

Appleton Parish Council

Social Media Policy

Adopted by the Parish Council on 25th September 2019, confirmed on 19th May 2020

Social Media is now an established form of communication, enabling better and more direct contact between the Parish Council, residents and organisations that it serves and works alongside.

This Social Media Policy describes how Appleton Parish Council will use social media to improve and develop the way in which it communicates with its residents, local businesses and government agencies, both central and local.

It is intended that Appleton Parish Council will use its Facebook page to provide up to date information regarding the activities of the Parish Hall users, Council meetings, and those meetings that are open to the public, events arranged by the Parish Council, and provide a place for receiving comments and suggestions from residents and local organisations.

It sets out what is and is not acceptable usage of social media, ensuring it aligns with the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

SCOPE

Social Media describes and includes websites and online tools which allow people to interact. It also includes, but is not limited to:

- Blogs
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Linked-in
- Instagram
- Snapchat

Used in the correct way, social media is about sharing information, giving opinions, creating interest groups and building on-line communities and networks, which encourage participation and engagement.

This policy relates to any social media communication published by or on behalf of the Parish Council or any individual in his/her capacity as a councillor.

Key Principles

The key principles of using Social media are that information and comments are immediate to a large number of people and organisations, and are usually conversational in tone.

However there are standards that should be followed:

- Any communication can be misinterpreted, and the very essence of lack of face-to-face communication can magnify any issues.
- Comments must therefore be accurate, informative and considered as it will be recorded and permanent
- Councillors should be mindful of any posts they make on a personal basis, which may bring the Council into disrepute.

Responsibility and Accountability

The Parish Clerk and/or Assistant Clerk have delegated responsibility for all formal communications between the Parish Council and members of the public. They will be responsible for maintaining the Council website, Facebook page and any other Council social media that may be set up.

Individual councillors may communicate on social media e.g. as a moderator or administrator to ensure posts and responses are acceptable i.e. meets the criteria described in the Criteria section.

Criteria

Social media communication from the Parish Council should meet the following criteria:

- It should be civil in tone, tasteful and relevant
- It should not contain content that is deemed illegal, construed as libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, and harmful to a person's reputation, obscene, profane, sexually or racially offensive.
- It should not contain any content that is copied or shared, for which the Parish Council does not own the copyright. **Exceptions** include the sharing of local news items from

local and national agencies, items from other government agencies and updates from local and national Police.

- It should not contain any personal information, other than the required basic contact details.
- It should not contain any information that may infringe GDPR

Councillors do not need to have a personal Facebook or Twitter account, but if they do, they should:

- Indicate clearly whether or not they are communicating in his/her capacity as a councillor or an individual.
- Ensure that they comply with the Code of Conduct for Councillors, whenever they act or appear to act in an official capacity on social media in the same way as for other forms of communication.

Independent communications with residents are important in order to be approachable and to engage with them.

The overarching rules are that councillors should not:

- Make commitments on behalf of the council without approval
- Bring the council into disrepute.
- Fail to respect confidentiality.

Social Media Guidelines

Respect

Do not use social media to make personal attacks or indulge in rude, disrespectful or offensive comment. Treat others with respect.

Equality

Do not publish anything that might be interpreted as racist, sexist, homophobic or anti-faith. Comply with all equality legislation.

Bullying and Harassing

Do not post anything that may be construed as bullying, harassing or intimidatory.

Confidentiality

Do not disclose any information that is given to you in confidence by anyone, or information acquired by you which you believe, or ought to be reasonably aware, is of a confidential nature.

Separation

Consider keeping your personal and councillor profiles separate on social media sites.

Check your privacy settings.

Be aware that you may be seen as acting in your official capacity if you publish any information that you could only have accessed by being a councillor.

Potential Issues

It must be understood that failing to comply with any legislation may lead to legal challenges personally or against the council

The following is a list of potential legal issues:

Libel

If you publish an untrue statement about a person or organisation which is construed as damaging to their reputation, they may consider it as defamation and take legal action.

Copyright

Do not use images or text from a copyrighted source e.g. photographs or extracts from publications, without obtaining permission as it will likely be breaking copyright laws.

Data Protection

Data Protection legislation is quite clear and should be adhered to. Unless there is express permission, no personal data of individuals should be published on social media or any other form of communication. You cannot presume consent to pass data on to others.

Bias and Predetermination

Councillors must not publish on social media or any other form of communication that suggests they have made up their minds about an issue that has not been formally decided. Councillors should be prepared to attend meetings with an open mind, weigh all the information and evidence and make an informed decision. You could be challenged if you have already published your views and/or decision beforehand.

Any changes, updates and new legislation should be added to this document immediately and notified to all councillors and posted to all relevant social media sites.