

Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

Social media is the term for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.

For the purposes of this Policy, the term “social media” covers sites and applications including but not restricted to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, and any similar sites which develop after the creation of this policy. It also includes comments in relation to online newspaper articles.

2. Purpose

The widespread availability and use of social media networking applications bring opportunities to communicate and engage with members of the community in new ways. This Policy relates to Councillor use of social media, whether inside or outside of official capacities.

The Parish Clerk is responsible for any social media sites set up for the Council as a corporate body. *It is recommended that in the case of Facebook and similar sites, Councillors wishing to keep their personal life and official capacities separate should create separate accounts.*

It is important that the Council utilises these technologies effectively whilst being fully aware of its legal responsibilities and ensuring the reputation of the Council is not adversely affected.

3. Scope

The Social Media Policy includes:

- User Responsibilities
- Safety
- Information Protection
- Best Practice
- Elections
- Breaches of this Policy

4. Policy

a) User Responsibilities

- i) In any biography where the Councillor is identified as a Councillor, the account should state that the views are those of the Councillor in question and may not represent the views of the Council.
- ii) Where possible, a Councillor should make clear who they are in the profile of any account and whether they are an authorised representative of the Council. In exceptional circumstances, such as a potential threat to personal safety, the Parish Clerk must be consulted.
- iii) When commenting online on any matter relating to the Council, Councillors should identify themselves as a Councillor and make it clear whether or not they are representing the views of the Council. Councillors must not make anonymous posts nor use a pseudonym to hide their identity.
- iv) Councillors are personally responsible for the content that they publish on any form of social media. Publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may amount to libel.
- iv) Councillors must treat others with respect and not make disrespectful, rude or offensive comments.
- v) Councillors must comply with the Council's Equality Policy.

b) Safety

- i) Councillors must be aware of their own safety when placing information on the internet and should not publish something that could leave them vulnerable.
- ii) Any Councillor receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their use of social media should report it to the Parish Clerk and/or the Police.
- iii) Councillors' social media accounts should be password protected and not shared.

c) Information Protection

- i) Councillors must not disclose information, make comments or engage in activity on behalf of the Council ***unless they are authorised to do so.***
- ii) Councillors must handle personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's Data Protection Policy.
- iii) Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important that Councillors ensure that they are confident of the nature of the information they publish. Comments posted online are permanently available and can be used by the Media such as newspapers.

- iv) Councillors must not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal nor release confidential reports/papers.
- v) Copyright laws apply online. Councillors must not use images to which they do not hold the copyright. Information shared should be attributed to the source.

d) Best Practice

- i) Social media must not be used to publish content which may result in action for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes, but is not limited to, material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the Council into disrepute.
- ii) Social media accounts set up as a Councillor must not be used to promote personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns, whether or not related to the function of the Council.
- iii) Use of social media must not breach the Council's misconduct, equality or bullying & harassment policies.

e) Elections

- i) The Electoral Commission requires that candidates provide a return of expenditure on any form of advertising or campaign literature – and this includes web advertising. Full guidance for candidates can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.
- ii) Councillor social media accounts may need to be closed down for a defined period before local council elections in order to comply with legislation (Purdah).

f) Breach of this Policy

- i) Failure to comply with this Policy will be deemed as a breach of the Members Code of Conduct and will be reported to the Monitoring Officer.
- ii) Other violations, such as breaching the Data Protection Act 1988 could lead to criminal or civil action being taken against the individual(s) involved.
- iii) The Council reserves the right to request the closure of any applications or removal of any content published by Councillors deemed inappropriate, or which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council, or put it at risk of legal action.

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