

Social Media Policy

Last Reviewed: 23rd August 2021

As adopted 13th September 2021

Minute ref: 87/21

To be reviewed and adopted at each Annual Meeting of the Parish Council

Introduction

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Hunts Grove Parish Councillors and its Clerk for publishing communications online. These collective communications will be referred to as social media. The forms of social media included but are not limited to,

- The Hunts Grove Parish Council (HGPC) Website.
- Hunts Grove Parish Council (HGPC) emails.
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- YouTube

Social media is not to replace other forms of communication with residents and existing methods of communication such as letters, flyers on noticeboards, telephone and in person conversations should continue.

Expectations of online content is as follows:

Comments should be,

- Objective
- Balanced
- Informative
- Accurate

Anything written on the internet is a permanent comment and councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law could have more serious consequences.

Councillors should not use their own personal social media accounts when posting or commenting on posts with regard to Hunts Grove Parish Council business or anything that may be construed as such.

Councillors using their own social media accounts or any other form of communication for community or other purposes do so as private individuals and should not use any privileged material gained from their position as a Parish Councillor.

The Parish Clerk along with all Parish Councillors will be responsible for establishing and administrating Parish Council social media accounts. Parish Council posts or comments on posts should only be made using the established Parish Council social media account.

Councillors wishing to utilise a Parish Council social media account should email the Parish Clerk, Chair and Vice-Chair with the proposed content. Once approved by either the Chairman or Vice Chairman the Councillor or The Parish Clerk will make the post or comment as instructed.

The Parish Clerk may initiate posts or comments without prior approval for the purpose of circulating or responding with public domain information, public service notices and details from approved Parish Council minutes or on instructions from a full council meeting.

The Parish Council Website can be used to:

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies for both Councillors and Staff
- Share information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc.
- Announcing new information.
- Post or share information from other Parish related community groups e.g. schools, sports clubs and community groups

Emails will be used to distribute information about council business. Individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for council business.

Code of Practice

All parish councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies. All comments must be respectful, informative and never condescending or loud. Always use sentence case format, not capital letters, nor write in red to emphasis points. Spell and grammar check everything. Correct any errors promptly and refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.

Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site. A Councillor must always avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications and never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so. When using social media (including email), 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, balanced and informative.

Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- 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, online fights 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
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

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

Always:

- Obtain permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
- Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
- Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages.

This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation is an offence.

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

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

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.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

Social media and meetings

HGPC encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of any notification and the use of social media can help with this, including during official Council meetings.

During meetings the use of

- Handheld devices
- Laptops

are permitted to allow effective communication. But are not to be used as a distraction and devices should be muted. Councillors have a responsibility to take Council business seriously therefore Councillors are reminded that overuse of social media during meetings can demonstrate a lack of focus on the meeting. It is not appropriate for members to use social media to tease or insult any other Councillor.