



Newton Poppleford and Harpford Parish Council

Website and Social Media Policy

Policy Statement:

This policy is intended to help councillors and council staff to make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as emails, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other relevant social media websites.

Introduction:

The Council will encourage the use of social media for the purposes of:-

- Providing and exchanging information about services;
- Supporting local democracy and improving community engagement;
- Gathering citizen insights and managing citizen relationships;
- Promoting cultural events or tourism for the area;
- Supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience;
- Creating internal communications, learning and development

This policy also outlines the standards that the Council requires councillors and staff to observe when using social media, whether in their personal or professional lives, 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 Equal Opportunities Policy, Ethical Policy, Data Protection Policy, Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure, Members Code of Conduct and such like.

This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

Who is covered by the policy?:

This policy covers all individuals working at all levels within the Council, including all elected and co-opted councillors, the Clerk to the Council and any other employees and volunteers that the Council may employ (collectively referred to as staff in this policy).

Scope of this policy:

The Council has a corporate presence on the web and also utilises email.

Over time, the Parish Council may decide to add to the channels of communication that it currently uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, this Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements that it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit the Parish. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. We may ask those who contact us for their preferred channel of communication when we deal with them.

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

Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Employee Disciplinary Procedure. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated, discriminatory or racially offensive comments by the employee. This list is not exhaustive and Council may take action for reasons other than those specifically listed.

Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.

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 must 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 verbally, but posting them on the internet means that they have been published in a way that cannot be contained nor removed. Online content should be objective, balanced, informed and accurate.

Members must be aware that their profile as an elected or co-opted councillor means that it is more likely they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking via Social media, even when this is not the case. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public.

Eg. when communicating in a '*private*' group or forum / chatroom, members should ensure that they consider how the Council would be viewed should that statement or comment be made public.

Guidelines for use of Social Media and other Web platforms:

Staff and councillors must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies that the Council works with and serves.

Posts must not contain anyone's personal information other than necessary basic contact details.

If staff or councillors blog or tweet personally and not in their role as a councillor, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council. Use of the prefix Councillor or Cllr. is discouraged as this gives the outside observer the impression that the author is acting on behalf of the Council.

All staff and councillors must ensure that they use any Council funded / provided facilities appropriately. If using a Council-provided website, blog site or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Do not use Council facilities for personal or political blogs.

The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator - usually the Clerk - who will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on Council pages and ensure compliance with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to immediately without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the hosts (i.e. Facebook/Twitter) and also to all members of Council.

The Council will appoint a nominated 'Webmaster' to maintain and update the Parish Council website. This will usually be the Clerk. The website may be used to:-

Post notices and minutes of meetings;

Advertise events and activities;

Post positive community news stories;

Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct;

Advertise vacancies;

Retweet or 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, library, district & county council etc.;

Announce new information appropriate to the Council;

Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, sports clubs and community groups;

Post other items as the Council sees fit;

Facebook and / or Twitter etc. may be used to support the website and its information as above;

Staff and individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for Council business. Both staff and councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.

All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure that the security settings are in place.

When participating in online communication, staff and councillors must:-

Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent;

Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council;

Never make false or misleading statements;

Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. They must protect the good reputation of the Council at all times;

Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council;

Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud'.

Use sentence case format, not capital letters, and do not write in red to emphasise points;

Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.

Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief should not be published on any social media site;

Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications;

Not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face;

Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so;

Seek permission to publish original photographs or video 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;

Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents;

Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations such as libel and copyright;

Ensure that all spelling and grammar is checked prior to posting.

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 that is 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. Again 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 by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites or on websites that become known to the Council should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the Council for review and consideration as required.

This Policy will be reviewed annually.

Policy reviewed by the Policy & Personnel Committee – February 2023