



WATER ORTON PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to staff and Parish Councillors in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet or by electronic means. The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Social Networking Sites (eg Facebook)
- Micro-blogging sites (eg X)
- Video and Audio sharing sites (eg YouTube)
- Professional Networking sites (eg LinkedIn)
- Personal and Special Interest Blogs
- Discussion forums and comments fields on other media sites.
- SMS messages
- Web Apps and push notifications
- Messenger Applications (eg WhatsApp)
- Parish Council Emails and Mailing Lists

Who does it apply to?

The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors, all Council Staff and any volunteers or paid interim staff / consultants that undertake activity on behalf of the Parish Council.

It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration as well as the Nolan Principles.

Use of Social Media

The use of social media is not to replace other forms of communication but to enhance methods of delivery to increase accessibility and speed where it is deemed appropriate.

Other methods of communication

Council Noticeboards will continue to be used as the primary method of communicating methods of contact, engagement and forthcoming meetings.

Further enhancements of communication will be considered and enacted as appropriate. These may include (but are not limited to):

- Other Noticeboards throughout the village
- Use of existing village communications (eg Coleshill Post / The Bridge)

- Creation and distribution of village newsletter / direct mailings
- Accessing communication methods via other governmental bodies (eg NWBC / WCC)
- Direct Engagement at meetings / parish gatherings / village events (eg Carnival)
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The Policy

1. The Council will appoint a nominated member of staff/ Councillor or Councillors as moderator(s). They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from our social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libel nature. Such post will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the clerk.

2. The Council will appoint a nominated “Webmaster” to maintain and update the Parish Council Website

The social media may be used to:

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Retweeting or ‘share’ information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc.
- Announcing new information.
- Post or Share information from other Parish related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups

3. Other methods of social media may be used to support and share the website information above. Emails may be used to distribute information of council business.

4. Whilst the Parish Council encourages engagement with residents these methods need to be controlled and expectations for external recipients with regards to speed and level of response tempered. As such, whilst every platform of response should detail how the parish council may be contacted the creation and use of comment fields should only be undertaken where it is necessary or agreed in advance by full council.

Guidance for Councillors using the Council’s Social Media Presence

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. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses, and adhere to The Members’ Code of Conduct or subsequent policy.

Councillors, staff, volunteers, suppliers and interims may have their own personal social media presence and use these as they see fit, however they should be mindful of how these viewpoints may be viewed by others. Any actions or activities which may bring the Parish Council into disrepute may lead to action under any relevant policies in action at the time. These may include (but are not limited to) contracts of employment, codes of conduct and supplier agreements.

Councillors, staff, volunteers, suppliers and interims should be aware that all communications made on council business may be subject to sharing under Freedom of Information legislation or released under a Subject Access Request.

5. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.
6. When participating in any online communication;
 - a Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
 - b Provide contact details for responses
 - c Have suitable signatures or disclaimers
 - d Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
 - e Parish Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. 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.
 - f Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, guard against methods which may be perceived as condescending or "loud." Be mindful of fonts used, capitalisation and colours.
 - g Be mindful of the Nolan Principles. Especially when discussing matters of contention.
 - h Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be used in any council communication.
 - i Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
 - j Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
 - k 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.
 - l Confidential or personal information should not be disclosed. All should be mindful of GDPR when sharing information
 - m Be mindful of your own safety, be careful and mindful of the sharing of personal information or any details which may put yourself, your property or acquaintances at increased danger or risk.
7. Respect the privacy of councillors, staff, residents, suppliers and other stakeholders.
8. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations.
9. Residents and Councillors should note that not all communication requires a response.
 - a There will not be immediate responses to communications as they may be discussed by the Parish Council and responses may need to be agreed by the Parish Council.
 - b The Moderators will be responsible for all final published responses and should take advisement from the Parish Clerk and any relevant organisations ahead of publication if appropriate.
 - c If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors.Again, the poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.

- d. If the moderator feels unable to answer a post for example of a contentious nature this shall be referred to the Parish clerk. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Parish Clerk directly.
 - e. Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Parish Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.
10. The nominated moderator or moderators shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libellous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.
- a Spell and grammar check everything.
 - b Correct any errors promptly.
11. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.
12. The Policy shall be reviewed in line with councils review procedures.

Date of Approval by Council 31st October 2024

Next Review Date – At next meeting of Governance Working Group or 1st November 2025
– whichever sooner.