

# **Newington Parish Council**

## **Social Media Policy**

### **Definition**

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice which provides guidance to 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. The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but 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 site
- LinkedIn
- Meeting / Discussion platforms (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams etc)
- Blogs & discussion Forums
- Parish Council Emails

The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors and The Clerk. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council (PC). The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The use of social media is not intended to replace existing forms of communication but enhance it. Therefore, existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option. No direct costs will be incurred by implementing it. It will require volunteer/s to update and monitor the social media sites.

Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way they do to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What you write on the web is permanent.

In the main, councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. There are some additional duties around using their websites for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken when writing on planning matters, see further notes below.

### **The Policy**

1. The Council will appoint a nominated 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 or libellous 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. (Clerk)

The social media may be used (but not limited) to:

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- PC Vacancies
- Re-tweeting or 'sharing' 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
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillors

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.

### **Monitoring Accounts**

Any social media platform used by the Parish Council is not monitored for 24/7 and not all messages or comments will be individually replied to. Sending a message via Facebook will not be considered as contacting the Parish Council for official purposes, please see the Contact Details form on [www.newingtonandpeene-pc.gov.uk](http://www.newingtonandpeene-pc.gov.uk) . We do not undertake to follow or connect with any person who contacts the Parish Council via Social Media.

It is expected that any comments on Social Media platforms will:

- be polite and relevant
- Not promote political parties
- Not advertise specific products or services
- Not contain unlawful, libellous, threatening, obscene or offensive language or private or personal information published without consent
- Not contain spam or commercial promotions.

Any person deemed to be not complying will not be tolerated and can result in a ban from the social media platforms. The Council reserve the right to remove any posts or comments that do not meet these guidelines. Views expressed by others are not necessarily endorsed by Newington Parish Council and the Parish Council is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by others, nor does it accept any responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of reliance upon information posted on Social Media.

## Code of Practice

1. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.
2. When participating in any online communication; be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- 3 Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements. 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).
4. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or write in red to emphasis points.
5. Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
6. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
7. Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
8. 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
9. Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
10. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.
11. Residents and Councillors should note that not all communication requires a response:
  - There may not be immediate responses to communications if they need to be discussed by the Parish Council.
  - The Parish Clerk and/or moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.
  - 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.
  - 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.

- 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.
12. 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.
  13. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council.
  14. The Policy will be reviewed annually.

## **Further Considerations**

### Libel

If you publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation, they may take a libel action against you. This will also apply if you allow someone else to publish something libellous on your website if you know about it and don't take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel claim against you will result in an award of damages against you.

### Copyright

Placing images or text on your site from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about, or seek permission in advance. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you.

### Data Protection

Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission.

### Bias and pre-determination

If you are involved in determining planning or licensing applications or other quasijudicial decisions, avoid publishing anything that might suggest you don't have an open mind about a matter you may be involved in determining. If not, the decision runs the risk of being invalidated.

### Obscene material

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

### The council's legal position

Material published by a local authority as an organisation is, for obvious reasons, restricted in terms of content. It must not contain party political material and, in relation to other material, should not persuade the public to a particular view, promote the personal image of a particular councillor, promote an individual councillor's proposals, decisions or recommendations, or personalise issues. Nor should the council assist in the publication of any material that does any of the above.

#### The Members' Code of Conduct

Councillors can have 'blurred identities, you may have a social media account where you comment both as a councillor and as an individual. Ensure it is clear when you are posting in a private capacity or as a councillor. Such blurred identities might for example have implications where your views are taken as those of your organisation or political party, rather than your personal opinion. There is the need to get social media accounts/ profiles clear, to be confident as to what you can and can't say while you are representing the Parish Council.

This Social Media Policy was developed, approved and adopted by Newington Parish Council at a full meeting on the 08 November 2021, and will be reviewed annually.

This Social Media was reviewed and agreed by the Parish Council on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2024