

Social Media Policy

Contents

Section	Description	Pages
1	Introduction	1
2	Definition of Social Media	1-2
3	Purpose	2
4	Aims and Objectives	2
5	Policy and Scope	3-4
6	Responsibilities	4
7	Guidance for Councillors	4
8	Social Media Strategy	4-5
9	Other Social Media	5

1. Introduction

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

2. Definition of Social Media

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. They include social networking sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction.

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, phones and tablets
- 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
- Allows communication take place in real time or intermittently

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This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook, Instagram and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Bloggs and discussion forums
- Email

3. Purpose

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.

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 this will include the Chippenham Parish Website.

4. 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 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, newsletter, 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.

It is acknowledged that there is considerable potential for using social media which can provide significant advantages. 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.

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5. Policy and Scope

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 all members of the Council.

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 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.

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Chippenham 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 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 and proprietary information policies
- Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong
- Use of the Parish Council's Website 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.

Councillors are at liberty to set up 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. Councillors should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.

The Parish Council reserves the right to restrict or remove any content on the Parish Council social media platform that is deemed in violation of the social media policy or applicable law. Users will be informed that their posts may not be published/or may be deleted if they meet any of the criteria below;

- Comments not topical to the article being discussed
- Comments that are politically motivated
- Profane language
- Material that perpetuates discrimination of protected characteristics as listed in the Equality Act 2010, including age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity

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- Solicitation of commerce *i.e.*; Trying to sell items or encourage the sale of products or services not related to the Council
- Illegal conduct or encouragement/support of illegal activities
- Information that compromises or may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems
- Content that violates the legal ownership interest of any other party

6. 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.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to set up their own accounts but they should ensure they comply with this policy and ensure the 'personal view' disclaimer is used.

7. Guidance for Councillors

The Council encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of Chippenham issues and the use of social media can help with this, especially during official Council meetings. 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. Chippenham 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.

8. Social Media Strategy

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, Instagram, Bebo, and Myspace. 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.

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

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One of the hallmarks of online networks is the ability to “friend” others – creating a group of others that share interests and personal news. Care should be exercised when accepting invitations to friend others within personal social networking sites. Friends will gain access to the Council’s network of contacts on the site.

Good practice guidelines for the use of social media streams 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 realizing 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.
- All activity on the Council social media page must follow the Council’s agreed statement of purpose and outcomes for the use of the networking tool.
- Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.
- Pay close attention to the site's security settings and allow only approved members of the Council full access to manage the site.
- Only add statements 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 characterizations.
- Weigh whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness at Chippenham Parish Council at risk.
- 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 arrive via email or on your wall, providing a link for you to click, leading to a fake login page.
- 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.
- Stay informed and cautious in the use of all new networking technologies.

9. Other Social Media

At this stage it is not intended to use any other forms of social media for official use by Chippenham Parish Council. However this could be open to review in the future. Councillors are entitled to use any form of social media they wish to but must abide by this policy at all times when so doing.

	Version	When
Adopted	1.0	21.06.2021
Reviewed	1.0	13.06.2022
Reviewed	1.0	12.06.2023