

A.3 APPENDIX A

Tendring
District Council



TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR MEMBERS

Social Media Guidance for Members (Revised 2026)

This guidance supports Members in using social media safely, effectively and responsibly. It incorporates relevant elements from the Local Government Association (LGA) model guidance on social media and their Guide to the role of Councillors on social media.

Purpose and Scope

This guidance applies to all elected Members when using social media **in their capacity as Councillors**, including circumstances where they are *reasonably perceived* as acting in an official role. It supports:

- Public confidence in local democracy
- Members' ability to communicate with residents
- Safe, lawful and respectful online engagement

Social media includes (but is not limited to): Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, WhatsApp, blogs, YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, and any other platform where content can be published or shared.

Members should be able to use social media to promote their 'council work' without fear of harassment, bullying, defamation or other hate speech; this is finely balanced with comment (and criticism) based upon freedom of speech and political debate. Members are reminded that all activity must align with:

- **Tendring District Council Members' Code of Conduct:**
<https://legacy.tendringdc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/TENDRING%20DISTRICT%20COUNCIL%20NEW%20CODE%20OF%20CONDUCT%20MAY%202023.pdf>
- **The Seven Principles of Public Life (The Nolan Principles)**
- **Equality and data protection law**
- **Copyright and defamation law**
- **Article 10 (Freedom of Expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights.**

Key Principles

Acting as a Councillor

Because others judge whether you appear to be acting as a Councillor, assume your online activity may be linked to your role. Online actions and posts must not bring the Council into disrepute.

Personal Responsibility

You are personally responsible for the content you publish on any social media or messaging platform. Even if content is deleted, it may already have been copied, shared or archived.

Inappropriate use of social media can be a **criminal offence** and may also lead to a **breach of the Members' Code of Conduct**.

Respect and Civility

Comments must be respectful to:

- Other Members
- Officers and partner organisations
- Members of the public
- Volunteers

Members must comply with equality legislation and avoid harassment, bullying, discriminatory or offensive language. Some online behaviour may constitute a criminal offence.

Confidentiality and Information Security

Do not disclose confidential, personal, sensitive or privileged information. Information provided to you as a Councillor may not be publicly available and should not be shared unless you are certain it is appropriate to do so.

If notified of a potential safeguarding issue via social media, you must follow the Council's safeguarding procedures without delay.

Bias, Predetermination and Decision-Making

Where Members are involved in planning, licensing or other quasi-judicial decisions, they should avoid social media activity that could give the impression they have made up their mind in advance.

While expressing a preliminary view is not unlawful in itself, Members must be able to demonstrate that they approach formal decision-making with an open mind.

Staying Safe Online

The LGA highlights risks faced by Councillors online, including abuse, harassment and exposure of personal information. Members are encouraged to:

- Use strong, unique passwords
- Enable two-factor authentication
- Use secure email addresses that are not shared across platforms

If you feel harassed or unsafe, report concerns to Essex Police via 101.

Defamation, Libel and Copyright

Defamation and Libel

Defamation (including libel) occurs when an untrue statement is published about a person that damages their reputation. A person may take legal action against the **individual Councillor**, not the Council.

Members should note:

- Posting false or unverified allegations can be defamatory
- Repeating, sharing or re-posting a libellous statement can create the same legal liability as the original post
- Legal action may result in significant personal financial and reputational consequences

Members should exercise particular care when commenting on individuals, organisations and ongoing disputes.

Copyright

Copyright law applies to social media content. Members must not use text, images, videos or other material created by others unless:

- Permission has been granted
- The material is clearly licensed for reuse
- Use falls within a lawful exception

Always credit original sources where appropriate and ensure content is accurate.

Members' Code of Conduct

Failure to follow this guidance **may amount to a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct**, depending on the circumstances.

Even when using personal accounts, Members must ensure that:

- Comments are lawful
- Confidential information is not disclosed
- The Council is not brought into disrepute

Disclaimers such as "views my own" may help provide clarity but **do not remove responsibility** or disapply the Code of Conduct.

Do and Don't Guidance for Members on Social Media

Do	Don't
Listen to online conversations and engage where appropriate	Publish anything you would not say in traditional media, a public meeting, or in person
Remember that libel and copyright laws apply	Bring the Council or your role into disrepute
Clearly state when you are speaking personally, as a Councillor, or on behalf of a political group.	Say how you will vote on an issue where it creates a risk of predetermination
Be respectful and professional in all communications	Disclose confidential or privileged information
Share verified information from the Council's corporate accounts, particularly during major incidents	Use social media when angry, tired or under the influence of alcohol or other substances
Consider how the public may perceive who you follow or what you share	Use social media during committee meetings if it distracts from Council business
Think carefully before posting – content is persistent and shareable	Assume everyone shares your sense of humour or understands sarcasm

Managing Abuse, Harassment and Online Conflict

Members should be able to use social media without fear of harassment, bullying or hate speech.

If you experience online abuse:

- Use platform reporting and moderation tools
 - Block or mute accounts where appropriate
 - Keep records, including screenshots
 - Seek legal advice in serious cases
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Training and Further Support

Members may access:

- **LGA Model Guidance for Councillors' Use of Social Media**

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/communications-and-community-engagement/social-media-guidance-councillors>

- Council-led training sessions
 - Support from the Corporate Communications Manager
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Approved and adopted by the Standards Committee on **[Insert Date] 2026**.