

Whitmore Parish Council Social Media and Website Policy

The purpose of this document is to set out a code of practice and to provide guidance to Whitmore Parish Council Councillors & Officers in the use of online public communications in the context of social media, social networking sites and the Parish Council website, in particular where this is representing the Parish Council and its work.

The principles of the policy apply to all Councillors and the Clerk to the Council. It is also intended as guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council in terms of agreeing expectations in regard to content and response. This policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to also be taken into consideration.

What is social media?

Social media is the term commonly given to website and online tools that allow users to interact with each other in some way, e.g. by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction can be through computers, mobile phones, tablet devices and new generation technologies as they materialise. Examples of current popular social media & social networking tools include: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok, LinkedIn, blogs, etc, though new platforms are emerging regularly and therefore this policy is not intended to apply to any specific social media platform.

Social media can provide a useful and often more far-reaching alternative to official means of communication such as written correspondence for the Parish Council to inform and respond to questions and queries raised by the people who live in, work in, and visit the Parish.

The over-riding purpose of any online or social media communication is to provide those with an interest in the work of Whitmore Parish Council with an additional source of information. It is not designed to replace other official channels of communication, rather to enable more members of the local community to understand the work of the council and to promote greater knowledge of the council's processes, actions and decisions.

Whitmore Parish Council use of online and social media – Code of Practice

I. Purpose

Online and social media should be used primarily for the following purposes:

- a. To share information relating to the official business of the Parish Council, e.g. posting dates of meetings, minutes and agendas.
- b. To advertise events and activities of potential interest to those who live in, work in, or visit the parish.

- c. To broadcast information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health, etc.
- d. To promote newsworthy stories of potential interest.
- e. To alert the public to vacancies on the Parish Council.
- f. To support local individuals or community groups by sharing information that may be of benefit or interest.
- g. To announce new information that may be of relevance in relation to the work of the Parish Council.
- h. To function as an alternative platform for residents to express their views or queries to the Clerk or Councillors, although this will not be treated as being in an official capacity.

2. Guidance

When participating in any online communication (including email), Parish Councillors and the Clerk to the Council must;

- a. Not hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms.
- b. Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
- c. Not post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council.
- d. Not post information that is not yet in the public domain.
- e. Be responsible, respectful as well as direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- f. Never make false or misleading statements.
- g. Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment.
- h. Be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure that personal opinions are not published as being those of the Parish Council, or bring the council into disrepute, especially by contravening the Council's other policies.
- i. Not disclose any content of any business declared as confidential as defined in Standing Orders Section 70.
- j. Refrain from posting controversial or inflammatory remarks.
- k. Not present political views.
- l. Not post offensive language or materials relating to ethnicity, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief.
- m. Avoid personal attacks, online fights or hostile arguments.
- n. Not post any information, including photographs, videos etc that infringes the copyright of others, without the express permission of the owner of the material. It will be assumed that these permissions have already been obtained if these are shared from third party sources.

3. Response

Residents and Councillors should note that not all communications via social media will require a response, or will be responded to. If a matter is intended to be brought officially to the Parish Council's attention, residents should write, in the first instance, to the Council Clerk where it will be discussed at a council meeting. The response

will then be communicated via the minutes of the meeting.
Anonymous communications will be ignored.

4. Responsibilities and Monitoring of Accounts

- a. The Parish Council should appoint a nominated councillor or committee to be responsible for social media. This nominated person, or committee will be responsible for posting and monitoring content, ensuring that it complies with the social media policy.
- b. He/she/they will also act as moderator, overseeing comments made by the public, with the authority to remove any posts which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libellous nature or inappropriate in content. Such posts will be reported to the hosts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) and this action noted by the Clerk.
- c. It is understood that social media platforms operate 24/7, 365 days a year, however it is not expected that they will be monitored continuously and not all messages or comments will be individually responded to. Sending a message via the website or social media will not be considered as contacting the Parish Council for official purposes. However, if communication is deemed relevant then it may be referred to in official meetings for the benefit of updating the Parish Council on issues of potential importance.
- d. Councillors or residents who have concerns regarding content placed on online/social media sites should report them to the clerk of the council

5. Liability

Views expressed by others that remain present on the website or a social media platform are not necessarily endorsed by the Parish Council and the Parish Council is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by others, nor does it accept any responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of reliance upon information posted online.

6. Review

The policy will be reviewed whenever it is considered appropriate to do so but not less than once every two years.

