
WINKLEIGH PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Effective 24th May 2018



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This procedure is a document that sets out Winkleigh Parish Councils approved and agreed practices. Any deviation must be by resolution of the full Council.

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SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to define the roles and responsibilities within the Council for working with social media and deals with the day-to-day relationship between the Council and social media.

It is not the intention of this policy to curb freedom of speech or to enforce strict rules and regulations. Rather, it provides guidance on how to deal with issues that may arise when dealing with the media and to act as safeguarding for authorised users for the Parish Council social media websites.

This policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration. Social Media does not replace existing forms of communication.

KEY AIMS

The Council is accountable to the local community for its actions and this can only be achieved through effective two-way communications.

All mediums for communication are crucially important in conveying information to the community so, the Council must maintain positive, constructive relations and work with them to increase public awareness of the services and facilities provided by the Council and to explain the reasons for policies and priorities.

The purpose of using social media on behalf of the council is to:

- Increase community engagement and offer responsive communication
- Improve democratic engagement
- Support emergency and crisis communications
- Share messages which are aligned to the Code of Conduct

The Council will defend itself from any unfounded criticism and will ensure that the public are properly informed of all the relevant facts using other channels of communication if necessary.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the **Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988**. The Council must also have regard to the governments **Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity**. The Parish Council's adopted Standing Orders should be adhered to.

All communications posted by WPC must conform with Data Protection Act.

PASSWORDS AND ACCOUNTS

All parish council social media channels must only be used for business of the authority and never for private use.

The clerk will manage the allocation of all social media usernames and passwords, as well as any changes to them. Account details and passwords must not be changed or shared with unauthorised users.

PROFESSIONALISM AND TONE

Clearly indicate your 'opening hours' on any social media page

Anything you write on a council social media channel reflects on the Council but, given the relaxed style of social media, it's important not to appear overly formal.

DO

- Engage with conversations, share news and ask questions
- Post regular content and respond to questions
- Take difficult conversations out of the public domain and on to a private channel

DO NOT

- Ignore genuine questions or interactions
- Engage in political debate
- Engage in discussions on draft/unratified council policies
- Reveal confidential or sensitive information about the authority or your work
- Delete posts/comments unless necessary (see Moderation)
- Use false names or pseudonyms
- Present personal opinions as that of the Parish Council
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Parish Council
- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Parish Council
- Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- Use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Bring the Parish Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity

If you are found to be viewing or publishing inappropriate content, such as illegal, pornographic, racist or sexist material, it will be investigated formally under the council's disciplinary procedure

MODERATION

We are under no obligation to moderate posts or comments by the public. However, there are measures which must be taken to ensure our duty of care when using social media which could be viewed by young and vulnerable people.

The council must not be seen to be endorsing comments which are:

- Defamatory, false or misleading
- Insulting, threatening or abusive
- Obscene or of a sexual nature
- Offensive, racist, sexist, homophobic or discriminatory against any religions or other groups

- Promoting illegal activity
- Intended to deceive

If any comment, by the Parish Council or a user, is suspected as falling into one of these categories then email the Parish Clerk at winkleighpc1@btconnect.com or telephone 01837 89095 immediately

RISK MITIGATION

- Passwords will be controlled and regularly changed by the Clerk.
- Account details and passwords will not be shared with unauthorised users.
- unsuitable content from other users, such as unsavoury comments/unsuitable posts and comments will be removed as soon as we are made aware of any issues (see Moderation)
- Damage to the council's reputation. The Clerk and Chair will liaise to formulate responses and actions to limit damage where required.

All users of social media on behalf of the council must agree to this policy

RESPONDING TO NEGATIVE POSTS

Negative posts can't be avoided but how they are dealt with has implications for the authority's reputation. They should not be ignored, although sometimes no answer is required if it is a rhetorical question, a repetition of an earlier posting or a post designed to provoke.

If such posts are public, it is better to acknowledge them in public although, occasionally, it may be necessary to take them onto a private channel.

ENGAGING WITH YOUNG AND VULNERABLE PEOPLE

There are many benefits to engaging with young people, vulnerable adults, and their families on social media. However, the associated risks could be very serious and preparation is crucial:

- A young or vulnerable person may choose to utilise social media to make a disclosure or allegation. These must be taken seriously and immediate action taken to investigate. □
- Be alert to any signs of localised grooming.
- If you believe someone is in immediate danger, contact the police. □
- Most platforms have their own mechanisms for reporting cyber bullying which you must know how to use. □
- The council is not expected to ensure that users meet the age limits for using social media platforms.

All concerns must be reported to the Clerk □

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO

- Copyright – WPC must have written permission from the original copyright-holder before using any photo or video. It is generally illegal to use imagery from the internet without permission. Copyright cannot be transferred from a third party, such as a school.

- Stock image libraries all have restrictions on usage. WPC must check the licensing agreements.
- Images of young or vulnerable people. WPC must not take or use any images of young or vulnerable people without written permission from their parent or guardian.
- If a young or vulnerable person uploads a picture to a social media profile or page you control, you could be held responsible for not acting upon it if it's later deemed to play a part in an offence.

If you suspect there is an issue with an image, contact the Clerk.

DRONE PHOTOGRAPHY

As drone photography becomes more common-place, you must be aware of the Civil Aviation Authority's legal guidelines for using them if doing so as an unlicensed operator:

- Don't fly within 50m of people or buildings
- Don't fly within 150m of, or over, crowds or built-up areas
- Always keep your drone in sight
- Fly below 120m (400ft) – if you endanger an aircraft, you could be jailed for up to five years

Images or video posted on behalf of the council must not breach these rules. For further guidance, visit droneaware.org/

PERSONAL USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Employees/Councillors are personally accountable for what they publish on their own social media accounts. However, posts can still affect their professional standing and/or that of the Council. The posting of inappropriate content could result in a formal investigation under WPCs disciplinary procedure and Code of Conduct if:

- Your profile refers to your position within the council
- You hold a prominent public-facing position within the authority

If you do refer to your position with the council on a personal social media profile, please ensure the following actions:

- Declare somewhere on your page or biography that the views expressed are yours alone
- Do not bring the authority into disrepute
- Do not reveal any potentially confidential or sensitive information about the authority that you may have come across in your work
- Do not use any council-owned images or logos
- Do not make offensive comments about the authority, members, colleagues or members of the public as this is a disciplinary offence

CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA

The Clerk and Members should always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all their dealings with social media.

Confidential documents, exempt Minutes, reports, papers and private correspondence should not be Placed on social media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action taken.

There are a number of personal privacy issues for the Clerk and Members that must be handled carefully and sensitively. These include the release of personal information, such as home address and telephone number (although Member contact details are in the public domain); disciplinary procedures and long-term sickness absences that are affecting service provision. In all these and similar situations, advice must be taken from the Clerk before any response is made on social media.

All formal requests for comment regarding WPC policy on any matter should be directed to the Clerk in the first instance. If unavailable, the Chairperson should be contacted.

The Clerk or Chairman are authorised to make Parish Council Posts on Social Media. All matters requiring a formal response should be drafted by the Chairperson with the assistance of the Clerk for accuracy regarding WPC current policy on the matter being responded to and its lawfulness.

Responses drafted on any matter may however be directed to another councillor with the assistance of the Clerk and others for accuracy and lawfulness. In this instance the Chairperson should be made fully aware of the response and agree to its contents.

Statements made by the Chairman and the Clerk should reflect the Council's opinion. If WPC does not have an official position on the matter raised, this should be stated as WPC current position.

Other Councillors can communicate with the media but must ensure that it is clear that the opinions given were their own and not necessarily those of the Council. Councillors are at liberty to communicate with the public and press in their own right as representatives of their wards. However, they must always maintain that they speak as individuals and not on behalf of WPC in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

Parish Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Parish Council at a Council or meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings

This policy will be reviewed annually.