

Scarcliffe Parish Council

Social Media Policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this social media code of practice is to outline the responsibilities and standards expected by staff when using social media inside and outside of work. The Code forms part of the 'Employees Code of Conduct'.

2. Introduction

Social media is an incredibly useful tool; it can increase engagement by reaching a wider audience; enabling active and potentially instantaneous conversations with our communities. It can also support increased participation, stimulating debate about services, campaigns, and local issues and often at a fraction of the cost of many traditional means of communication.

The use of social media is now a daily part of our communications mix. The following guidance has been produced to ensure appropriate legal and effective use of social media as a communication channel for the Council which does not compromise Council information or computer systems and is in line with the Council's values.

This guidance aims to help you and ensure that:

- There is a consistent approach to the use of social media.
- Council information remains secure and is not compromised using social media.
- Users work within the Social Media Policy, other existing policies, these guidelines and relevant legislation;
- The Council's reputation is not damaged.
- Staff are protected by ensuring there are no inadvertent breaches of the Social Media Policy;
- Staff are helped to do their jobs.
- All stakeholders including Council employees, councillors and members of the public are treated with mutual dignity and respect in any electronic communication.

3. What do we mean by social media?

The term 'social media' is used to describe websites and applications for social networking, where people create, share and exchange content and ideas in virtual networks and communities. The content shared may include (but is not limited to) personal information, opinions, research, commentary, video, pictures, or business information.

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For the purposes of this guidance, the term applies, but not limited to blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, YouTube, Vimeo, Foursquare, discussions forums, special interest forums, user communities and any other personal web space where content is created, manipulated and shared. There are many more examples of social media, and this guidance is relevant in relation to any social media an employee may use.

4. Why social media guidance is needed?

This Social Media Policy seeks to minimise the Council's exposure to security risks, reputational damage and potential financial penalties from the Information Commissioner due to breaches of the Data Protection Act.

5. Social media guidance

The following guidance outlines the processes, responsibilities and standards expected for all Council social media accounts and personal use that may be directly or indirectly linked to the Council, ensuring that staff are protected by inadvertent breaches of the Social Media Policy.

Guidance for Council accounts:

Before setting up a Council social media account

Staff must not set up any social media accounts without the agreement of the Parish Council. As part of the set-up process an account moderator will be selected and the usernames and passwords held centrally.

What can you post on Council accounts?

Officers must ensure that they respond to as many posts as possible, ensuring that you focus on the quality of response. This will support further engagement and participation, helping the accounts to become trusted sources of information. Growth in these forms of communication is organic and only happens if people believe their 'voice' will be heard, or there is relevant and engaging content that warrants following and sharing.

If you have lots of comments to respond to, focus your time on the most important issues or influential posts.

Make sure that you like, follow, or share information following the sites or applications' house rules. It doesn't mean we endorse them, just we think others might find their information interesting and relevant to the account's followers or fans. Do make sure that you only follow, like and share appropriate accounts linked to your day-to-day business and not personal interest such as football club and celebrity accounts.

Don't use a formal tone of voice – there's no need. Write like you would when speaking to someone, be honest, warm and approachable.

Even though people often expect an instantaneous response, do take the time to make sure it's a good response. If you need to confirm facts or check with a manager first, that's ok. It's very difficult to remove poor content once it has been published.

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Don't worry about challenging incorrect posts, but make sure that you are calm, respectful, and factual. Remember you are representing the Council and our values.

All Council accounts must have clear Council branding. So that it is easily identifiable as being part of Scarcliffe Parish Council.

Be aware that if accounts are not well used, they may be considered redundant and could be closed.

If comments made on a social media account are a direct complaint or a specific freedom of information act request, the account moderator should seek guidance from the Parish Council.

What can't you post on Council accounts?

Content, which includes, photos, images, text, and film, must be honest and officers must ensure the reliability of anything they publish or allow to be published. Once information is published, it is very hard to remove and can be copied, amended, and shared by others without direct permission. There can be serious consequences of publishing inappropriate content: Defamatory allegations made on social media sites can result in civil legal action, such as being sued for libel. Breaking a court order or other contempt of court can result in a fine or imprisonment.

Officers must not disclose personal details and be aware of the Council's Data Protection Policy.

Officers must always act professionally in Council's social media accounts. All posts must be in line with the Council's values and the Employee Code of Conduct.

Officers are not expected to respond to any messages that contain abusive language or swearing.

Content copied from elsewhere, for which the Council does not own the copyright, must not be published.

Officers must not publish the same or similar content repeatedly or in bulk, this can also be called 'spamming'.

Council social media accounts **cannot** be used at any time for political purposes or political party campaigning. Once in restricted publicity during the pre-election period, officers must ensure no statements are published that could be seen to have an influence on a political outcome on the run up to an election. This includes announcements about any new or potentially controversial initiatives. Officers must also not seek to promote Councillor accounts.

It is acceptable, due to the restriction around restricted publicity during the pre-election period that there is a slight reduction in the volume of posts published during this time. Published content must be in relation to current services. If any comments or responses to posts are overtly party political then the account moderator must remove them immediately.

Most online communities have their own rules and guidelines, which we will always follow. Where possible, we will rely on the measures of protection and intervention that the social networking site already has in place (e.g., against illegal, harmful, or offensive content), for example, by flagging comments or alerting them to any breaches of the site's terms and conditions. Account moderators are responsible for flagging these concerns, both directly with the site or application and with the Parish Council Social Media Sub Committee

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If inappropriate content is posted on your social media page or in response to your posts then they must be removed as soon as possible. The posts must be reported to both the Parish Council and the social networking site. Comments that disagree, challenge, or criticise the Council should not be removed. If we remove all critical responses the social media accounts lose their trustworthiness and can quickly generate more negative comments. It's best to be transparent, challenge the comment cordially and calmly.

Do not post promotional content or endorse external organisations. For example, we don't promote any special offers or services from organisations we are not in a formal partnership with.

Leaving or moving within the Council

All account moderators must share their usernames and passwords for Council accounts with the Clerk. This is to ensure that there is a centrally held record of all details should they be required.

When a member of staff leaves the authority, the employee's line manager is asked to change any passwords during the leavers' process.

Malware and online crime prevention

Social media can be used by the online criminal community to deliver malware, malicious software such as a virus, and carry out schemes designed to damage property or steal confidential information. To minimise risk related to such threats, adhere to the following guidelines. While these guidelines help to reduce risk, they do not cover all possible threats and are not a substitute for good judgment.

Do not use the same passwords for social media that you use to access Council computers or devices.

Do not follow links or download software on social media pages posted by individuals or organisations that you do not know.

If any content you find on any social media web page looks suspicious in any way, close your browser, and do not return to that page.

Configure social media accounts to encrypt sessions. Facebook, Twitter, and others support encryption as an option. This is extremely important for roaming users who connect via public Wi-Fi networks.

Council accounts should be accessed via council owned devices such as office PCs or tablets – so that it can be ensured that these devices have the correct security settings and will be stored in a secure way.

If staff are working remotely, they must use encrypted sessions.

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6. Guidance for personal social media use:

The Council respects all employees' right to a private life. Officers must be aware however, that where they are identified as a council employee, they are expected to behave appropriately and in line with the Council's values and policies.

Any content published online in personal social media accounts is your own; however, anything published about Scarcliffe Parish Council cannot be kept entirely separate from your working life.

The Council needs to ensure that its reputation is not damaged, and confidentiality is protected. All stakeholders must be able to trust the integrity of our employees. Furthermore, the Council may be liable for the actions of officers who post inappropriately.

With this in mind, all staff are asked:

- To be aware that they are responsible for any content on their pages, including tags and comments.
- To ensure that any comments or posts in their personal accounts about Council activities does not bring the Council into disrepute.
- Not share confidential information arising from their employment with the Council.
- To respect privacy and confidentiality.
- Not discuss or criticise customers or colleagues.
- Not use work email addresses to set up personal accounts.
- Not to accept customers/service users known through the course of their work as 'friends' on personal social media sites. If staff are repeatedly contacted by a customer or service user known through work on personal social media accounts, they may wish to seek advice from their line manager.
- To ensure privacy settings are in place to restrict open access and understand who could have access to personal social media accounts.
- To abide by the Council's Employee Code of Conduct and other Council policies.
- Staff are also advised that where they choose to identify themselves as a Council employee to include a disclaimer on their social media account profiles to make it clear that the opinions expressed are their own and take care to ensure their opinions are not perceived as comments made on behalf of the Council.

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7. Use of social media and smart devices during meetings and events

Increasingly handheld devices, such as smartphones or tablet devices like iPads are used to access social media during internal and external Council meetings and events to share information, views or comments.

Devices need to be used with care and in line with the above guidance for Council and personal social media accounts. Alongside this, officers are asked to ensure that devices are silent during meetings and are used without disturbing others.

8. Compliance

The guidance in this document Policy' forms part of the 'Employee's Code of Conduct' and must be read alongside this 'Social Media Policy' and any professional standards that govern individual employee's area of work. Failure to comply with Council policies will be dealt with through the Council's disciplinary procedure.

Inappropriate content published in Council accounts by Account Moderators may lead to removal of access to social media sites at work. Breaches of the Social Media Policy and the Employee Code of Conduct will be dealt with through the Council's disciplinary procedure. Serious breaches could result termination of the employment contract and where applicable, may result in civil action and/or criminal charges.

Definition of an Account Moderator

Officers with responsibility for Council social media accounts are known as account moderators. They will produce content, review, and monitor the social media accounts they have responsibility for.

AdoptedOctober 9th, 2023.....

Signed by Chairman

Signed by Clerk.....

Next Review date.....October 2024.....

