HELPRINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Reviewed: 18/8/26
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Review: August 2027

Parish Council Social Media Policy
The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to parish councillors, council staff and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Social media is 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
- Bloggs 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 and council staff and also applies to others communicating with the Parish Council.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing polices 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 and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

In the main, councillors 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
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Announcing 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 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

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 Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator of parish council social media output and be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.

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.

Guidance for Council Officers on the Use of Council Social Media

a) Officers should be familiar with the terms of use on third party websites e.g. Facebook, Twitter – and adhere to these at all times.

b) No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain i.e. available on the Council's website, contained in Minutes of meetings, stated in Council publicised Policies and Procedures etc.
c) Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.
d) Everyone must be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.
e) Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.
f) Other organisations should not be referenced without their approval – when referencing, link back to the original source wherever possible.
g) Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.
h) Staff much remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Council and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.

Third Party Social Media and Individual Councillor Usage
Councillors need to think about whether they are acting in a private capacity or whether any impression might be conveyed that they are acting for and on behalf of Helpringham Parish Council. The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct which is binding on all members. If you use Social Media in your official capacity as a councillor, you should always by mindful of the Code and of the seven Nolan principles applicable to holding public office – selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

Do:
- Set appropriate privacy settings for any blog or networking site.
- Watch out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on any blog or page and remove them as soon as possible to avoid any perception that you condone such vices.
- Be aware that the higher your profile as a councillor, the more likely it is that you may be seen as acting in an official capacity when you blog or network.
- Ensure any Council facilities are used appropriately – if using a Council-provided blog site or social networking area, any posts that you make are extremely likely to be viewed as being made in your official capacity.
- Avoid publishing any information that you could only have accessed in your position as a councillor
- Be careful if making 'political' points and avoid being specific or personal about individuals.

Don't:
- Blog/post in haste.
- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or in face-to-face contact,
- Use Council facilities for personal or political purposes.

This policy will be reviewed annually.