



Social Media Policy

Introduction

Social media has changed the way communicate. Channels such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs are an easy and fast way to converse and find out what our communities care about. The way that online information is created and owned, and the speed at which it is shared has changed.

The important thing to remember about social media is that it is social; it is about communication. Social media is designed to be shared meaning that it is extremely easy for people to forward, link to or republish comments with a potentially very wide audience. It has put the transformative power of the printed press into the hands of the people. Now anyone can publish and share their views and engage in conversation with others about those views.

Taking part in social media is and will continue to be a major activity in our communities. Local government needs to be involved in order to fulfil its leadership role, understand its communities, and remain relevant to its stakeholders. Residents and service users are increasingly expecting a greater say in how things happen in their neighbourhood and are already discussing these issues online via social media. Engaging with these conversations can help to shape policy, support local democracy, and improve our relationships and services with the customer at the heart of our decisions.

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):

1. Parish Council Website
2. Parish Council Emails
3. Facebook, Myspace, and other social networking sites
4. Twitter and other micro blogging sites
5. YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
6. LinkedIn
7. Bloggs and discussion forums

Social Media Policy

Illogan Parish Council realises that social media and networking websites have become a regular part of everyday life. The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to staff and Councillors in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media.

The use of social media will not replace existing forms of communication; the website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication.

Why are the Parish Council using social media?



The Parish Council's aim is to inform members of the community and the wider local area, about what is happening within the Parish and local area and share important news and information.

The Parish Council's social media channels supplement the information published on their noticeboards and in the newsletter. The use of social media allows the Parish Council to:

- Remind people of important events and alert followers to news.
- Link to interesting and useful information about the Parish and local area published by other people.
- Better communicate with those using mobile devices.

What are the benefits of using social media?

- Social media allows new two-way conversations with the people you represent.
- Increasing numbers of people are using Twitter and Facebook, as their preferred method of communication, therefore it is easier to contact more people
- Social media allows you to have a conversation with a range of people that you would never be able to physically meet and who do not traditionally seek out their local representatives.
- Social media allows for immediate communication. You can pass on information and receive opinions in minutes. You can forward information from other people equally quickly. "Going Viral" is not necessarily a bad thing and refers to a mass spreading of a piece of information, potentially around the world.
- It is a useful way of finding out what people are talking about locally, their concerns and interests.
- It is useful for finding out about breaking news, the latest research or publication
- It is an effective way of making the electorate more aware of the work the Council does
- Social media is mobile. You can take it around your community, on the train, to an event or meeting.
- You can upload pictures and videos, showing for example your role in local events, area regeneration projects or images of Illogan - a picture tells a thousand words.
- It is free, accounts cost nothing

When participating in any online communication

When using social media, Councillors and officers must:

- Be responsible and respectful
- Be direct, informative, brief, and transparent.
- Keep your communications clear, positive, polite, and professional. Plain language helps.
- Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council.
- Never make false or misleading statements.
- Avoid being ironic or sarcastic, it can be misinterpreted.
- 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.



- 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.
- 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.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights, and hostile communications.
- Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
- 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.
- Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
- Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, *see below libel and copyright*.
- Avoid entering into online debates or arguments about the Council's work.
- Social Media must NOT be used in the recruitment process for employees or new councillors - other than for the sole purpose of placing vacancy advertisements - as this could lead to potential discrimination and privacy actions, as well as breach of data protection issues.
- If you do not have anything to say...do not say anything. Even though it is tempting to let your followers know how busy you are they will soon become bored with constant updates on your day without some relevant or interesting information.

Use of Official Accounts

The Parish Clerk has the ongoing authority to issue public statements on behalf of the Council and will therefore manage the Council's social media interactions.

Councillors may not post on behalf of the Council without express approval. When posting on social media in a personal capacity, councillors must take care not to give the impression that they are representing the Council.

Illogan Parish Council operates a Facebook account for the promotion of activities and events and as a communication and broadcast tool.

Examples of acceptable corporate content are:

- Post agenda, minutes, and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories - linked to the website or press page
- Vacancies either Cllr or Officer
- 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., School, sports clubs, and community groups
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other councillors
- Consultation documents
- News feed & emergency information
- Key dates
- Polls and information gathering



- Useful links

The following outlines the limits of their use:

- An official account on any social media website may only be set-up with consent from the Parish Council.
- Once approved, each account will be set up by the Parish Clerk.
- Only authorised persons may use these accounts to post online and access to the account is limited. The Parish Council's social media accounts are managed and monitored by the Parish Clerk. Two councillors will also be nominated to monitor the social media account(s) to ensure frequent monitoring in accordance with this policy and to manage the account when the Clerk is on leave.
- All information published on the internet must comply with the Parish Council's confidentiality policy and data protection.
- Social media accounts will primarily be used to promote 'good news' and information supplementing content already published on the Parish Council's website.
- Any employee, Councillor or member of the public who becomes aware of social networking activity that would be deemed distasteful should make the Parish Clerk aware as soon as possible.

Facebook

The Parish Clerk manages the Council's Facebook page. Facebook pages are used to highlight news, make announcements, engage with the community, and share information. Other officers and two appointed Councillors will be able to upload posts to the Council's Facebook page, in the absence of the Clerk.

Comments posted on and messages received on the Facebook page are views of individuals and do not represent the views of the Parish Council.

Requests for something to be posted on the Parish Council's Facebook page, should be directed to the Parish Clerk.

Social media moderation policy

The Parish Councils Facebook page is reactively moderated. The Council cannot accept responsibility for the content of any comment.

The Council reserve the right to remove comments received on Facebook that:

- Contain abusive, obscene, indecent, or offensive language, or link to obscene or offensive material
- Contain swear words or other sorts of profanity
- Are completely removed from the topic of conversation or are not relevant to the item posted on the wall
- Contain abusive language and/or inappropriate comments directed towards an individual involved in the thread, other organisations, or the page administrator



- Constitute spam or promote or advertise products, except where it is for an event, publication or similar item that has direct relevance to the subject of discussion. Information about locating and sharing knowledge and expertise is welcomed, but within the specific discussion
- Are designed to cause nuisance to the page administrator or other users

For serious and/or persistent breaches of the moderation policy, we reserve the right to prevent users from posting further comments.

Use of Photos and Video

The appropriate permissions must be obtained for all imagery.

Personal Accounts on Social Media

Staff need to use social networking in a way that does not conflict with the terms of their contract of employment. The absence of, or lack of, explicit reference to a specific website or service does not limit the extent of the application of this policy. Where no policy or guidelines exist, employees should use their professional judgment and take the most prudent action possible. If the Parish Council is referred to in a way that is deemed defamatory or confidential information is disclosed, it reserves the right to report the comment and request that it be removed.

Councillors are at liberty to set up accounts using any of the tools available but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view. Councillors should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary, or libellous nature should not be made, and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration, and colourful language.

Purdah

In the six-week run up to an election – local, general, or European – councils have to be careful not to do or say anything that could be viewed in any way to support any political party or candidate. The period is known as purdah.

The Council will continue to publish important service announcements using social media but will monitor and potentially have to remove responses if they are overtly party political.

Will the Parish Council respond to direct messages posted on social networking sites?

If appropriate, the Clerk will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible to all questions received via social networking sites. All formal requests, comments, enquiries, or complaints should be emailed to the Parish Council.



The Parish Council may monitor forums and blogs to gain indirect feedback. The Parish Council may post replies on forums or blogs to answer queries or address factual corrections but would take a cautious approach before getting involved in contentious issues.

The Parish Council reserves the right to take any necessary steps to protect members of the Parish community and will delete any comments referencing the Parish Council, which are deemed abusive or offensive in anyway.

Guidance for Parish Clerk on the use of Council Social Media

The Clerk should be familiar with the terms of use on third party websites – e.g., Facebook - and adhere to these at all times

No information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain – i.e., available on the Council's website, contained in minutes of meetings, stated in Council publicised policies and procedures, etc.

Information that is published should be factual, fair, thorough, and transparent.

Copyright laws must be respected.

Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.

Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.

The Clerk must remember that they will be seen as ambassadors for the Council and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner.

Guidance for Individual Councillors on the use of Private Social Media

Councillors are free to use social media in a private capacity but should always take care not to give the impression that they are posting for or on behalf of the Council. The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct which is binding on all members. When using social media in your private capacity, please be mindful of the Code, and of the seven Nolan principles applicable to holding public office – selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership. Even though you are posting as a private individual, others may still view you as representing the council, so it is important to uphold these principles.

If a member of the public contacts you publicly via social media for assistance with a council matter, acknowledge their contact publicly but respond to them in full privately and/or direct them to the Clerk where appropriate.

Do:

- Set appropriate privacy settings for any blog or networking site



- Watch out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on any blog or page and remove them as soon as possible to avoid any perception that you condone such views
- Avoid sharing any information that you could only have accessed in your position as a councillor
- Avoid using social media for 'point-scoring' against other councillors or against collective decisions you did not support.
- Avoid responding to arguments about or criticism of the Council. The Clerk will post an official response to comments on the Councils Facebook page, if required, but will not engage with debates elsewhere on social media.

Do not:

- Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or in face-to-face contact.

Golden rules

Think before you post on Facebook. Do not say anything, post views or opinions that you would not be prepared to:

- Discuss face to face with the person you are speaking about.
- Write on a placard and carry down your high street and discuss and defend with anyone who sees it.
- Be prepared to have minuted in a public meeting – remember Facebook effectively publicly minutes everything for you as you go along.

Remember that once you have said something it may be seen by millions - friends, supporters, political opponents, and the press and could be re-posted around the world in minutes.

Keep your messages professional, polite and positive.

Remember to try to keep posts and texts separate – many people post comments that they would previously have texted someone privately; this may be about meeting up later through to 'in' jokes that could be misinterpreted.

If you make a mistake - admit it. Mistakes happen so do not try to cover it up as there will always be a record of what you have said.

Do not enter into unhelpful online arguments; remember all of your followers or friends will be witnessing this online. Ignore people or block them if they persist in vexatious comments.

Do not post on Facebook when you are tired. It is sensible to turn off your phone at any time when you think your judgement may be impaired.

Bear in mind that it is possible for your followers and friends to be seen. If you follow or are Facebook "friends" with council employees, contractors who have been procured to provide services to the council, a company or member of the public making a planning application or



pressure groups, this might be construed as having a close personal association with them and therefore a personal interest.

As with your own leaflets or newsletters, always ask permission before taking a picture that you intend to use. NEVER take photos of children without the express permission of their parents based on an understanding of what you intend to use the picture for.

Do not allow anyone else access to your social media accounts, protect your passwords, especially if you use a public computer.

Just like email, you can get spam in social media. Be wary about direct messages even from people you know, with messages such as 'Hi, have you seen this photo of you on Facebook?' Delete these before opening, as the spam could then be sent to all of the people you are following.

The Law

Councillors new to social media tend to be concerned about the legal implications. It is an important consideration, and some councillors and other politicians have fallen foul of the law, but with careful use and following some ground-rules you will be fine.

The style of communication employed in the social media environment tends to be fast and informal. Messages can appear lightweight and transitory.

Whenever you post something on social media, it becomes a publication, you have effectively made a broadcast. As it is now in the public domain, it is subject to both the Code of Conduct and to various Laws.

Code of Conduct

If you conduct yourself on Facebook as you would in person on the street, then you will be fine.

Remember that according to guidance from the Ombudsman, the Code of Conduct applies to you whenever you are "Conducting the business of your authority, acting, claiming to act or give the impression you are acting in your official capacity as a member or representative of your authority" Also the Code applies if you "Conduct yourself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing your office or your authority into disrepute" If you can be identified as a councillor when you are using social media, either by your account name or how you describe yourself or by what you comment upon and how you comment, the requirements of the Code of Conduct apply. Also, if you say something that could be regarded as bringing your office or authority into disrepute the Code applies even if you are not acting in your official capacity or do not identify yourself as a member.

Remember that the Ombudsman's guidance states that "Making unfair or inaccurate criticism of your authority in a public arena might well be regarded as bringing your authority into disrepute"

In the same way that you are required to act in council meetings or in communities you should:



- Show respect for others - do not use social media to be rude or disrespectful
- Not disclose confidential information about people or the council
- Not bully or intimidate others - repeated negative comments about or to individuals could be interpreted as bullying or intimidation
- Not try to secure a benefit for yourself or a disadvantage for others
- Abide by the laws of equality – do not publish anything that might be seen as racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic or anti faith. Even as a joke or “tongue in cheek”

Predetermination

As a councillor, you are aware that when you act in a quasi-judicial capacity, for example on a planning committee, you should not make up your mind about an issue that is to be formally decided upon before you have heard all the relevant information. You are allowed to be predisposed to a particular view but not to have gone as far as to have predetermined your position. It is important to remember therefore that anything relevant you might have said about particular issues on social media could be used as evidence of your having made up your mind in advance of hearing all the relevant information.

Criminal Offences

These apply to you already in your conduct as a councillor, but it is worth considering them as they apply to social media:

Harassment - It is a criminal offence to repeatedly pursue a campaign against someone where this is likely to cause alarm, harassment nuisance or distress.

Data Protection - It is illegal to publish personal data about individuals unless they have given their permission to you. As a councillor you are a data controller in your own right and therefore personally responsible for what you publish.

Incitement - It is a criminal offence to incite any criminal act.

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 claim against you will result in an award of damages against you.

Discrimination and Racially Aggravated Offences (or any other protected Characteristic) - It is a criminal offence to make a discriminatory remark about anyone based on a “Protected Characteristic” as defined in The Equality Act (such as their race, religion, sexual orientation etc).

Malicious & Obscene Communications - It is a criminal offence to send malicious or obscene communications.

Civil Law



Defamation - It is against the law to make a false statement about someone which damages their personal or professional reputation. Crucially - even if you simply pass on information originally posted by others, you may still be held equally as responsible as the original commentator. This can also apply to publishing images. If you are found liable to another person, you could be ordered to pay large sums of money as damages.

Copyright - The legal ownership of the contents of documents, photos, videos, and music belong to the person who created them. You could be in breach of copyright if you reproduce such material without the owner's permission. Always ask for written consent before you use someone else's material.

Political Comment and Electioneering - Remember that although it is acceptable to make political points or canvass votes via your own social media accounts this will not be permissible if you are using this via council supplied computer equipment, certainly in the run-up to elections.

Review Date	Reviewed By	Amendments	Minute Number