

Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council

Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 The objective of this policy is to provide Councillors and Clerk an overview of Social Media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use. In addition, it includes guidelines on Officer and Councillor responsibilities when using such channels of communication.

2. Definition of Social Media

2.1 Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content. They include social networking sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction.

2.2 Social media has the following characteristics:

- Covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs, audio
- Allows messages to flow between many different types of device; PCs, phones and tablets (e.g. iPad)
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or just view information
- Speeds and broadens the flow of information
- Provides one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications. Lets communication take place in real time or intermittently

2.3 Examples of popular social media tools include: Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, You Tube, Pinterest, Snip.It, Linked In and Google Plus. Groupings of interest are a natural feature of the development of such systems with people with similar interests being attracted to share information.

3. Pitfalls

3.1 Whilst these tools are very useful to share information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of:

- The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world. You do not even need to register in many cases to view the content. Registering is only required should you wish to participate and post to the site.
- Groups on specific themes can set up easily and posts then edited by the owners of that group to reflect their single interest, ensuring theirs is the

only voice heard. There is no guarantee of truth and ill informed comment and gossip is as likely to be found there as useful information.

- The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is all too easy to respond instantaneously which can result in unintentionally inflaming a situation. Information can then be shared with other sites and be spread far beyond the intended audience. Friends of Friends may not be our Friends.

3.2 It is also very easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages that would outweigh the value gained in the first place.

4. Purpose of the Policy

4.1 Social media provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities, providing updates, news, information and retweeting relevant information from other sources. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with the younger age group, the business community and hopefully the harder to reach groups.

4.2 The Council will make use of approved social media tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control its use in order to minimise the risks as stated above. In the first instance this will be a Facebook Group (not a Parish Council-owned page).

5. Aims and Objectives

5.1 Social media can be used by the Council as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity.

5.2 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 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 upheld and improved rather than adversely affected
- That communication by use of social media is effective, timely, appropriate, useful, engages with a wider audience and utilises cross-promotion of other Council communication tools (e.g. website, linking facebook to twitter account etc)
- Social media activity isn't something that stands alone, to be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned

campaigns, promotions and activities can be plugged in to social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

6. Policy Statement

6.1 It is acknowledged that there is considerable potential for using social media which can provide significant advantages. The responsible, corporate use of social media is actively encouraged. The following applies equally to Officers and Members.

6.2 This policy provides a structured approach to using social media associated with the Parish Council and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information.

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

6.4 The following guidelines will apply to online participation using Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council assets and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council:

- 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 of others such as home address and telephone numbers.
- Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act.
- Use a disclaimer. When using Council-associated 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".
- 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 issues.
- Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong.
- Use of the Parish Council's Facebook account must always reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be

used to express personal opinion, particularly when used by a Councillor. If unsure, say nothing.

- Councillors are. Of course, at liberty to set up personal 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.

7. Responsibilities

The Parish Clerk is the designated 'Council' owner of the Council Social Media channels agreed by the Council. Councillors officially appointed by the Council may assist the Parish Clerk to disseminate information. However all must ensure they follow this policy. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk or the designated assistant(s).

8. Guidance for Councillors - social media and meetings

The Council encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of Winterbourne Stoke issues and the use of social media can help with this.

Below are some extra guidelines for Councillors to consider for the use of social media during meetings:

- Handheld devices and laptops are permitted (indeed encouraged) for use during meetings to allow environmentally friendly and effective communication.
- The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings - not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part.
- Ensure the volume on all electronic devices is turned to 'mute'.
- Councillors' tweets/blogs during Council meetings should refer to the discussions which are taking place at the meeting - tweeting/blogging about other subjects will show the public and other attendees at the meeting that you are not engaging properly in the meeting.
- Councillors have a responsibility to take Council business seriously and it is not appropriate for members to use social media to tease or insult other members.
- Winterbourne Stoke residents expect debate and to be informed about Council business, not witness petty arguments.
- Remember that if you break the law using social media (for example by posting something defamatory), you will be personally responsible.

9. Generic Social Media Strategy

9.1 Social networks are rapidly growing in popularity and are used by all ages in society. The most popular social networks are web-based, commercial, and not purposely designed for Parish Council use. They include sites like

Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, and Xanga. For individuals, social networking sites provide tremendous opportunities for staying in touch with friends and family.

9.2 For the Council the sites provide a modern alternative means to communicate with residents of the Parish.

9.3 Facebook, for example, offers a rich platform allowing you to share unlimited content, including images and videos.

Example activity:

- Share articles / blog posts / expertise
- Start discussions and ask questions to encourage interaction
- Create surveys to encourage participation from visitors
- Upload images and videos
- Generic news – what’s happening in the area

9.4 Facebook “Friends” will gain access to the Council’s network of contacts on the site. The hallmarks of online networks is the ability to “friend” others – creating a group of that share interests and personal news. Care should be exercised when accepting.

9.5 Good practice guidelines for the use of Facebook by the Council as a body or Councillors as individuals are:

- As a Parish Council, we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image.
- Remember that people classified as “friends” have the ability to download and share your information with others.
- Post only what you want the world to see. It is not like posting something to your web site or blog and then realizing that a story or photo should be taken down. On a social networking site, basically once you post something it may continue to be available, even after it is removed from the site.
- Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise Council policies or personnel.
- Set your profile’s security and privacy settings carefully. At a minimum, all privacy settings should be set to “only friends”. “Friends of friends” and “Networks and Friends” open the content to a large group of unknown people.
- All activity on the Council facebook page must follow the Council’s agreed statement of purpose and outcomes for the use of the networking tool.
- Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.
- Pay close attention to the site's security settings and allow only approved personnel full access to the site.
- Only add statements approved by either Full Council or the Parish Clerk.
- Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or
- libellous.

- Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterisations.
- Weigh whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness at Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council at risk.
- If you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines then you must report it as required by law.
- Please stay informed and cautious in the use of all new networking technologies.

10. Current Social Media Accounts

Facebook: Winterbourne Stoke Notifications Group

10.1 Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council have created a "Secret" Facebook Group for use by Parish Councillors, the Clerk and Parishioners. In this context, "Secret" is simply a term used by Facebook Inc to describe a group that cannot be seen by the general public and the ability to see and contribute to it is by invitation only.

10.2 The Parish Clerk is the Council "owner" of the group and its primary Administrator. The Clerk may co-opt other Councillors to be Co-administrators (or a resident in extremis). All Councillors will be appointed as Moderators, enabling them to give, or remind access to the site to users and to delete any entries that breach this policy.

10.3 All villagers on the electoral roll and their families resident in Winterbourne Stoke (providing they fulfil the minimum age criteria for Facebook), have the right to apply/be invited for access to the group. Family members of elderly, infirm, or otherwise vulnerable villagers may be given access to the group - a key reason for forming it.

10.4 The group has some very basic rules that will apply and these appear on the group main page:

The Winterbourne Stoke Notifications Group is to be used purely for notifications about things going on in the village: an urgent need to contact a villager, problems on the A303, etc. It is NOT to be used for general conversations/exchanges that should be conducted by other means.

Because of this, the group is being restricted to those on the electoral roll for Winterbourne Stoke and any of their families resident in the village and old enough to have a Facebook account. The Parish Council may use this facility to notify of new posts on the village website (<https://winterbournestokepc.org.uk/>).

The group will be moderated and persistent offenders will have access removed.

Please let us know of anyone who should be invited to join the group by sending an email to: clerk@winterbournestokepc.org.uk

10.5 All Councillors should accept notifications of new content from this group set-up on their smart phones or computers. Having received an alert, all Councillors/Moderators are urged to view the new content as soon as possible and moderate the content if needed. The Clerk and any other Administrator must view the group at a minimum of once a week and ideally daily.

10.6 All users are entitled, and encouraged to add content to the group that will be of interest to others. Councillors should ensure that the group is the appropriate place for any content they wish to add. It may be that the content is best added to the Parish Council website and the group merely used to point readers to its existence.

10.7 Any content that breaches this policy will be deleted immediately. If it is merely content in the wrong place, the poster will be asked to repost to the website and reminded of the group rules. If the Moderators feel the users are breaching the word or the spirit of para 9.5., they are to block the content creator immediately and report this to the Clerk. If the content breaches mandatory reporting guidelines then you must report it as required by law. Take a screenshot of all material believed to be in breach of the policy and copy to the Clerk or the relevant authority before deleting from the group.

10.8 The Clerk will determine how long to block offenders from using the group (ie 1 week, 2 weeks, 1 month). In the case of very serious (but not criminal) abuses of the group, or in the case of repeat offences, the user will be blocked until the matter can be discussed by the full council. The ultimate sanction will be permanent exclusion from the group. In all cases, exclusion for more than 3 months will be subject to the right of appeal to the Parish Council.

11. Future Use of Social Media

11.1 At this stage it is not intended to use any other forms of social media for official use by Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council. However this could be open to review in the future and does not require further agreement.

11.2 Councillors are entitled to use any form of social media they wish to but must abide by this policy at all times when so doing.

Related Documents

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Adoption and Review History

Adopted at Parish Council Meeting on:	2nd August 2018
Reviewed On:	
Next Review Due:	September 2021