



Social Media Policy

Reviewed and Re-Adopted at the meeting of 28 June 2021

This policy applies to all councillors, staff and volunteers.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communications.

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

Social media here is used as a collective term and used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

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

- Parish Council website
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

The Wivelsfield Parish Council Facebook page is to operate within the following criteria:

- Only information regarding the Parish Council should be entered as part of the Biography
- No religious or political views should be expressed under the Biography
- The Wivelsfield Parish Council logo will be the profile picture for everyone to see and cannot be changed
- The page will be a government organization
- The page will be open for all to read/comment
- The clerks will administrate the site

Contents/Use (Wivelsfield Parish Council website and Facebook page):

- Publication of notices and minutes of Parish Council meetings
- Advertising Parish Council events and activities
- Good news stories relating to the Parish Council
- Instigate discussion and seek opinions from parishioners through questions, forums and surveys (Wivelsfield Parish Council Facebook page)
- Advertise Parish Council vacancies (councillor and staff)
- Link to Parish Council website (Wivelsfield Parish Council Facebook page)
- Share information from partners i.e. Police, library, district council etc.

- Announce new information appropriate to the Council
- Share information promoting bodies for community/Parish benefit such as sports clubs and community groups
- Post other items as the Council see fit

If a matter that is raised on the Wivelsfield Parish Council Facebook page needs further consideration by the Council, it may be raised at either the open forum or as 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 and invited to contact the Clerks direct. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Social Media Usage – Code of Conduct:

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

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

- The use of Facebook by staff, volunteers and councillors of Wivelsfield Parish Council must prohibit treating others with disrespect, bullying and bringing one's office or authority into disrepute (personal page and Wivelsfield Parish Council page)
- Clerks and individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for Council business.
- All councillors and clerks posting comments on the Wivelsfield Parish Council Facebook page should sign the post with their name so people know who has posted what. This prevents confusion and gives the public a name to associate with their comments.
- Both clerks and councillors are expected to have separate council and personal email addresses.

When participating in online communication, councillors, volunteers and staff must:-

- Be responsible and respectful
- Be direct, informative, brief and transparent
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council
- Never make false or misleading statements
- Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being those of the Council
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud'
- Use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents
- Spell and grammar check everything

When participating in online communication, councillors, volunteers and staff must not:-

- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Present personal opinions as those 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 online fights, personal attacks or hostile communications
- Use an individual's name unless given permission to do so
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission to do so
- Post any information that infringes the copyright of others
- Post any information that may be deemed libel
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Bring the council into disrepute, including 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 libel and can result in a court action and a fine for damages.

This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site.

A successful libel claim may result in an award of damages against you.

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you.

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.

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 .

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate parish councillors, volunteers, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

Misuse of social media content by councillors, employees or volunteers, that is contrary to this and other policies, could result in action being taken by the Council. The Clerk will have authority to remove from council social media pages any posts made by third parties which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.