

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this policy is to provide Councillors, staff and volunteers an overview of Social Media and outlines the Parish 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.

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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.

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

Examples of popular social media tools include: Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, You Tube, Pinterest, Snapchat, Whatsapp, 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.

PITFALLS

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

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.

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PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

Social media provides the Parish Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities, providing updates, news, and information and passing on 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.

The Parish Council 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 include Facebook and Twitter.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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

The aim of this Policy is to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of Parish Council- based services through the use of social media
- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media
- That Parish 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 Parish 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 Parish Council communication tools (e.g. website, community magazine, 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. Refer to the Parish Council's Communications Policy.

POLICY STATEMENT

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.

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

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

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The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Eastington 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 social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the Parish Council. Avoid use of the Parish Council e-mail address, logos or other Parish 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 Parish Council's policies or opinions".
- Know your obligations: you must comply with other Parish Council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach Parish Council confidentiality and proprietary information policies.
- 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 Parish 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 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 Parish 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.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Parish Clerk is the designated owner of the Parish Council Social Media channels agreed by the Parish Council. Councillors officially appointed by the Parish 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.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to set up their own accounts but they should ensure they comply with this policy and ensure the 'personal view' disclaimer is used.

GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS - *social media and meetings*

The Parish Council encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of Eastington 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:

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- Handheld devices and laptops are permitted for use during meetings to allow environmentally friendly and effective use of meeting papers. The use of such devices is intended to improve communication and not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part in the meeting. Ensure the volume on all electronic devices is turned to 'mute'.
- Councillors' tweets/blogs during Parish 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 Parish Council business seriously and it is not appropriate for members to use social media to tease or insult other members. Eastington residents expect debate and to be informed about Parish 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.

FACEBOOK/TWITTER STRATEGY

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

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.

One of the hallmarks of online networks is the ability to “friend” others – creating a group of others that share interests and personal news. Care should be exercised when accepting invitations to friend others within personal social networking sites.

Good practice guidelines for the use of Facebook and Twitter by the Parish 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 realising that a story or photo should be taken down. On a social networking site, once you post something it may continue to be available, even after it is removed from the site.

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- Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise Parish Council policies or personnel.
- Set your profile's security and privacy settings carefully.
- All activity on the Parish Council Facebook and Twitter pages 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 Eastington Parish Council at risk.
- To reduce security risks, do not install any non-productive external applications that work with the social networking site. Examples of these sites are calendar programs and games.
- Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.

Please stay informed and cautious in the use of all new networking technologies.

OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA

At this stage it is not intended to use any other forms of social media for official use by Eastington Parish Council. However this could be open to review in the future.

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.