

WOULDHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MEDIA POLICY

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Introduction

As information and communications technology continues to move forward, making considerable advances, so too do the tools that enable us to communicate with, and unite people. "Social Media" is the term used for the current wave of online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other in various ways, through sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interest. Social media involves building online communities or networks, which encourage participation, dialogue and involvement.

Social media is at the forefront of modern communications; its capabilities are exploited by central and local government and various public and private organisations as a method of engagement with customers, stakeholders and partners. We can benefit from taking a similar, innovative approach to communicating with people, which can lead to greater involvement with residents, increased efficiencies and improvement of our reputation. It could also enable us to engage with harder-to-reach groups like the younger population of Wouldham. Rather than waiting for individuals or groups to approach the Council, social media offers the opportunity of being able to connect to the community, listen to what people are saying and engage with them on an equal footing, focusing on two-way communications rather than simply delivering messages. It may empower local residents to speak up about their needs and influence decision making, in turn building trust and stronger bonds.

For social media to work effectively it is vital that it is used as part of the overall communications mix: up to date information about the Council, its services and engagement activities must be posted on the official website and social media communication should signpost people to appropriate web pages where possible.

Currently the only social media used by WPC (Wouldham Parish Council) is Facebook but others may be used in future. It is accepted that the use of local government forums and information-sharing portals are an exception to the general restrictions that have been put in place. However, wherever Council representatives use such sites they should still familiarise themselves with the guidance that is set out in this policy.

We need to set clear guidelines for using social media sites to ensure they are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that this use does not expose the Council to security risks or reputational damage. Therefore we need a comprehensive policy to effectively manage and regulate the corporate use of social media.

1. Purpose and Aim of Policy

Social media offers great potential for building relationships and improving the services that we provide. This policy will clearly set out how social media can be managed effectively and how any risks or pitfalls can be avoided and mitigated.

As with any online activity there are often risks associated, the following types of risk have been identified with social media use:

- Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection from infected sites.
- Disclosure of confidential information
- Damage to the reputation of the Council
- Social engineering attacks (this is the act of manipulating people into disclosing confidential material or carrying out certain actions. Social engineering is often conducted by an individual fraudulently claiming to be a business or client)
- Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation
- Breach of safeguarding

In light of these risks, we need to regulate the use of social media sites and ensure that such use does not damage the Council, its employees, partners and the people it serves.

The aim of this policy is to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of council-based services through the use of social media.
- A consistent and corporate approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media
- That council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media
- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation
- That the Council's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected.

1.1 Scope

Not everyone will be able to access social media sites but it is accepted that the Council all have access due to business discussed on email.

The principles of the policy apply to Parish Councillors and the Clerk to the Council, it is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council who use the Council's infrastructure and are granted access on the above grounds.

1.2 Policy statement

It is acknowledged that there is significant potential for using social media and that this can bring great advantages. The responsible use of social media is encouraged.

This policy provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise the Council information or computer systems/networks.

Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, in line with Council policy. They must ensure that their use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or to otherwise violate any Council policies.

2. Policy Details

Social media will be made available for Council business use only, subject to Council approval for using such communications. Aspects of the Members' code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate, what you write on the web is permanent.

2.1 Responsibilities of Members and Officers

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as representative of WPC.

- Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy.
- Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.
- Never give out personal details such as home addresses and telephone numbers. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's data protection policies.

Be aware of Safeguarding issues, as social media sites are often misused by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business – if you have any concerns about other site users, you have a responsibility to report these to the safeguarding lead in your service.

- Respect copyright, fair-use and financial disclosure laws.
- Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important to ensure that you are confident about the nature of the information you publish. Permission must be sought if you wish to publish or report on meetings or discussions that are meant to be private or internal to WPC. Don't cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers without their approval.

- Don't use insulting, offensive or racist language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace. Show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory – such as politics or religion.
- Don't download any software, shareware or freeware from any social media site, unless this has been approved and authorised by WPC.

Failure to comply with the guidelines could result in disciplinary action being taken

3. Responsibilities of Officers

Officers using social media must be aware of and comply with WPC codes of conduct and standing orders. 28B "Councillors shall not in their official capacity, provide oral or written statements or written articles to the press *or other media*"

Officers must identify themselves as being part of WPC. Staff will be permitted to use only council email addresses and not personal ones.

If they wish to post comments as a member of the public they must still be aware that they are still an elected member of the Council and as such, the comments may be construed as Council led.

If an officer receives any threats, abuse or harassment from members of the public through their use of social media then they must report such incidents to the Council Officer.

Officers should also refer to the Violence at Work pages on the internet.

3.1 Use by Members

Members should ensure that they are familiar with the guidance that is set out within this policy and that their use of social media does not put the Council's information and security systems at risk, or be damaging to the reputation of the authority, Members should also be familiar with the Members' Code of Conduct, which outlines key information and guidance on best practice issues such as information handling and security.

3.2 Investigatory use.

It is recognised that social media can be used for investigatory purposes such as identifying fraud, illegal events etc. It is important that Councillors who use social media for this purpose comply with relevant guidance and legislation.

3.3 Personal Use.

This policy relates to the business use of social media. If employees/Councillors have been granted access are found to be accessing social media sites for personal reasons, then appropriate action will be taken.

Employees should be aware that the Employees Code of Conduct covers the issues of fidelity and information disclosure, and should bear this in mind when using social media (in a personal capacity) outside of Council business. Employees should be aware that any reports of inappropriate activity, linking them to the Council, will be investigated.

With the rise in identity theft and fraud, employees may wish to consider the amount of personal information that they display on their personal profile.

3.4 Relationships with other Council policies

This social media policy could also be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Employee code of conduct
- Internet policy
- Email policy
- Data Protection policy

3.5 Business Case

All members of staff need to ensure that any business cases for using social media sites are agreed by the Council.

3.6 Management Responsibilities

All Councillors have a duty to ensure that employees/Councillors who have access to social media sites comply with the Social Media policy and relevant guidance and do not abuse their access rights or misuse such sites. Any breaches of this policy by employees/Councillors should be dealt with immediately and in accordance with council procedures.

3.7 Implementation

This policy will be implemented with immediate effect through appropriate communication streams. This policy will also be made available on Wouldham Parish Council website

4. Responsibilities

Wouldham Parish Council is the designated Council owner of this Social media policy and is responsible for the maintenance and review of the policy.

5. Monitoring Arrangements

It is accepted that Wouldham Parish Council will monitor the use of social media to ensure it is compliant with council policies and guidelines and in support of security and criminal investigations.

6. Reporting Arrangements

Any potential misuse of social media identified by employees/Councillors will be reported to the appropriate officer.

6.1 Performance Measures

Statistical information of use activity provided by Facebook will be reviewed to ensure that performance remains at a high standard

- Breaches of Policy

Any breaches may lead to access being withdrawn and disciplinary action being taken.

Other violations of this policy, such as breaching the Data Protection Act could possibly lead to criminal or civil action being taken against the council or the individuals involved.

- Sustainability Implications

It is recognised that the regulated use of social media has the potential to make a positive impact on communities and social wellbeing. By establishing greater links with members of the public, community groups, partners and stake holders, through social networking, there is scope for more open communication and the increased ability to share information and to improve service delivery.

This form of communication can be engaged to tackle a wide variety of issues and to influence change. As a cost-effective form of resource, social media is likely to become a more popular choice when it comes to developing relationships, sharing information and communicating council messages.

Legal requirements: The following legal documents have a bearing, or impinge on the rationale of this policy:

- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Human Rights Act 1998