

HOOE PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

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1. Aims

- 1.1 The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Councillors, and the Clerk in the use of online communication, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites.
- 1.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by Hooe Parish Council. The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.
- 1.3 All Councillors and the Clerk are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of Hooe Parish Council, its services, employee, partners and community.

2. Code of Practice

- 2.1 The social media may be used for:
 - Engagement with individuals and the community.
 - Post dates of Council meetings and give links to the appropriate agendas etc.
 - Advertise events and activities.
 - Providing and exchanging information about local services and events.
 - Advertising vacancies
 - Announcing statutory/community information

3. Responsibilities

- 3.1 The Clerk will be responsible for posting and monitoring the content on the Parish Council website and social media pages in line with the Social Media Policy. The Clerk will be appointed as a moderator, to moderate Parish Council media output. The Parish Council shall appoint a Councillor to act as a moderator in the absence of the Clerk.
- 3.2 The Clerk as the moderator will have the authority, without notice or comment, to remove posts from Council social media pages which are deemed to be of an inflammatory, defamatory or libelous nature. Such posts may be also reported to the hosts (i.e. facebook) and to the Clerk for Council records. The moderator will also have the authority

to block or ban access from an individual or company's account to the Parish Council social media pages.

- 3.3 Parish Council posts or comments on posts should only be made using the established Parish Council's social media account. The Clerk may initiate posts or comments without approval for the purpose of circulating or responding with public domain information, public service notices and from approved minutes or instructions from the Parish Council.
- 3.4 The Clerk will maintain and update the Parish Council's website. Under the Transparency Code, all information pertaining to the Parish Council will be made available online.
- 3.5 Facebook will be used to support the website with all the relevant information. Emails will be used to distribute information relating to Council business.
- 3.6 The Clerk will be responsible for checking the correct security settings are in place on the social media sites used.
- 3.7 No social media account details may be changed without permission of the Clerk or Full Parish Council.
- 3.8 All communication on behalf of the Parish Council must be through official contact channels and should be directed to or passed to the Clerk.

4. Personal Safety and Privacy

- 4.1 The Clerk 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.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 The Clerk 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.

5. When Participating in Online Communication, Councillors and the Clerk Must:

- 5.1 Be responsible and respectful, ensuring posts are positive, informative, and balanced.

- 5.2 Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents.
- 5.3 Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud' i.e. use sentence case format and not write in capital letters or red or in bold to emphasise points.
- 5.4 To seek permission to publish original photos or videos (posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence so Councillors and the Clerk must ensure any information does not infringe copyright).
- 5.5 Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Parish Council, and never hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms.
- 5.6 Councillors using their own social media accounts or any other form of communication for community or other purposes do so as private individuals and should not use any privileged material gained from their position as a Parish Councillor.
- 5.7 Be objective, balanced, informative, and accurate.
- 5.8 Spell and grammar check everything.

6. The Clerk and Councillors Must Not:

- 6.1 Use the Cllr or Councillor title on personal social media.
- 6.2 Present personal opinions as those of the Parish Council.
- 6.3 Bring the Parish Council into disrepute or cause embarrassment, including through content posted in a personal capacity.
- 6.4 Use an individual's name in social media communications or post information about an individual unless given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation).
- 6.5 Make false or misleading statements.
- 6.6 Post personal or political content, content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.
- 6.7 Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Parish Council.
- 6.8 Disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Clerk.
- 6.9 Post comments on the Clerk or Councillors without their prior approval.

- 6.10 Upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent. This includes use of an individual's name without written permission to do so; publishing photographs or videos of minors without parental permission.
- 6.11 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.
- 6.12 Post, forward or link to controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks, engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications as this may constitute bullying or harassment and will bring the Parish Council into disrepute.
- 6.13 Conduct on any online activity that is against any regulation or the law e.g., may be deemed libelous or that constitutes a criminal offence.
- 6.11 Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors or residents should report them to the Clerk for referral and/ Council as required.

7. Councillors

- 7.1 Councillor's views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Parish Council at a Council or Committee meeting may constitute pre-deposition, predetermination or bias and may require the Councillor to declare an interest at a Council meeting in accordance with the Localism Act 2011.
- 7.2 Councillor's authority to post will be withdrawn during a defined period before a local election in order to comply with legislation previously known as purdah.

8. Addressing Allegations of Misuse

- 8.1 The Clerk or Councillor who feels that they have been harassed or bullied or are offended by material posted or uploaded onto a council social media website should inform the Clerk or Chairman of the Parish Council who should ensure that all complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly.
- 8.2 For Councillors, complaints will be dealt with following the Council's Complaints Policy, with complaints concerning the Councillor's conduct being referred to the Wealden District Council Monitoring Officer. For the Clerk, complaints will be dealt with following the Parish Council's Disciplinary Procedure.