

Warbleton Parish Council

Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Parish Councillors and Council Staff in the use of online communications, collectively known as “social media”. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council.
- 1.2 The council recognises that “social media” provides an important information and communication system which can be used during the course of council business. This policy provides guidelines and procedures to protect users and the council.
- 1.3 This policy applies to all staff members who have access to the internet, email facilities and social media via the council computer and council mobile phone.
- 1.4 This policy also applies to all councillors in their correspondence & communication with staff members and/or other councillors, and members of the public and other authorities

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication. The Council website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication.

2. The Policy

2.1 Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing/communication via the internet [online]. The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites that include but are not limited to:

- Parish Council Website
- Parish Council emails
- Whatsapp
- Facebook
- X (formerly Twitter)
- You Tube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs & discussion forums
- Instagram

2.2 The Policy is to ensure that councillors and the clerk/staff are aware of the standards and processes that are in place and are using the most appropriate channels. It is also to protect the Parish Council's reputation from inappropriate use of social media. Councillors and the clerk have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

3. The Council shall appoint the clerk as 'Webmaster' to maintain and update the Parish Council website.

4. Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- News stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- "Share" information from partners i.e. Police, Health, Higher Authorities
- Post or share information from other parish-related community groups/clubs/associations
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and other councillors
- Share appropriate information between councillors and clerk

5. Copyright:

- Using images or text from a copyrighted source (e.g. extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright
- Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about, or seek permission in advance
- Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages

6. Data Protection (GDPR):

- Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission
- In determining planning or licensing applications avoid publishing anything that might suggest you don't have an open mind about a matter you may be involved in determining. If not, the decision runs the risk of being invalidated.

7. Obscene Material:

- Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence

8. Internet usage:

8.1 Councillors and staff members are encouraged to use the internet responsibly as part of their official and professional activities.

8.2 Information obtained via the internet and published in the name of the council must be relevant and professional. A disclaimer must be stated where personal views are expressed.

8.3 The use of the internet to access and/or distribute any kind of offensive material will not be tolerated and staff/councillors may be subject to disciplinary action.

8.4 The equipment, services and technology used by the clerk to access the internet are the property of the council. The council reserves the right to monitor internet traffic and monitor and access data that is composed, sent or received through its online connections.

9. Unacceptable use of the internet

9.1 Unacceptable use of the internet by councillors and staff members includes, but is not limited to:

- sending or posting discriminatory, harassing or threatening messages or images
- using computers to perpetrate any form of fraud, and/or software, film or music piracy
- obtaining, using or disclosing another staff member's password without authorisation
- sharing confidential material or proprietary information outside of the council
- hacking into unauthorised websites
- sending or posting information that is defamatory to the council, its services, councillors and/or members of the public
- introducing malicious software onto council computers and/or jeopardising the security of the council's electronic communication systems
- sending or posting chain letters, solicitations or advertisements not related to council business or activities
- passing off personal views as those representing the council
- accessing inappropriate internet sites, web pages or chat rooms

9.2 If a staff member is unsure about what constitutes acceptable internet usage, then he/she should ask his/her line manager for further guidance and clarification

10. Email

10.1 Use of email is encouraged as it provides an efficient system of communication.

10.2 Email should be regarded as written paper documents for the purposes of production, use, retention and disclosure and can be called upon under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Personal information should be kept in accordance with the principles established in the Data Protection Act 1998 as updated to incorporate from 25th May 2018 the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

10.3 The council reserves the right to open any email file stored on the council's computer system.

10.4 The following guidelines for email use should be observed by all staff members and councillors:

- use appropriate language to avoid unintentional misunderstandings
- respect the confidentiality of information contained within emails, even if encountered inadvertently
- check with the sender if there is any doubt regarding the authenticity of a message
- do not open any attachment unless certain of the authenticity of the sender
- only copy emails to others where appropriate and necessary
- emails which create obligations or give instructions on behalf of the council must be sent by officers only, not councillors
- emails must comply with common codes of courtesy, decency and privacy

11. Reporting and sanctions

11.1 If a councillor receives an email from a staff member which they believe is contrary to the guidance provided in this policy, the matter should be referred to the chair who will consider use of the council's formal disciplinary procedure depending on the severity of the event.

- 11.2 If a staff member receives an email from a councillor which they believe is contrary to the guidance provided in this policy, the staff member is entitled to consider use of the council's grievance policy and/or report the issue through the procedures outlined in the Member's Code of Conduct.

12. Security

- 12.1 Only software purchased by the council shall be installed on the council's computer system. Software licences shall be retained.
- 12.2 Only hardware belonging to the council shall be used with the council's computer system.
- 12.3 Only those Warbleton Parish Council email addresses issued to councillors by the clerk shall be used in all correspondence issued by members on council business.
- 12.4 Only the Warbleton Parish Council email address warbletonparishcouncil@gmail.com shall be used by the clerk for all his/her business in relation to the council.

13. Facebook

- 13.1 The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator of the parish council Facebook social media output and they will be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.
- 13.2 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.
- 13.3 When using social media 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.
- 13.4 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
 - publish 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

- 13.5 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.
- 13.6 Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.
- 13.7 Publishing personal data of individuals without permission constitutes a breach of Data Protection legislation and is an offence.
- 13.8 Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.
- 13.9 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
- 13.10 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.
- 13.11 Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Date approved by Warbleton Parish Council: 26 March 2026