



Festival of Britain Village 1951
Motto: "Independence and Self Help"

TROWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 The use of digital and social media now has a clear and compelling impact on all areas of local government, enabling better and more direct contact between the Parish Council and the people and organisations that it serves and works with.

1.2 This policy is intended to help members, the clerk, employees and volunteers make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, forums, or comments on web articles, such as X, Facebook and LinkedIn.

1.3 This policy outlines the standards we require members, employees, and volunteers to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which we will monitor your use of social media and the action we will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

2. Scope of the Policy

2.1 social media describes a range of websites and online tools which allow people to interact. This includes blogs and postings on wide range of platforms including, but not limited to, Facebook, X LinkedIn, Instagram and Snapchat. Social media is all about sharing information and people use social media platforms to give opinions, create interest groups and to build online communities and network which encourage participation and engagement. This policy relates to any social media communication published by or on behalf of the council or any individual in their capacity as a councillor.

2.2 All employees, volunteers and members are always expected to comply with this policy to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of the council.

2.3 Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure and in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.

2.4 Breach of this policy by members may be dealt with under the Code of Conduct.

3. Key Principles

3.1 Any communication is capable of being misinterpreted. The immediacy of social media and the lack of face-to-face contact can magnify any problem. Information and comments made can be

broadcast to a large number of people more quickly than other media. The same rules apply to social media that govern other behaviour as a councillor – but extra care needs to be taken given the immediacy and ease of dissemination.

Although social media is conversational in tone, it is recorded, and it is permanent, so content and comment must be accurate, informative, and thought through.

4. Responsibilities and Accountabilities

4.1 The council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.

4.2 The clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the council's work.

4.3 All employees, volunteers and members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand the policy. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk in or the case of a member, reported to the Monitoring Officer at Broxtowe Borough Council.

4.4 Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

5. Using social media sites in the Council's name

5.1 Only the clerk is permitted to post material on social media website in the council's name and on their behalf.

6. Using social media

6.1 We recognise the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about our council and community. We also recognise the importance of our employees, volunteers and members joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.

6.2 Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the council you must.

- Read and understand this policy.
- Employees and volunteers must have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from the clerk.

7. General Rules for use of social media

Whenever you are permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, you must adhere to the following general rules,

7.1 Do not upload, post, or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.

7.2 Any employee, volunteer or member who feels that they have been harassed or bullied or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform the clerk.

7.3 Never disclose commercial sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the clerk.

7.4 Do not upload, post, or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.

7.5 Before you include a link to a third-party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.

7.6 When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.

7.7 Be honest and open but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.

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

7.9 Do not escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.

7.10 Do not discuss employees without their prior approval.

7.11 Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g., politics and religion.

7.12 Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them, and never publish anyone else's contact details.

7.13 Never give out personal details of others such as home address and telephone numbers.

7.14 Ensure that you manage any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act.

7.15 Use a disclaimer. When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the Council. Avoid use of the Council e-mail address, logos or other Council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only. Where possible, you should include a standard disclaimer, such as: "Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent the Council's policies or opinions."

7.16 Know your obligations: you must comply with other Council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach Council confidentiality and proprietary information policies.

7.17 Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong.

8 Parish Councillors and Council Staff MUST NOT:

8.1 Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms.

8.2 Present individual opinions as that of the Council.

8.3 Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council.

8.4 Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Council.

8.5 Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.

8.6 Engage in personal attacks, online fights, and hostile communications.

8.7 Use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so.

8.8 Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission.

- 8.9 Post any information that infringes copyright of others.
- 8.10 Post any information that may be deemed libel.
- 8.11 Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment.
- 8.12 Bring the Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity.
- 8.13 Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief.
- 8.14 Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.
- 8.15 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.
- 8.16 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.
- 8.17 Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.
- 8.18 Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation and is an offence.
- 8.19 Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.
- 8.20 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.

9 Monitoring use of social media websites

- 9.1 Employees should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether accessed for council purposes or not) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees under our Disciplinary Procedure and for members action may be taken under the Code of Conduct investigated by the Monitoring Officer at Broxtowe Borough Council.
- 9.2 Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and the Council.
- 9.3 A serious case of uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):
- a) Pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature).
 - b) A false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation.
 - c) Material, which is offensive, obscene, criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the council or anyone else.
 - d) Confidential information about the council or anyone else.
 - e) Any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the council).
 - f) Material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Any such action will be addressed under the disciplinary policy and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

9.4 Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedure involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

9.5 If you notice any use of social media by other employees or volunteers in breach of this policy, please report it to the Clerk.

9.6 If you notice any use of social media by other members in breach of this policy, please report it to the Monitoring Officer at Broxtowe Borough Council.

Reviewed and adopted: 12th December 2023