WERRINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Adopted January 2025

Review January 2027

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Werrington Parish Councillors, Council staff and others who engage with the Council using online communications, 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 which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook, Instagram and other social networking sites
- Twitter (X) and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- WhatsApp
- Bloggs and discussion forums
- Email

Social media may be used to-

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities,

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Police, Library, Health etc.

- Announcing new information
- Post or Share information from other Parish Councils related to community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

The principles of this policy apply to Werrington Parish Councillors and Council staff and also applies to others communicating with the Parish Council.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does too other written or verbal communication.

Individual Parish Councillors and Council staff are responsible for what they post in a Council and personal capacity.

In the main, Councillors and Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Social media may be used to-

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.

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- Announcing new information
- Post or Share information from other Parish Councils related to community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities

Code of Practice

When using social media (including email) Parish Councillors and Council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative. Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative. DO NOT speak on behalf of the Council if you aren't giving a response discussed and agreed by the Council.

Parish Councillors and Council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the Council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal

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capacity

- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages.

This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation and is an offence.

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

The Parish Clerk is the moderator of Parish Council social media output and is responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the social media Policy.

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The moderator will have the authority to remove any posts made by third parties from the council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

Annex A Werrington Parish Council-specific Social Media Policy

Principle of the policy

The principles of this policy apply to Werrington Parish Councillors including all elected and co-opted, the Clerk to the council and all other employees and volunteers. (Collectively referred to as council staff in this policy). and Council staff and also applies to others communicating with the Parish Council

The policy supplements and should be read in conjunction with other sits alongside relevant existing policies and procedures adopted by the Council, which include but are not restricted to Equal Opportunities Policy, GDPR Policy, Disciplinary Procedure and Code of Conduct. need to be taken into consideration.

Code of Conduct.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does too other written or verbal communication.

Individual Parish Councillors and Council staff are personally responsible for the social media content they create, publish and share. Being a Parish councillor does not prevent someone else from pursuing legal action following the publication of an untrue statement, spreading of incorrect or misleading information, or causing distress or harassment. A councillor or council staff member could be held personally liable.

Parish Councillors and Council staff should keep in mind their additional responsibilities because of their position to include but not be restricted to confidential information, copyright, data protection, the pre-election period and exempt reports, the portrayal of information provided and the difference between fact and opinion. Parish Councillors and Council staff are still subject to the Code of Conduct on social media where there is an explicit link between the content posted, council business or your role, what they post in a Council and personal capacity. In the main, Councillors and Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law legislation and any associated copyright licence. may have more serious consequences.

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When posting to social media remember:

- You are a representative of the council.
- What you post can affect the reputation of your council.
- The council is a corporate decision-making body.
- Some communications are best left to the Parish council's official social media channels, managed by our Parish Clerk.
- You do not have to respond or comment. And sometimes it may be better not to and to pass matters to the Chair and Clerk.

Keeping your personal and family life private

Parish councillors and council staff should maintain a divide between your personal and family life, and your public profile. Using a “Page" rather than a “Profile" for your councillor role can help to maintain separation. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (X) platforms have similar options and allow privacy control settings to support this.

Be aware as a Parish councillor or council staff that separation does not exempt you from redress. If you are not comfortable with what you are publishing. Stop and seek advice from the Parish Clerk or Chair.

As a rule, do not share personal information such as personal phone number, date of birth, home address or post images that make these obvious. Also, consider the personal data of others around you.

Consideration to family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues private family life. You may be comfortable living your life in the public glare. But those around you may not.

Where possible have a dedicated email address for your Parish Council role and a separate phone number to differentiate between the role, personal life and work commitments.

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Dealing with negativity and abuse online

Social media platforms including email can attract negative comments and abuse. Commonly known as ‘Trolls'. These individuals are not easy to deal with. The best response is to either ignore what they have posted, delete or hide the comment and report such behaviour to the Parish Clerk and Chair. Where matters are more severe it may be necessary to report matters to the police.

It is sensible and reasonable to block some people not just for your protection but for those around you.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council.

Taking a break

As a Parish councillor or council staff your position can be publicly demanding. Do not be afraid to take a break from social media if you feel the need to protect your mental health and well-being.

The social media policy will be updated every 2 years or where there is a change in processes, legislation or guidelines.

Werrington Parish Council Zero Tolerance Notice

Violent, threatening or abusive behaviour including shouting and swearing

(spoken or typed) will not be tolerated.

Members of the public who act in such a manner will be reported to the police.

Werrington Parish Council members and staff are here to help you, please treat them with respect.

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