

Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council

Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 The objective of this policy is to provide Councillors and Clerk an overview of Social Media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use. In addition, it includes guidelines on Officer and Councillor responsibilities when using such channels of communication.

2. Definition of Social Media

2.1 Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content. They include social networking sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction.

2.2 Social media has the following characteristics:

- Covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs, audio
- Allows messages to flow between many different types of device; PCs, smart phones and tablets (e.g. iPad)
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or just view information
- Speeds and broadens the flow of information
- Provides one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications
- Lets communication take place in real time or intermittently

2.3 Examples of popular social media tools include: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Wikipedia, You Tube, Pinterest, Snapchat, Linked In. Groupings of interest are a natural feature of the development of such systems with people with similar interests being attracted to share information. As of 2020, there are several hundred social media vehicles available.

3. Pitfalls

3.1 Whilst these tools are very useful to share information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of:

- The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world. You do not even need to register in many cases to view the content. Registering is only required should you wish to participate and post to the site.

- Groups on specific themes can be set up easily and posts then 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 and ill-informed comment and gossip is as likely to be found there as useful information.
- The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is all too easy to respond instantaneously which can result in unintentionally inflaming a situation. Information can then be shared with other sites and be spread far beyond the intended audience. Friends of Friends may not be our Friends.

3.2 It is also very easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages that would outweigh the value gained in the first place.

4. Purpose of the Policy

4.1 Social media provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities, providing updates, news, information and retweeting relevant information from other sources. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with the younger age group, the business community and hopefully the harder to reach groups.

4.2 The Council will make use of approved social media tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control its use in order to minimise the risks as stated above. In the first instance, as an experiment, this will be a Facebook Group (NB, this is NOT a Parish Council-owned facility and access is by virtue of the good-will of the owner).

5. Aims and Objectives

5.1 Social media can be used by the Council as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity.

5.2 The aim of this 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 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, linking facebook to twitter account etc)

- Social media activity isn't something that stands alone, to be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities can be plugged in to social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

6. Policy Statement

6.1 It is acknowledged that there is considerable potential for using social media which can provide significant advantages. The responsible, corporate use of social media is actively encouraged. The following applies equally to Officers and Members.

6.2 This policy provides a structured approach to using social media associated with the Parish Council and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information.

6.3 Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and 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 Council policies.

6.4 The following guidelines will apply to online participation using Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council assets and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Winterbourne Stoke 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.
- Never give out personal details of others such as home address and telephone numbers.
- Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act.
- Use a disclaimer. When using Council-associated social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the Council. Avoid use of the Council e-mail address, logos or other Council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only. Where possible, you should include a standard disclaimer, such as: "Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent the Council's policies or opinions".
- Know your obligations: you must comply with other Council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach Council confidentiality issues.

- Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong.
- Use of a Parish Council 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. If unsure, say nothing.
- Councillors are. Of course, at liberty to set up personal accounts using any of the tools available but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view.

7. Responsibilities

The Parish 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 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 or the designated assistant(s).

8. Guidance for Councillors - social media and meetings

The Council encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of Winterbourne Stoke issues and the use of social media can help with this.

Below are some extra guidelines for Councillors to consider for the use of social media during meetings:

- Handheld devices and laptops are permitted (indeed encouraged) for use during meetings to allow environmentally friendly and effective communication.
- The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings - not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part.
- Ensure the volume on all electronic devices is turned to 'mute'.
- Councillors' tweets/blogs during Council meetings should refer to the discussions which are taking place at the meeting - tweeting/blogging about other subjects will show the public and other attendees at the meeting that you are not engaging properly in the meeting.
- Councillors have a responsibility to take Council business seriously and it is not appropriate for members to use social media to tease or insult other members.
- Winterbourne Stoke residents expect debate and to be informed about Council business, not witness petty arguments.
- Remember that if you break the law using social media (for example by posting something defamatory), you will be personally responsible.

9. Generic Social Media Strategy

9.1 Social networks are rapidly growing in popularity 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. They include sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, X, Threads, Tribl, Mastodon, etc. For individuals, social networking sites provide tremendous opportunities for staying in touch with friends and family.

9.2 For the Council the sites provide a modern alternative means to communicate with residents of the Parish.

9.3 Facebook, for example, offers a rich platform allowing you to share unlimited content, including images and videos.

Example activity:

- Share articles / blog posts / expertise
- Start discussions and ask questions to encourage interaction
- Create surveys to encourage participation from visitors
- Upload images and videos
- Generic news – what’s happening in the area

9.4 WhatsApp is an increasingly popular simple, reliable, private messaging service. It can also be used for audio and video calling and conferencing. Each other form of social media offers a range of more or less desirable attributes.

9.5 Good practice guidelines for the use of social media by the Council as a body or Councillors as individuals are:

- As a Parish Council, we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image.
- Remember that people classified as “friends” have the ability to download and share your information with others.
- Post only what you want the world to see. It is not like posting something to your web site or blog and then realising that a story or photo should be taken down. On a social networking site, basically once you post something it may continue to be available, even after it is removed from the site.
- Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise Council policies or personnel.
- 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.
- Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.
- Pay close attention to the site's security settings and allow only approved personnel full access to the site.

- Only add statements relating to council business that are approved by either Full Council or the Parish Clerk.
- Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libellous.
- Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterisations.
- Weigh whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness at Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council at risk.
- If you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines then you must report it as required by law.
- Please stay informed and cautious in the use of all new networking technologies.

10. Current Social Media Use

10.1 As of April 2024, Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council will make use of Facebook and WhatsApp as a secondary means of disseminating information quickly to villagers.

10.2 The Parish Council will NOT have accounts in its own right and will only use social media as a means of providing a link to material published on the Parish Council website in the form of a URL (eg: <https://winterbournestokepc.org.uk/>).

10.3 The Clerk will have the primary responsibility to mirror Parish Council website URLs on social media. The Chair, IT support, or other councillors can do so with the express permission and approval of the Clerk or full council. This ensures that appropriate audit trails and controls are maintained.

11. Future Use of Social Media

11.1 At this stage it is unclear as to how Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council will wish to proceed with its use of social media. Such use can be reviewed in the future and does not require further agreement.

11.2 Councillors are entitled to use any form of social media they wish to but should abide by this policy at all times when so doing.

11.3 Councillors should be aware that linked social media accounts may result in postings to one social media site being mirrored across several others.

Related Documents

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Adoption and Review History

Adopted at Parish Council Meeting on:	2nd August 2018
Revised: - to reflect current use of social media	January 2019 February 2020 April 2024
Reviewed On:	2 April 2024
Next Review Due:	May 2027