

Drayton Bassett Parish Council

Social Media Policy

Approved 17 Oct 2023

Date Created	Date Adopted	Date Revised	Review Date
February 2022	February 2022	17 th October 2023	October 2024

1. Policy Statement

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to parish councillors, council staff and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media. It is intended to help Councillors and Council Staff to make appropriate decisions about the use of social media and the nature of material that should be posted on various sites.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

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

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook, Instagram
- 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.

The Council will encourage the use of social media for the purposes of providing and exchanging information about services, gathering citizen insights, promoting cultural events or tourism in the area, supporting community cohesion and neighbourliness among other things.

2. Who is covered by this policy?

The principles of this policy apply to parish councillors and council staff and also applies to others communicating with the Parish Council e.g. volunteers. For these reasons passwords to access the social media platforms shall be held by Councillors and Staff only and shall not be shared.

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. Councillors will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the Code of Conduct 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 Remarks are easily withdrawn, apologised for and forgotten when made in person, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained.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, informative and accurate.

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 newsletters, agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings

- Advertise events and activities
- Advertise good news stories linked to website or press page
- Advertise vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Announce new information
 - Post or Share information from other parish related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillor

3 Rules for using Social Media

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.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative. Parish councillors and council staff must 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 controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- 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
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence 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.

This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site.

A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

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. 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, Predetermination 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 Clerk will be the appointed moderator of parish council social media output and be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.

The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

This document may be edited but to be effective it must remain within any existing legal framework.

4 Responding to Social Media Communication

Residents and Councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the council, it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors.

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

The Council supports community interaction with the Parish Council via Facebook etc. However, where it is considered that the posts are unreasonable and damaging to the parish council, its work and employees, the parish council will have the authority to remove such posts / block individuals from the Parish Council social media platforms.