



Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

Version Control

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1. Introduction

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, or on behalf of, Disley Parish Council use online communications.

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

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- Discussion forums
- Email

The Cheshire East Code of Conduct for Councillors, adopted by the Parish Council, 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.

Councillors and council officers have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

2. Uses of social media

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings.
- Advertise events and activities.
- Highlight good news stories from linked websites or press pages.
- Advertise Council vacancies.
- Retweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health Service etc.
- Distribute information e.g. roadworks.
- 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, other councillors or relevant external bodies.

3. Code of Practice

When using social media (including email) parish councillors and council officers must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments professional, 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 libellous.

- 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 libellous and can result in a court action and fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on a councillor's or council staff's social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against the individual, not 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 the individual, not the Council.

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.

Councillor's 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 the relevant council meeting.

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 or other policies could result in a case being referred to the Monitoring Officer.

4. Moderator

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 this 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.