



Social Media Policy

Introduction

The objective of this policy is to provide Councillors and staff with an overview of Social Media and outlines the Council's position on various aspects of usage, including everyone's responsibilities when using such channels of communication.

The policy also provides guidance to the public who engage with the Council using online communications.

For Councillors, this policy is to be used in conjunction with the Council's Code of Conduct, which applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Definition of Social Media

Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content.

Social media has the following characteristics:

- Covers a wide variety of formats including text, video, photographs, and audio
- Allows messages to flow between many different types of device eg PCs, phones, and tablets
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or view information
- Broadens the flow of information
- Provides one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications
- Allows communication to take place in real time or over a longer space of time

Examples of social media includes X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, You Tube and LinkedIn. Groupings of interest are a feature of the development of such systems, with people following similar interests being attracted to share information.

Purpose of the Policy

Social media provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities and updates, news, information and sharing relevant information from other sources.

The Council will make use of approved social media tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control its use, to minimise risk (see section below, *Avoiding negative impact*). Currently, the Council use Facebook as its primary social media tool.

Aims and Objectives

Social media can be used by the Council as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity. The aim of this policy is to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and our wider community
- Promotion of Council-based services
- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media
- That the Council's reputation is upheld and improved, rather than adversely affected
- That communication by use of social media is effective, timely, appropriate, useful, and utilises promotion of other Council communication tools (e.g. website and newsletter)

To be effective, social media needs to integrate with other communications. Any planned promotions and activities can be promoted with social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

Avoiding negative impact

Whilst social media is particularly useful to share information quickly with other people, there are some issues to be wary of:

- The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world.
- Groups on specific themes can be set up easily and posts can be edited by the owners of that group to reflect their single interest, ensuring theirs is the only voice heard. There is no guarantee of truth or useful information.
- The nature of social media is that information is shared immediately, and it can be easy to respond too quickly, which can result in unintentionally inflaming a situation.
- Information can be shared with other sites and be spread beyond the intended audience.
- It is easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages and this would outweigh the value gained by social media in the first place.

Policy Statement

There is considerable potential for using social media which can provide significant advantages. The responsible use of social media is actively encouraged. The following applies equally to Councillors and staff.

This policy provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems/networks.

Users must ensure that they use social media responsibly and ensure that its use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any other Council policies.

The following guidelines apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected of (and directed to) representatives of Kimblesworth and Plawsworth Parish Council:

- Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy.
- Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.
- Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act 2018.
- When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the full Council. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only and/or your sole opinion as a Councillor.
- Know your obligations: you must comply with other Council policies when using social media.
- You should be respectful of the authority and its employees- derogatory comments are always wrong.
- Use of the Parish Council's Facebook account must always reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal opinion, particularly when used by a Councillor.

Responsibilities

Councillors and staff should always present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork or exaggeration.

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 and informative. Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- 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 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
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief.

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.

Councillors views, posted in any capacity, in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a council meeting may constitute bias and may require the councillor to declare an interest at council meetings.

Our Facebook Strategy

Social networks continue to grow rapidly and are used by all ages in society. The most popular social networks are web-based, commercial, and not purposely designed for Parish Council use. For individuals, social networking sites provide tremendous opportunities for staying in touch with friends and family. For the Council, the sites provide a modern alternative means to communicate with residents of the Parish.

Our Facebook account was set up by the Chair in late 2018. However, the Parish Clerk is the designated lead of the Council's Facebook account, as agreed by the Council. Councillors officially appointed by the Council (and minuted) may assist the Parish Clerk to disseminate information. However, all must ensure they follow this policy. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk.

The Clerk will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from the Facebook account which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

Example activity on the Facebook account:

- Share articles/ posts from partner agencies such as Durham County Council, Police, Central Government etc.
- Start discussions and ask questions to encourage interaction
- Create surveys to encourage participation from visitors
- Upload images and videos
- Generic news – what is happening in the area
- Distribute dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked to our website
- Vacancies
- Post or share information from other related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk

Good practice guidelines for the use of Facebook by the Council as a body (or Councillors as individuals) are as follows:

- Remember that people classified as “friends” can download and share your information with others.
- Set your profile's security and privacy settings carefully. At a minimum, all privacy settings should be set to “only friends”. “Friends of friends” and “Networks and Friends” open the content to a large group of unknown people.
- All activity on the Council's Facebook page must follow the Council's agreed statement of purpose and outcomes for the use of the networking tool.

- Pay close attention to the site's security settings and allow only approved personnel full access to the site.
- Any decisions added to the Facebook account must have been approved by either the full Council or the Parish Clerk (within delegated powers).
- To reduce security risks, do not install any external applications that work with the social networking site. Examples of these sites are calendar programs and games.
- Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.
- Be careful not to fall for phishing scams that may arrive via on your wall, providing a link for you to click, leading to a fake login page.

Other Social Media

At this stage it is not intended that the Council will use any other forms of social media for official use by Kimblesworth and Plawsworth Parish Council. However, if this changes in future a decision will be required by the full Council.

The Council will then appoint a nominated person as moderator of the new social media account, and they will be responsible for posting and monitoring content- to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.

Councillors are entitled to use any form of social media they wish to but must always abide by this policy when doing so.