

Social Media Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Stantonbury 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 are not limited to):

Parish Council website

Facebook, Instagram and other social networking sites

Twitter and other micro blogging sites

You Tube and other video clips and podcast sites

LinkedIn

Blogs and discussion forums

Parish Council Emails

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

The use of social media is not to replace existing forms of communication. The Parish Council Newsletter will remain the main media for the purpose of communicating about the Parish Council legally the council have to produce three newsletters a year. The website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

Aspects of the Members Code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. On line content should be objective , balanced, informative and accurate. What is written on the web is permanent. In the main, councillors have the same legal duties on line as anyone else but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. There are some additional duties around using their websites/social media for electoral campaigning.

1 The Council /Clerk will appoint a nominated staff member to be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring it complies with the social media policy. The nominated person under direction will have authority to remove any posts made by

third parties from our social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libel nature. Such posts will be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the Clerk.

2 The Council/Clerk will appoint a nominated staff member to maintain and update the Parish Council website.

The social media may be used to:

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Retweeting or 'share' 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.

Facebook will be used to support the website information above.

Emails will be used to distribute information on Council business.

Individual Parish Councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted by their published email address which is used for council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses and Facebook accounts..

Code of Practice

Guidance when using social media (including email);

3 All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.

4 When participating in any online communication;

- a. Be responsible and respectful: be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- b. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
- c. Parish Councillors should not represent themselves in any way that may 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 Councils Code of Conduct or any other Policies.

- d. 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 emphasise points.
- e. 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 beliefs should not be published on any social media site.
- f. Avoid personal attacks on line fights and hostile communications.
- g. Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission.
- h. Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the person or organisations in the video or photograph before being up loaded.

5 Respect the privacy of other Councillors and residents.

6 Do not post information or conduct any online activities that violate laws or regulations concerning libel or copyright.

7 Residents and councillors should note that not all communications require a response:

- a. There may not be an immediate response to communications as they may be discussed by the Parish Council and all responses will be agreed by the Parish Council.
- b. The Parish Clerk and the Chairman will be responsible for all final published responses.
- c. If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised 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.
- d. If the nominated member of staff feels unable to answer a post for example of a contentious nature then 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.
- e. 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 next meeting.

8 The nominated member of staff or the Clerk shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libelous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.

- a. Spell and grammar check everything.
- b. Correct any errors promptly.

9 Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council . Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

Additional background information (Improvement and Development Agency)

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 do not take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel award 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. Always abide by the data protection act. Copy of ICO membership is held in the office.

Bias and pre –determination

If you are involved in determining planning or licensing applications or other quasi-judicial 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.

Electoral periods

Full guidance for candidates at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents

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 proposal, 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.

How you use your online identity will also determine how online content will be treated in respect of the Members' Code of Conduct. Councillors are expected to communicate politically. There is a difference between communicating on behalf of the council or blogging as a councillor or as a private citizen and the former will be held to a higher standard than the latter. The key to whether your online activity is subject to the Code of Conduct is whether you are giving the impression you are acting as a councillor. That stands whether you are in fact acting in an official capacity or simply giving the impression that you are doing so.

This may be less than clear if you have a private blog or a Facebook profile. There are a number of factors which will come into play which are more a question of judgement than a hard and fast line. For example, a Standards Committee may take into account how well known or high profile you are as a councillor, the privacy settings on your blog or social networking site, the content of the site itself and what you say on it. Most councillors are using their online profile to communicate with citizens about representing their local area so engaging the code, if necessary, should be a relatively straight forward decision. Since the judgement of whether you are perceived to be acting as a councillor will be taken by someone else it's safest to assume that any online activity can be linked to your official role.

Unless you have gone to significant effort to keep an online persona completely separate from your councillor identity you are unlikely to be able to claim that you were acting in a completely private capacity.

Members should comply with the general principles of the Code in what they publish and what they allow others to publish.

Some of the terminologies in social media like 'following' or 'friending' can imply an intimacy that is not really there. Both terms just mean you have linked your account to someone else so you can share information. Savvy internet users are used to this, but some people can feel a frisson of unease when their Council, local police service or councillor begins following them on Twitter before establishing some sort of online relationship. Some councillors wait to be followed themselves first. Do make use of other communication functions that social media allows you. Twitter's 'list' function, for example, can help you to follow local people in a less direct way. Bloggers are almost invariably happy for you to link to them so you don't need to ask first in this instance. Social media is transparent. The best bloggers admit mistakes rather than try to cover them up (which isn't possible on line). Amending your text and acknowledging your mistake: perhaps by putting a line through the offending words and inserting a correction or providing an update section at the bottom of a blog post – shows you are not pretending it never happened, and is much better than just deleting it when dealing online misfires.

Signed _____ G Davison _____
Chairman

Dated _____ 07/06/2017 _____