let them know and when they can expect a full response. We monitor social media over weekends and bank holidays for emergencies.

If necessary, and where appropriate, we will invite residents to provide more information in a private direct message.

Our commitment:

- we will be friendly, polite and honest
- we will try to answer queries as soon as we can
- we will signpost to the best place to resolve queries quickly, for example, an online form or website, or via a direct message
- if we can't resolve the matter immediately, we will keep the member of the public updated until we have a response
- we will protect privacy at all times
- we will maintain our [customer service standards](#)
- our content will be accessible and inclusive. We follow best practice as outlined in our accessibility policy and the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#)

Liking and following

We follow, share or like people who provide information that is relevant to our work. This can be UK government agencies, other public sector partners, or those whose information we can pass on for the benefit of our residents. While we may like or follow someone, it doesn't mean that we endorse them.

Sharing and retweeting

We share or retweet information that we think will be of interest or use to our residents and businesses. As a local authority, any sharing of information could be seen as endorsement of a particular view, individual or organisation. Therefore, it is important that we remain impartial and protect our reputation.

Pre-election period

In the run-up to an election, we will continue to publish important service announcements using social media. However, during a pre-election period, we have to be careful not to say anything that could be seen to support any political party or candidate. We follow the [Local Government Association guide on the pre-election period](#).

We will continue to publish important service announcements but may have to remove responses if they are political-party specific.

Use of personal images or video

We take photos and videos at Council events, activities and venues which we share on our social media accounts. Where necessary we will obtain the consent of individuals before photographing them. We process personal information in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. More information regarding rights under data protection law can be found in our [privacy notice](#).

Individuals can withdraw images from the photo library at any time by contacting the Communications team at communications@hart.gov.uk

Freedom of Information requests

We will accept Freedom of Information requests via our social media accounts as long as they are submitted from an identified person with an address for correspondence. The request should provide a clear description of the information

requested. If we are unsure if the post is a Freedom of Information request, we will contact the individual to ask if the question should be considered under the [Freedom of Information Act](#) and handled accordingly.

Consultations

We use social media to share information about consultations we may be running or requests for residents' views. Usually there will be a formal way to respond, but we will take comments via social media as long as they are submitted from an identified person.

Complaints

We can act on and respond to complaints received via social media, but it is not a replacement for our formal complaints procedure. Complaints can be made via our [Feedback and complaints page](#).

Individuals can also report any issues to our contact centre or specific service. Contact details are available on our [Contact us page](#).

Crisis communications

We use our social media channels when dealing with emergencies, providing regular updates and information. During this time, normal communications activity may be paused to focus on timely and accurate messages on social media.

Social media house rules

We have published house rules for social media. See Appendix A.

5. Performance Monitoring

We use a social media management tool to manage and schedule our posts. It enables us to monitor social media performance, using analytics to understand the reach of posts including follower growth, levels of engagement and the top performing posts. This helps us to understand which types of content resonate with our audiences and improve customer service.

6. Officer conduct on social media

The majority of social media activity will be managed by the Communications team. There are occasions when officers will use it in an official capacity. All officers should be professional when posting content through our channels.

Along with our Communication and Engagement Strategy, all staff should be aware of and adhere to the Code of Conduct. If in doubt, officers should contact the Communications team for advice.

Any communication that officers make in a professional capacity through social media must not:

- bring Hart into disrepute. For example, by criticising or arguing with residents, making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups or posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content

- breach confidentiality. For example, by revealing confidential or sensitive information or giving away confidential information about an individual such as an officer or customer contact details
- breach copyright. For example, by using someone else's images or written content without permission or failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something. Officers should avoid publishing anything they are unsure about or seek permission from the copyright holder in advance
- do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual. For example, by making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race including nationality, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age or any other protected characteristic.

Safeguarding issues are paramount because social media sites are often misused by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business. If officers have any concerns about other site users, they have a responsibility to report these to the appropriate agency.

7. Personal use of social media

All staff are free to use social media in their own time, so long as it does not include unprofessional or inappropriate content.

Officers should be aware of:

- liking or posting damaging or defamatory remarks about Hart, staff or other third parties which may bring us into disrepute
- identifying or disclosing personal information of staff, third parties or customers without their consent
- engaging in conduct that is detrimental to Hart

Staff are welcome to like and share posts from Hart District Council, although officers should be mindful of commenting on peoples' comments if they are negative or disparaging remarks. It is advised that they should not respond but contact the Communications team who will decide if a response is appropriate.

Officers should also avoid commenting on political issues or those that may interfere with democratic processes which might compromise our impartiality.

8. Action over social media use

All staff are required to adhere to this policy and any breaches may lead to disciplinary action.

Serious breaches of this policy, for example any reported incidents of bullying of colleagues, social media activity causing serious damage to the Council, or excessive use of social media at work will be investigated and could constitute gross misconduct which would lead to summary dismissal.

Staff must:

- Keep their personal and professional lives separate and always maintain appropriate professional boundaries
- Use social media in a professional, responsible, and respectful way and must comply with the law in their online communications
- Be responsible for their own conduct and avoid behaviour which could be misinterpreted by others, or which could put themselves in a position where there is a conflict between their work for Hart and their personal interests
- Decide whether to list Hart District Council as an employer on any social media account. Listing this detail links staff to the Council and posts/comments must not bring the Council into disrepute.

This policy sets out the responsibilities of all council employees when using social media.

9. Governance and security

We follow [National Cyber Security Centre Guidance](#) to maintain the security of our social media sites. This includes:

- Making sure only authorised staff can publish content. At Hart, this is the communications team using passwords to control access
- Using social media platforms with good security features. At Hart, we use [Sprout Social](#) which complies with relevant security protocols
- Using corporate devices to create and publish content. At Hart, the communications team use corporate-issued laptops for this purpose
- Making sure content is reviewed and authorised before being published. At Hart, service requests are reviewed by the communications team before posting and our social media management tool enables us to review scheduled posts before they go out live

Appendix A

Social media house rules

We're here to help in any way that we can, but we expect the public to offer us the same level of courtesy that we offer them. We want our social media channels to be safe spaces and a place for healthy and open discussion, which is why we have a short set of house rules:

- All individuals must comply with the social media platform's terms of use
- Individuals are responsible for any content posted, including content they choose to share
- We will remove, in whole or in part, posts that we feel are inappropriate or discriminatory against any individual or group
- We will remove content, hide, report and/or block individuals whose posts we consider to be:
 - abusive or obscene
 - deceptive or misleading
 - spam. We interpret this as persistent negative and/or abusive tweeting in which the aim is to provoke a response
 - in violation of any intellectual property rights, including copyright
 - in violation of any law or regulation

We will not tolerate or respond to abusive comments, posts and messages. We will block and/or report to the associated social media platform anyone who repeatedly engages with us using content or language which falls into the above categories.

Our [Policy on Unreasonable Customer Behaviour](#) sets out what we consider to be unacceptable and the steps we may take to deal with such behaviour.