



Parish Council

Social Media Policy

Statement of policy and purpose of policy

Newington Parish Council (the Council) recognises that social interaction on the internet is an important and integral part of life and, if used correctly, can offer valuable opportunities for communicating with residents. However, inappropriate use of Social Media can damage the reputation and credibility of the Council and can pose significant risks to the individual.

Aims of Policy

The objective of this policy is to define a Code of Practice and guidance for Councillors and staff, outlining the Council's position on various aspects of Social Media use.

The Policy is to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of Council based services through the use of Social Media
- A Consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of Social Media
- That Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of Social Media
- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation
- That the Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected
- That communication by the use of Social Media is effective, timely, appropriate, useful, engages with a wider audience and utilises cross-promotion of other Council communication tools (e.g. Website, Village Voice, linking Facebook to Twitter account etc)

The use of Social Media should not replace existing forms of communication, but as an additional means of communication, provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate with a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with a younger age group, the business community and harder to reach groups.

This is a statement of policy only. The Council may amend this policy at any time.

Definitions

Social Media is a term used for websites based on user participation and user-generated content. It includes (but not limited to) social networking sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction.

This policy covers the following (but not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook

Should the Council approve the addition of further Social Media Platforms, the Social Media Policy will be amended to reflect these additions.

Responsibilities

The Clerk is the designated Council 'Owner' of the Council Social Media channels agreed by the Council. Councillors officially appointed by the Council may assist the Clerk to disseminate information. All Councillors and staff have personal responsibility to ensure compliance with this policy.

Scope of Usage

The purpose of the use of the Social Media Platforms by the Council, is to share information to reach a wider audience only.

Sending a message/post via a Social Media platform will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and the Council is not obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through the Social Media channel.

The Council presence within the Social Media platforms will not be monitored outside of 'regular' office hours; however, from time to time, updates may be made outside of these hours.

The Council will not enter into debate / discussions via the Social Media platforms.

Council and personal use of Social Media

All media enquiries (including requests for comments for publication on Social Media) should be directed to the Clerk (Proper Officer). If you are contacted by a media representative or asked for comment for publication about the Council, you should not respond unless you have been given written approval by the Chair / Vice Chair / Clerk (Proper Officer).

Only councillors and staff specifically authorised by the Chair / Vice Chair / Clerks (**Authorised Users**) may use Social Media (including updating the Parish Council website) on behalf of the Council as an organisation or otherwise or post comments on any of our Social Media accounts or profiles. Clerks will need to be authorised by the Chair / Vice Chair, or by a resolution of the Council. If you are authorised to do this, then the Council may require you to undergo training before undertaking such activities and you will be required to comply with additional guidance and instructions concerning these communications.

The Parish Council website allows selective authority to individual staff and councillors (or any person appointed by the Council) to update specific pages. This access must be approved by the Chair / Vice Chair / Clerk (Proper Officer) or by resolution of the council. These policies apply to the contents of and updates to, the Council's website.

Personal capacity

When using Social Media:

- a. you should make it clear that you are speaking in your personal capacity and not as a representative of the Council, communicate in a way consistent with that and if you choose to include contact information this should be your personal, not work contact details; and
- b. if you do elect to disclose your connection to the Council, then you must clearly and expressly state that your views do not represent those of the Council.

Permanent form

It is always useful to bear in mind when posting any Social Media content or comment that it may be permanently and publicly available and that you may not be able later to delete or remove it. You should ensure that your communications are consistent with the image that you would like to present publicly including to present and any future Councils, colleagues, friends, business contacts and the world at large.

Personal liability

Remember that you are personally responsible and may be legally liable for what you communicate on Social Media. Public statements of this type can create legal issues in a number of different ways including for being defamatory, breach of confidentiality, infringement of intellectual property rights or amounting to unlawful harassment.

Taking care to avoid misunderstandings

Before posting comments, think about whether, even if innocently meant, they could be misconstrued in a way that creates legal problems or causes reputational damage to the Council or you. Steer away from commenting on sensitive topics relating to the Council or your role as a councillor or member of staff. Such comments might damage the reputation of the Council even if you make clear that the views you express are personal.

Respecting privacy and confidentiality

All of us have information that we prefer to keep private. Do not post anything related to your fellow councillors or the Council's suppliers, customers or other stakeholders without their written permission.

Respecting intellectual property

If you post or reference material that is protected by intellectual property rights, you should satisfy yourself that you have taken steps to avoid legal liability such as appropriately referencing sources and ensuring that citations are accurate. If you are an Authorised Business User and have questions about whether a particular post or upload to the Council's Social Media accounts or profiles might violate anyone's copyright or trademark, then you should check with the Clerk (Proper Officer) in advance.

Prohibited uses of Social Media

Any communications through Social Media, like all other modes of communication, must not breach the Council's disciplinary rules or any other policy or procedure and must not cause the council to be in breach of obligations owed to others. For example, you must not use Social Media in any way that:

- a. breaches obligations of confidentiality which you owe to the Council or to any third party or which causes the Council to breach duties of confidence which the Council owes to any third party.
- b. breaches the rights of any other councillors or staff to privacy, data protection and confidentiality or which amounts to bullying or harassment;
- c. is offensive, insulting, discriminatory or obscene;

Discrimination can be on the basis of

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Under the Equality Act 2010 these are known as "protected characteristics".

- d. poses a threat to confidential information and intellectual property;
- e. infringes the intellectual property rights of any other person or entity;
- f. defames, disparages or causes reputational damage to the Council or associated authorities or to any party with whom the Council has a relationship, such as suppliers or customers and other authorities;
- g. breaches or causes the Council to breach any law or the rules or guidelines of any regulatory authority relevant to the Council;

- h. breaches data protection rules;
- i. breaches the rules, policies or procedures of the Council for the use of its IT systems or other equipment or resources;
- j. is dishonest, improper, unethical or deceptive (eg pretending to be someone);
- k. is likely to damage your reputation or the Council's reputation;
- l. breaches any of the Council's other policies and procedures.

You may not use the Council logos, slogans or other identifiable marks or post any of the Council's confidential information without prior written permission.

You must not give references for any person on a Social Media site (including any professional networking sites) on which the identity of the Council is shown in any public or private part of the site. This applies whether the reference is positive or negative. The reason for this is that such references may otherwise be attributed to the Council and create legal liability both for the Council and for you personally as the author.

Breaches of this policy

All councillors and staff must contribute to protecting the reputation of the Council. If you see content in Social Media that is defamatory, false or disparages or reflects poorly on the Council or our stakeholders, you should contact the Clerk (Proper Officer) who will bring this to the attention of the Chair/Vice Chair to agree a response (if any).

Staff who breach this policy

- a. may be required to remove the offending internet postings, comment or information;
- b. may be subject to disciplinary action.
- c. May be requested to undertake appropriate training

Councillors who breach this policy

- a. may be required to remove the offending internet posting, comment or information;
- b. may be reported to Swale Borough Council's Monitoring Officer if a breach of the Councillor's Code of Conduct is suspected.
- c. May be requested to undertake appropriate training

Adopted 24 September 2019
Reviewed 23 May 2023