

Policy on Social Media and use of IT

In this document, the use of social media for council business, IT acceptable use and data protection have been combined into one policy as there is significant overlap. This policy covers councillors as well as any staff or volunteers engaged on council business.

Social media is used here as a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

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

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

The principles of this policy apply to parish councillors, volunteers and council staff and to others communicating with the Parish Council.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Individual parish councillors, volunteers and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

In the main, councillors, volunteers and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Publish good news stories linked website or press pages
- Advertise vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Announce new information

- Post or share information from other parish related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other councillors

Code of Practice

When using social media (including email) parish councillors, volunteers 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.

Note that emails are 'discoverable' documents in that they can be searched and used in any legal action. The following therefore applies to emails between councillors as well as social media.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Parish councillors, volunteers and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as those 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 the 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

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and a fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on a council social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against the council

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 and 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, volunteers, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

Misuse of social media content by councillors, employees or volunteers, that is contrary to this and other policies, could result in action being taken by the Council.

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

Computer usage and data protection

Longhoughton Parish Council operates a bring you own device (BYOD) policy which means that councillors develop documentation, process emails and have sensitive information on their personal IT equipment. This includes but is not limited to desktop/laptops, tablets and mobile phones. Some councillors may also have proprietary software installed which is owned by the council as well as having access to on-line services paid for by the council. It is assumed that councillors can send/receive emails as well as receive and view documents in popular formats (MS Word, PDF or Excel).

Before using any device for council business, it must meet the criteria below:

- For Microsoft operating systems, virus checking software which has auto-updates turned on must be installed
- The machine cannot be a shared device unless each user has their own username for access
- Any mobile device should have a password or pin code set up for access
- The user is responsible for ensuring that any software loaded is installed and licensed appropriately and in accordance with the supplier's end-user agreement.

Where a user has software installed on their personal machine which is owned by the council or access is licensed by the council, the following also apply:

- The software or service is only used for council business
- For services, each user shall have their own password which must not be shared
- Should the user leave the council:
 - Software must be removed and documentation/software returned to the clerk
 - Any passwords should be set to the default or reset and passed to the clerk
 - Any data (private or otherwise) relating to council business should be deleted