



West Swindon Parish Council

Social Media Policy

DRAFT

Policy name	Date Adopted	Review Date
Social Media Policy	May 2021	June 2024

1.0 Parish Council Social Media Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a guidelines and principles to provide guidance to Parish Councillors, Council staff and others who engage with the Council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet via use of: applications; software and hardware including smart-phones, tablets laptops and so on.

This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook and other social networking sites
- X and other micro blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

2.0 Principles Guiding Use of Social Media

The principles of this policy apply to Parish Councillors and Council staff and applies to others communicating with the Parish Council. Social Media shall be used to:

- a) To publish, promote and preserve the work of West Swindon Parish Council to a wider audience;
- b) To advertise and promote engagement in the democratic process and to widen participation across the community in the affairs of the Parish Council and the community it represents;
- c) To advertise and promote work of its partner agencies such as the Police, Fire and ambulance services, and other town/parish Councils;
- d) To disseminate community news of interest such as road closures, planning and licensing applications, events and so on.

Social Media Shall NOT be used for:

- e) Entering online debates or arguments about the Parish Council's work, priorities or delivery of services; - the initiation of local debates should be agreed by Council resolution and led by the Parish Council's staff
- f) Canvassing, promoting or advertising any political ideological policy or decision of a Councillor or political party.
- g) The promotion or advertising of any individual business or going concern.

3.0 Approved Social Media

- a) Parish Council website
- b) Facebook page
- c) X Account
- d) Instagram Account

The Support Officer shall be the nominated social media officer to issue official postings via the approved social media accounts. The Clerk or Deputy Clerk will have the authority to issue public statements on social media on behalf of the Council.

All public statements must be vetted by the Clerk before being posted to a social media account. If in the opinion of the Clerk the post is unsuitable for dissemination it must NOT be posted to any of the approved social media accounts. The Clerk shall have the final say in deciding the suitability of public postings to approved social media accounts.

4.0 Guidelines

Social Media is a tool in sharing the way we work with the wider community and world. However, social networking posts can attract negative comments or have an adverse impact upon the individual or Parish Council's reputation. Staff must be aware that they act as ambassadors of the Council and that Councillors must also be mindful of their obligations under the adopted Code of Conduct and law. These guidelines are not definitive and do not provide an exhaustive list of all the considerations to consider before using social media, however they aim to give a framework for pausing and reflecting before posting:

- Post content should be restricted to that which is informative, objective and impartial.
- Irony and sarcasm are subjective notions and will be avoided within posts and in any comment on other posts in the name of the Parish Council
- Abide by the terms and conditions of the platform in use and respect the community guidelines for each;
- Monitor and be prepared to remove posts from platforms/pages which do not adhere to this policy or meet a threshold of behaviour which is deemed acceptable;
- Do use privacy settings where necessary;
- Protect passwords and change regularly where necessary. Parish Council; passwords shall only be in the knowledge of the Clerk and those authorised by the Clerk to post on his/her behalf;
- Always seek written permission when using any photos outside of public open space such as at community events or functions and be mindful of background identifiers such as faces and/or car registration plates etc;
- Photographs of children or those who are vulnerable and should be used only where there is explicit written consent of any parent/guardian who has responsibility. If in doubt always seek advice first before posting;
- Do not post or retweet comments where judgment is impaired due to bias, or pre-disposition or pre-determination;

Parish Councillors acting as Parish Councillors and Council staff should not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms;
- present personal opinions as that of the Council;
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council;
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Council;
- post content that is damaging or opposing the work of the Parish Team in its delivery of services
- comment or post in relation to incidents or damage to play equipment or outdoor facilities so as to avoid creating additional liability for the Council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks;
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications;
- use an individual's name unless given permission to do so – including Parish Council staff;
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission;
- post any information that infringes copyright of others;
- post any information that may be deemed libel;
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment;
- bring the Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity;
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief or other relevant protected characteristics;
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence;
- create content that shares or alludes to information of confidential matters or share restricted information to members of the public to post

Members have been provided with a separate email address which is only used for Council business and correspondence. The nominated account will be subject to any request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and/or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. Councillors should manage their email accounts in respect of General Data Protection Regulation (2018).

The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Individual Parish Councillors and Council staff are responsible for what they post in a Council and personal capacity and should comply with this Policy when acting as a Parish Councillor or posting on matters that relate to the Council, its projects and business. This applies to all pages, profiles or accounts. If Councillors have multiple accounts/pages or profiles alongside a Parish Councillor account, they should be mindful that the public may not distinguish between them or appreciate the difference.

In the main, Councillors and Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings;
- Advertise events and activities;
- Good news stories linked website or press page;
- Vacancies;
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as SBC, Police, Health etc;
- Announcing new information;
- Post or Share information from other area related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities;

5.0 Code of Practice

When using social media (including email) Parish Councillors and Council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative. Parish Councillors and Council staff should check with the Parish office before posting information relating to the Parish Team or Parish Council projects.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages.

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation is an offence.

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Councillors views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre- determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken. The Parish Team will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties or Councillors from Council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature. Where appropriate the team will have the authority to report any such posting to any other appropriate agency including the Police and SBC's Safeguarding Team.

Code of Conduct

If a Councillor is seen to act on social media in breach of this policy, it may be considered a breach of the code of conduct. Complaints will be dealt with on a case by case basis and referred to the Standards Committee where appropriate to do so.