

Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Social media is the term commonly given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (such as Facebook), video sharing platforms, blogs and other interactive websites.
- 1.2 Social media gives the Council the opportunity to communicate with a wide audience, providing news, updates and information about its activities. This policy applies regardless of which platform is used and is intended to remain current even as the Council's use of particular platforms changes over time.
- 1.3 At the date of adoption, the Council maintains a presence on Facebook, administered by the Clerk. References to Facebook in this policy reflect the Council's current practice and should be read as applying equally to any other social media platform the Council may use in future.

2. Purpose and Scope

- 2.1 This policy sets out how the Council uses social media in its own name, and provides guidance to the Clerk, Councillors and any contractors engaged in Council business on the standards expected when using social media, whether on behalf of the Council or in a personal capacity where this may affect the Council's interests.
- 2.2 This policy applies to the Clerk and all Councillors. Where the Council engages contractors or agency staff whose work touches on the Council's social media or online presence, this policy applies to them in respect of that work.
- 2.3 Breach of this policy may be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure where the person concerned is an employee, and in serious cases may be treated as gross misconduct. Where the person concerned is a councillor, conduct may instead be considered under the Council's Code of Conduct.

3. Responsibility for the Council's Social Media Accounts

- 3.1 The Council's social media accounts, including its Facebook page, are owned by Honeybourne Parish Council. The Clerk is the designated administrator, responsible for day-to-day management including posting content on the Council's behalf. No account details, settings or access may be changed without the agreement of the Clerk, or the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Council.
- 3.2 Only the Clerk, or in the Clerk's absence the Chair or Vice-Chair, may post material on social media in the Council's name and on the Council's behalf. Content will be limited to information regarding the Parish Council, or matters the Clerk, Chair or Vice-Chair consider relevant to the Parish of Honeybourne.
- 3.3 This clause concerns only the Council's own social media accounts — it does not restrict Councillors' use of their own personal social media accounts, which is addressed separately at Section 5. Councillors are free to use their own social media accounts as they wish, subject to the guidance in Section 5. What Councillors must not do is post or engage in social media activity in the name of the Council itself — that is, using the Council's own account, or otherwise presenting themselves as posting on the Council's behalf. Where a Councillor refers to Council business on their own personal account, they should make clear that

the views expressed are their own and do not represent the Council, any committee of the Council, any other Councillor, or any officer.

3.4 The Council's social media accounts are currently used for information-sharing only, and public comments are disabled. This reduces the risk of the Council needing to moderate user-generated content and limits the Council's exposure under online safety legislation, which primarily places duties on the platforms themselves rather than on organisations that hold a page. Should the Council decide in future to enable comments or other interactive features on any platform, this policy will be reviewed to ensure appropriate moderation arrangements are in place beforehand.

3.5 The Council's social media presence is limited to publishing its own content. The Clerk does not comment on, engage with, or post on any other Facebook page or group, including village community pages or groups, in the Council's name. Any communication the Council wishes to make is published on the Council's own page or website only.

4. Standards for Council Social Media Content

4.1 The following principles apply to anything posted on the Council's social media accounts:

- Content should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent.
- No information should be published that is not already in the public domain — for example, available on the Council's website, contained in minutes of meetings, stated in published Council policies, or otherwise approved by the Clerk.
- Confidential, commercially sensitive or personal information must never be disclosed.
- Council policies, personnel or contractors must not be criticised on social media.
- Images of children or young people must not be posted without appropriate parental or guardian permission.
- Content must not be defamatory, obscene, or otherwise unlawful, and care should be taken to avoid exaggeration, guesswork or unsubstantiated claims.
- Copyright and intellectual property rights must be respected, and other organisations should not be referenced without their agreement; where reference is appropriate, link back to the original source where possible.
- Once posted, content may remain available indefinitely, even after removal from the original site — anyone posting on the Council's behalf should be confident in the content before publishing it.
- Anyone with access to the Council's social media accounts is acting as an ambassador for the Council and should act in a responsible and professional manner at all times.

5. Personal Use of Social Media by Councillors

5.1 Councillors are public figures within the village, and many residents will recognise and identify them by their role as a Councillor first, regardless of the capacity in which they are posting. Because of this, a Councillor's personal social media activity carries a real risk of being treated as connected to their role, particularly where it touches on Council business, local issues, or other residents. The key test, as set out in Wychavon District Council's social media guidance for councillors, is whether a Councillor is, or appears to be, acting in their capacity as a Councillor rather than as a private individual.

5.2 It is a matter for each Councillor's own judgement whether, when and how they use social media in a personal capacity; the Council does not control or pre-approve personal posts. A disclaimer such as the wording at clause 5.3 is good practice and may help clarify intent, but Councillors should not rely on a disclaimer as protection: it does not guarantee protection from a Code of Conduct complaint. Where the

content itself touches on Council business or a Councillor's public role, the Monitoring Officer may still treat it as falling within the Code of Conduct regardless of any disclaimer used.

5.3 Where a Councillor uses a personal account in a way that touches on Council business, a disclaimer such as "Statements and opinions here are my own and do not necessarily represent the Council's policies or opinions" should still be used, despite the limits described at clause 5.2.

5.4 The seven Nolan Principles applicable to holding public office — selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership — apply equally to a Councillor's conduct on social media as to their conduct elsewhere.

5.5 Councillors should:

- set appropriate privacy settings on any personal social media account;
- remove or distance themselves from defamatory or obscene posts made by others on their own page or account, to avoid any perception that they condone such views;
- remember that the higher their public profile as a Councillor, the more likely their online activity may be seen as official rather than personal;
- remember that they are personally responsible for content they publish on any form of social media;
- never disclose personal details of others, such as home addresses or telephone numbers, without consent;
- handle any personal or sensitive information in line with data protection legislation;
- avoid publishing any information they could only have accessed in their position as a Councillor; and
- take care, when liking, re-sharing or forwarding another person's post, that this is not understood as endorsing or agreeing with its content.

5.6 Councillors should not:

- use Council email addresses, logos or other Council identification in a personal social media capacity;
- comment in haste, or post anything they would not be prepared to say in writing or face-to-face, or be comfortable seeing reported in the local press;
- use Council facilities or resources for personal or political purposes;
- accept a Council employee or contractor as a personal "friend" or connection on a social networking site, as this may suggest a close personal association (this does not apply to neutral professional platforms such as LinkedIn); or
- post comments that breach the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy, or that incite violence or hatred, or that are obscene or discriminatory — this applies without exception.

5.7 Councillors should be aware that posting online carries the same legal risks as any other form of publication, including defamation (making a damaging and untrue statement about a person), breach of copyright (using text or images from a copyrighted source without permission), and breach of data protection law (publishing personal data about an individual without their consent). Sharing or repeating someone else's defamatory statement can also give rise to liability.

5.8 During election periods, Councillors should be aware that using social media for campaigning may need to be declared as part of a return of election expenditure, and Council resources (such as a Council email address) must never be used to promote a political party or candidate.

5.9 If a Councillor is the target of online abuse or harassment (sometimes referred to as 'trolling'), they should speak to the Chair of the Council or, for guidance specific to their role as a Councillor, the Monitoring

Officer, who can advise on next steps. It is safer to report a concern early, even where a Councillor is unsure whether it is serious.

5.10 Further detailed guidance for Councillors on social media use, including safety and account security recommendations (such as using two-factor authentication and not logging into personal accounts using a Council email address), is available from Wychavon District Council's Monitoring Officer and in its published social media guidance for councillors.

6. Reporting Concerns

6.1 Any Councillor or the Clerk who feels they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted online by another Councillor or by the Clerk, should raise this with the Chair of the Council in the first instance, or in accordance with the Council's Dignity at Work Policy. Where a Councillor is the target of abuse from a member of the public rather than from another Councillor or the Clerk, clause 5.9 applies instead.

6.2 If anyone becomes aware of social media use by the Clerk or a Councillor that appears to breach this policy, this should be reported to the Clerk or the Chair of the Council as appropriate.

6.3 Misuse of social media can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability for the individual concerned and the Council. Where evidence of misuse is found, the Council may undertake further investigation in accordance with its Disciplinary Policy and Procedure or Code of Conduct as appropriate, and where necessary such information may be passed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

7. Security and Good Practice

7.1 The Clerk, as administrator of the Council's social media accounts, will follow good practice including:

- using a strong, unique password for each Council social media account, and enabling two-factor authentication where the platform supports it;
- keeping account login details secure and not sharing them other than as set out in clause 3.1;
- being alert to phishing attempts or suspicious links, in line with the Council's IT Policy; and
- avoiding installation of third-party applications or add-ons connected to the Council's social media accounts unless their security has been verified.

7.2 Councillors using personal social media accounts are encouraged to follow the same good practice: a strong, unique password, two-factor authentication where available, and avoiding the use of a Council or councillor email address to log into a personal account, since such addresses may be publicly available.

7.3 This policy should be read alongside the Council's IT Policy, Data Protection Policy, Code of Conduct, Equality and Diversity Policy, and Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

8. Monitoring and Review

8.1 The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and for making recommendations for changes to minimise risk to the Council's work. Any proposed amendments following review must be approved by Full Council.

8.2 This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure it continues to meet legal requirements and reflects current best practice and the Council's actual use of social media platforms.