

Social Media Policy

1. Policy Statement

This policy is intended to help councillors and council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet through channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Threads, Twitter and TikTok.

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.

This policy supplements and should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by the Council, such as the Member's Code of Conduct.

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication and should be seen as a complimentary form of communication which could engage more with certain sectors of the community.

This policy and the use of social media may be amended or withdrawn at any time.

2. Who is covered by this policy

This policy covers all individuals working at all levels within the Council, including all elected and co-opted councillors and the Clerk to the Council.

The Council will appoint the clerk to be the nominated person to moderate and administrate the parish council's social media output. The clerk will be responsible for posting and monitoring content and ensuring that it complies with the social media policy. The Council may also nominate other members to also post content, this would be in line with this policy and also subject to moderation.

3. The scope of this policy

All members and staff are expected to always comply with this policy to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.

Serious breaches of this policy by any Councillor or council representative may be dealt with as appropriate. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, homophobic, or racially offensive comments by the Council member or representative.

The 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.

It must be remembered that communications on the Internet are permanent and public. When communicating via social media consideration needs to be given as to whether we would make the same statement via any other method. If the answer is no, then the statement should not be made via social media.

4. Responsibility for the implementation of the policy

- a) The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- b) The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.
- c) All employees and elected members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk or Chair of the Council.
- d) Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

5. Social Media Uses

The Council will encourage the use of social media via the Council's official accounts for the following purposes.

- a) Post notices, dates, and minutes of meetings
- b) Advertise events and activities organised by the Parish Council (Carol singing, Remembrance Service etc.)
- c) Parish Council News – Information on decisions made that will benefit the community.
- d) Post good news stories (that are appropriate for a Council to promote)
- e) Link to appropriate websites
- f) Advertise vacancies.
- g) Retweet or 'share' information from partners i.e., Village Hall, Police, Cheshire East Council etc.
- h) Engagement with page followers on general enquiries.
- i) Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups and organisations.
- j) Post other items as the Council and moderator see fit.
- k) Where possible and appropriate social media content will mirror content shared to the Council website.

6. Social Media Standards – Posts via Council Media

When participating in online communication via the Parish Council's social media platforms, the clerk and any nominated members must.

- a) Ensure all official social media engagement comes from the Parish Council page. A moderator should not post official council social media posts from their own social media account.
- b) Any posts should identify which member or representative has made it via a sign-off of initials at the end of the post.
- c) All posts should be professional and follow the Council's consistent tone and voice. Use sentence case format, not capital letters. Spell and grammar check everything.
- d) Posts should utilise a photo or graphic when possible, so as to increase engagement.
- e) Not post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council.
- f) Do not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face.

- g) Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the video or photographs before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used.
- h) Respect the privacy of other councillors, employees, and residents.
- i) Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate legislation or regulations such as libel and copyright.
- j) Residents and councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.
- k) Official responses to comments should be concise and factual. Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, and respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- l) Any matter that is raised in any form of social media and needs further consideration by the Council may be raised as a full agenda item at a council meeting. The 'poster' shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case and invited to contact the Clerk directly. Any response agreed to by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- m) If a poster were to communicate via a social media channel but in a manner that would be deemed inappropriate, defamatory or of a libellous nature, a Parish Council moderator would reserve the right to remove the offending post.
- n) The Council would not accept any posts initiated by residents so as to minimise unrelated content.
- o) When the Council uses multiple social media platforms, content shall be mirrored across all to ensure consistency.

7. Councillor Interaction with Parish Council Social media posts

- a) Staff members and council members are prohibited from conversing in the comments section of a post published by the Parish Council account. (from their personal social media accounts).
- b) Councillors may share any posts from the Parish Council account to their personal or community social media accounts.
- c) Any comments made regarding Parish Council posts on other pages (not the Parish Council Page) should not be engaged with by members except for highlighting that "any questions need to be left on the Parish Council page so that they will be seen".

8. Councillor Social Media Standards – Posts via own media

- a) Make sure personal opinions are not published as being those of the Council.
- b) If a Councillor wishes to post Council information to their own page or another social media page, they should share the official post so that the information posted is consistent and that official edits are updated as and if required.
- c) Councillors should not act on behalf of the Council from their own personal profiles.
- d) Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. The good representation of the council must be protected. Be mindful of the impact your personal posts might have on people's perceptions of the Council.
- e) Not post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council.
- f) Never make false or misleading statements.
- g) Avoid personal attacks and do not enter into online fights or hostile communications.

- h) Do not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face.
- i) Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion, or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- j) Respect the privacy of other councillors, employees, and residents.

This policy was adopted into use by Council and members at the meeting due to be held on the 2nd of October 2023.

This policy will be reviewed and updated on an as required basis.