

MEDIA Policy statement

1. This policy is intended to help councillors and council staff to make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as emails, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other relevant social media websites.
2. It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, the intention is to establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media. The Council welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and, through them, to debate issues in the public arena.

Key Aims

3. The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications. The media – press, radio, TV, internet – are crucially important in conveying information to the community so the Council must maintain positive, constructive media relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for particular policies and priorities.
4. The media themselves have a vital role to play on behalf of the local community in holding the Council to account for its policies and actions. It is important that they have access to Officers and Members and to background information to assist them in this role. To balance this, the Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.
5. The Council will encourage the use of social media for the purposes of:-
 - 5.1. Providing and exchanging information about services
 - 5.2. Supporting local democracy
 - 5.3. Gathering citizen insights and managing citizen relationships
 - 5.4. Promoting cultural events or tourism for the area
 - 5.5. Supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
 - 5.6. Creating internal communications, learning and development
6. This policy outlines the standards the Council requires councillors and staff to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

Legal Framework

7. The Legislation governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. The Council must also have regard to the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Aspects of the Code which are relevant to this policy are:
 - 7.1. Any publicity describing the Council's policies and aims (and the provision of services) should be as objective as possible, concentrating on facts or explanation or both.
 - 7.2. Publicity touching on issues that are controversial, or on which there are arguments for and against the views or policies of the Council should be handled with particular care. Issues must be presented clearly, fairly and as simply as possible, although councils should not oversimplify facts, issues or arguments.
 - 7.3. Publicity should not attack, nor appear to undermine, generally accepted moral standards.

- 7.4. Local Authorities should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.
8. This policy supplements and should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by the Council, such as the Equal Opportunities Policy, Anti-Harassment Policy, Data Protection Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Members Code of Conduct and such like.
9. This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.
10. When the media wishes to discuss an issue that is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings, then advice should be sought from the Council's solicitor before any response is made

Who this Policy Applies to

11. This policy covers all individuals working at all levels within the Council, including all elected and co-opted councillors, the Clerk to the Council and all other employees and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy).

The scope of this policy

12. The Council has a corporate presence on the web and the use of email. Over time the Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur this Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements that it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit the Parish. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. We may ask those who contact us for their preferred channel of communication when we deal with them.
13. All members and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.
14. Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Employee Disciplinary Procedure. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive comments by the employee. Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.
15. Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained. Online content should be objective, balanced, informed and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in

a 'private' group it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

Rules for using social media.

16. Staff and councillors must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies that the Council works with and serves.
17. Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details.
18. If staff or councillors blog or tweet personally and not in their role as a councillor, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
19. All staff and councillors must ensure that they use Council facilities appropriately. If using a Council-provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Do not use Council facilities for personal or political blogs.
20. The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator – the Clerk who will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on Council pages and ensure compliance with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook).
21. The Council will appoint a nominated 'Webmaster' to maintain and update the Parish Council website. This will be the Clerk.
22. The website may be used to:-
 - 22.1. Post notices and minutes of meetings
 - 22.2. Advertise events and activities
 - 22.3. Post good news stories
 - 22.4. Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct
 - 22.5. Advertise vacancies
 - 22.6. Retweet or 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, library, district council etc.
 - 22.7. Announce new information appropriate to the Council
 - 22.8. Post of share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups
 - 22.9. Post other items as the Council see fit
 - 22.10. Facebook and/or Twitter etc. may be used to support the website and its information as above

23. Staff and individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for Council business. Both staff and councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.
24. All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure that the security settings are in place.
25. When participating in online communication, staff and councillors must:-
 - 25.1. Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent
 - 25.2. Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council
 - 25.3. Never made false or misleading statements
 - 25.4. Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment.
 - 25.5. They must protect the good reputation of the Council
 - 25.6. Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council
 - 25.7. Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud'.
 - 25.8. Use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points
 - 25.9. Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.
 - 25.10. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief should not be published on any social media site
 - 25.11. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
 - 25.12. Do not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face
 - 25.13. Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so
 - 25.14. Seek permission to publish original photographs or video from the persons or organisations in the video or photographs before they are uploaded.
 - 25.15. You must check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used
 - 25.16. Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents
 - 25.17. Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations such as libel and copyright
 - 25.18. Spell and grammar check everything
26. At any meeting of the Council or any of its committees, the following persons should sit in a separate designated area, although they may be included in a panning or panoramic shot – any members of the public who do not wish to participate in the meeting and who object to being filmed, recorded, photographed or otherwise reported about and children and vulnerable adults where the relevant responsible adult has not given consent for them to be filmed, recorded, photographed or otherwise reported about.
27. Residents and councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.
28. If a matter that is raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised at either the open forum or as full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of councillors. Again the 'poster' shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case and invited to

contact the Clerk direct. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

29. Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the moderator and/or Council as required.

Attendance of Media at Council or Committee Meetings

30. Agendas and minutes of meetings will be supplied to media outlets. These will also be available on the Council's website together with dates of Full Council meetings.

31. The Local Government Act 1972 requires that all agendas, reports and minutes are sent to the media on request, prior to the meeting.

32. The media will be encouraged to attend Council and Committee meetings.

33. A person may not orally report or comment about a meeting as it takes place if he is present at the meeting of the Parish Council or its committees but otherwise may:

- 33.1. film, photograph or make an audio recording of a meeting;
- 33.2. use any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear proceedings at a meeting as it takes place or later;
- 33.3. report or comment on the proceedings in writing during or after a meeting or orally report or comment after the meeting.'

Elections

34. The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity contains guidance for providing publicity for Members and for publicity around elections. The Code makes it clear that Council resources should not be used to publicise individual Members unless it is relevant to the particular position they hold in the Council. These extracts from the Code illustrate the main points:

- 34.1. Publicity about individual councillors may include the contact details, the positions they hold in the council (for example, Chairman of a committee), and their responsibilities. Publicity may also include information about individual councillors' proposals, decisions and recommendations only where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and personalisation of issues or personal images making should be avoided.

- 34.2. Publicity should not be liable to misrepresentation as being party political. Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual councillor which are relevant to their position and responsibilities within the Council, and to put forward their justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating policies or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups or individuals.

- 34.3. The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election.

- 34.4. In line with practice elsewhere in the country, the Council will not quote any Councillor in a News release or involve them in proactive publicity events during the election period, regardless of whether or not they are standing for election. The only exception to this is during an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the control of the Council. In this situation, Members holding key civic positions should be able to comment.

Press Release

35. The purpose of a press release is to make the media aware of a potential story, to provide important public information or to explain the Council's position on a particular issue. It is the responsibility of all Officers and Members to look for opportunities where the issuing of a press release may be beneficial.
36. Any Officer or Member may draft a press release, however they must all be issued by the Clerk following agreement by the Council in order to ensure that the principles outlined in section three (Legal Framework) are adhered to, that there is consistency of style across the Council and that the use of the press release can be monitored.
37. Where a press release is deemed to be urgent, the Clerk in conjunction with the Chairman/Vice Chairman and the writer (if different) should issue a press release to the Media within 24 hours. The press release will then be reported to Full Council at its next meeting.

Review of Policy

38. The Policy will be reviewed annually.