Social Media Policy

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Aim

The aim of the Parish Council's Social Media Policy is to set out a code of practice to provide guidance to staff and Parish Councillors in the use of social media communications.

Social Media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. Social media covers networking sites, and includes but is not limited to:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Instagram

This policy applies to all those in the Parish Council, including staff and Councillors. It sits alongside relevant existing policies which should be taken into consideration.

Scope

The use of social media does not replace existing communication forms, e.g. email and telephone correspondence with the Clerk, and thus acts as an additional means for the public to interact and stay updated with the Parish Council. Social Media will enhance the communication residents of Meriden have with the Parish Council and should remain an additional line of communication.

Meriden Parish Council Use Of Social Media

1. Councillors with access to social media will be granted access to the social media accounts. They will be responsible for responding to public enquiries and messages. They will have the authority to moderate posts made by third parties on Parish Council pages, which includes removing any posts that are deemed to be of a defamatory or libelous nature.
2. Councillors on the Planning, Transport, Environment, and Climate Change committee will be designated days and times in which they will be responsible to post updates on the Parish Council social media pages; this will act as a mechanism by which to update the public.
3. Clerks to the Parish Council will be granted access to moderate and respond to communication sent to the social media account.
4. During a Clerk's working week, the Clerk will be responsible as the first responder to social media communication.

5. Outside of the working week, the PTEC committee and Chair will be responsible for responding to any social media posts.
6. Social media accounts will be used to:
   6.1 Advertise events and activities
   6.2 Good news stories linked website or press page
   6.3 Vacancies
   6.4 Retweet or 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, library and health services etc.
   6.5 Announcing new information
   6.6 Post of share information from other Parish related community groups/clubs/ associations/bodies e.g. schools, sports clubs and community groups
   6.7 Updates on Parish Council meetings
   6.8 Refer queries to the Clerk

Guidance For Councillors

1. Individual Parish Councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted from their own accounts.
2. Councillors should be mindful when posting on their personal social media accounts, that they are also reflective of the Parish Council.
3. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and Councillors must ensure that the security settings are in place.
4. When communicating on social media on behalf of the Parish Council, Councillors and Clerks should:
   a. Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
   b. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
   c. 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 ensure 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.
   d. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud". Use sentence case format, not capital letters, and do not write in red to emphasis points.
   e. Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.

f. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
g. Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
h. 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.

5. Councillors will not:
    a. Use Cllr or the Councillor title in their personal social media names.
    b. Present personal opinions as that of the Parish Council.
    c. Post content that is contrary to the democratic decision made by the Parish Council.
    d. Post any information that infringes copyright of others including any link to a third-party website without checking that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
6. Councillors must avoid posting views in advance of a decision to be debated by the Council or a Committee meeting, that may constitute predetermination or bias. The Localism Act 2011 states that Councillors must not have "had or appeared to have had a closed mind (to any extent) when making the decision".

Personal Guidance And Safety

Employees and Councillors need to be aware that the information they post on their personal social media profile can make them identifiable to residents and service users, as well as people they know in a private capacity. Online sites such as Facebook are in the public domain, and personal profile details can be seen by anyone, even if users have their privacy settings on the highest level, if a user's profile is linked to other sites, any changes to their profile will be updated there too. Employees and councillors who have set their privacy level to the maximum can have their privacy compromised by 'friends' who may not have set their security to the same standard.

Addressing Allegations Of Social Media Misuse

Any employee or Councillor who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a staff member or Councillor onto a social media platform/website should inform the Clerk or Chairperson of the Parish Council who should ensure that all complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly.

Complaints relating to a Councillor's social media content/posts from members of the public, staff or other Councillors will be dealt with following the Council's Complaints Policy, with complaints concerning the Councillor's conduct being referred to the Monitoring Officer at Solihull Council.

Complaints relating to an employee's social media content/posts will be dealt with following the Parish Council's Disciplinary Procedure.