



This policy was adopted at the PC Meeting of 15th March 2021. Reviewed date May 2022.
Next review May 2023.

MEDIA POLICY

SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Introduction
2. Definition
3. Scope
4. Using Social Media
5. Social Media Channels
6. Use of Social Media by Employees
7. Use of Social Media by Councillors
8. Legal Code of Conduct
9. Libel
10. Data Protection

1. Introduction

Social Media encompasses a range of new digital technologies that allow people to share information, build relationships and share opinions. Highwood Parish Council has chosen to use social media to provide an additional means to communicate with residents, clubs, societies and businesses and to impart information to anyone with an interest in the villages.

- 1.1 ensure the safeguards are put in place to prevent the misuse of Social Media
-

1.2 all conduct on Social Media channels must accord with our existing policies: Code of Conduct for Councillors, Grievance & Disciplinary Procedures, Combined Safeguarding Policy for Children, Young People & Vulnerable Adults

2. **Definition**

Social Media refers to all types of electrical media where people can discuss and talk freely to each other over an open network, common examples are Facebook & Whatsapp.

3. **Scope**

This Social Media Policy covers Councillors and employees.

4. **Using Social Media**

Councillors should use the same safeguards as they would with any other form of communication concerning the Parish Council. In the first instance, should a Councillor have information that he/she feels would benefit the community, they are requested to send the information to the Clerk who will review and share accordingly. In case of emergencies and the Clerk being unavailable, the Chairman/Vice Chairman to be consulted.

5. **Social media channels**

Highwood Parish Council will use the Highwood Parish Council Facebook page only, administered by the Clerk.

6. **Use of social media by parish council employees.**

The parish council encourages employees to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites as part of their work. It is an important part of how the council engages with the community.

Employees, or contractors, must be aware at all times that, while contributing to the parish council's social media activities, they are representing the parish council. Employees should use the same safeguards as they would with any other form of communication about the parish council in the public sphere.

These safeguards include:

- Making sure that the communication has a purpose and a benefit for the council obtaining permission from the clerk, or the appropriate committee, before embarking on a public campaign using social media
- Ensuring that a colleague checks the content before it is published.

Any communications that employees make in a professional or personal capacity through social media must not:

- bring the council into disrepute, for example by: criticising or arguing with colleagues, councillors or the public making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content.
 - breach confidentiality, for example by: giving away confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague, councillor or a member of the public) which could be
-

a breach of the Data Protection Act 1998 discussing items, reports or plans that have not been communicated to the public.

- breach copyright, for example by: using someone else's images or written content without permission failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something.
- doing anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, for example by: making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age using social media to bully another individual (such as fellow employee) posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content.

7. Social media guidelines for councillors

It is important to distinguish between member information published by the parish council, such as the member pages on the council's website and personal blogs, or posts, which are the sole responsibility of the individual councillor. Councillors should be aware that what they put on social media is their responsibility. The reason why this distinction matters is that material published by the parish council is restricted in terms of content. It must not contain party political material, nor promote a particular view or councillor. It should not personalise issues. Councillors may use social media to improve engagement with the community and provide a leadership role. This can be a very positive activity as social media can reach a huge audience very quickly and may engage with parts of the community that does not engage often with local government.

8. Legal code of conduct

What is unacceptable offline is unacceptable online. Members of the public, fellow councillors, or parish council staff may make a complaint about a councillor if they breach the code of conduct.

Key requirements in the code of conduct are:

- Treat others with respect.
- Comply with equality and anti-discrimination laws.
- Do not publish anything received in confidence.
- Do not bring the parish council, or your role as councillor, into disrepute.

9. Libel

If a councillor publishes an untrue statement about a person which causes 'serious harm' to their reputation they may sue the councillor for defamation. This also applies if a councillor allows someone to publish something libellous on their website if they know about it and don't take prompt action to remove it. A councillor can be sued for defamation on the basis of what they have put on Twitter and by retweeting. Simply passing on a comment saying you agree with a libellous comment is enough. A successful claim may result in an award of damages. Copyright Using images or text from a copyrighted source (for example, extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing if there is any doubt or seek permission in advance. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages.

10. Data protection

Do not publish the personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission. Bias and predetermination If a councillor is involved in determining planning applications, it is best to avoid publishing anything which suggests they have already made up their mind on the matter. This could be challenged as predetermination and bias and runs the risk of the decision being challenged and invalidated. If in doubt advice should be sought. Obscene material Avoid publishing anything that people would consider obscene. Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

MEDIA – OTHER

MEDIA – RELATES TO NEWSPAPERS/JOURNALS/MAGAZINES

The Clerk is the first port of call for all officer-related media enquiries. Where appropriate the Clerk to respond to all calls and may arrange interviews with Councillors.

The media policy is to be:

- Open
- Transparent
- Honest
- Proactive and assertive
- Helpful to the media in facilitating photograph opportunities, interviews and other reasonable requests

The Clerk, staff & Councillors will:

- Promote the reputation of the organisation
- Respond quickly and effectively to media enquiries
- Respect the confidential nature of information which is retained by the Parish Council on individual cases or other matters which are officially specified as confidential

Clerk of the Council:

**Karen Kuderovitch, Springfields, Crows Lane, Woodham Ferrers Essex CM3
8RR Tel: 01245 842953 clerk@highwoodpc.org**
