

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. Background and relevance

This Social Media Policy aims to describe how St Nicholas Hurst Parish Council (SNHPC) will use social media to improve and expand the ways in which it communicates with its local residents, local businesses and the various government (local and central) agencies which it deals with. It sets out what is and is not acceptable usage of social media and complements the general rules in the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

2. Scope

Social media describes a range of websites and online tools which allow people to interact. This includes blogs and postings on a wide range of platforms including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, Instagram and Snapchat. Social media is all about sharing information and people use social media platforms to give opinions, create interest groups and to build online communities and network which encourage participation and engagement. Social media may be used, but is not limited to, the following purposes:

- to post agendas, minutes and dates of meetings;
- advertise events and activities;
- relay good news stories;
- vacancies;
- sharing information from partners i.e. Police, Local Authority and Health etc;
- announcing new information; and
- post or share information from other Parish related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. schools, sports clubs and community groups.

This policy relates to any social media communication published by, or on behalf of, SNHPC or any individual in their capacity as a councillor.

3. Key Principles

Any communication is capable of being misinterpreted. The immediacy of social media and the lack of face to face contact can magnify any problem. Information and comments can be disseminated to a large audience more rapidly than other media. For this reason, extra care needs to be taken given the immediacy and ease of dissemination. Although social media is conversational in tone, it is recorded and it is permanent.

4. Responsibilities and Accountabilities

The Parish Clerk is responsible for all formal communication between SNHPC and members of the public and will be responsible for maintaining the SNHPC's website and other Council social media. However, it is understood that there will be times when individual councillors may be communicating on social media.

5. Procedure

All social media communications from SNHPC will be required to meet the following criteria:

- be civil, tasteful and relevant;
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- not contain content copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright; and
- not contain any personal information, other than required basic contact details. It is not a requirement for councillors to have a personal Facebook or Twitter account or to use other forms of social media to engage with parishioners or otherwise fulfil their role, but this will often be the case. Councillors should always make clear whether they are communicating on social media in their capacity as a councillor or as a private individual. Councillors should ensure that they comply with the Code of Conduct for Councillors whenever they act or appear to act in an official capacity on social media in the same way as with any other form of communication. Whilst independent communications with parishioners are important in order to engage and be approachable, the overarching rules are that councillors should not make commitments on behalf of the Council, not bring the Council into disrepute and always respect confidentiality.

6. Social media guidelines

The following guidelines must be complied with by all employees and Councillors of SNHPC:

- treat others with respect – do not use social media to make personal attacks or indulge in rude, disrespectful or offensive comments;
- comply with equality laws – do not publish anything that might be seen as racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith;
- never bully or harass anyone – do not say anything, that might be construed as bullying or intimidation;
- do not bring the council into disrepute – do not publish anything that could reasonably be perceived as reflecting badly upon or lowering the reputation of you or the Council. Personal attacks on anyone, including Parish Council members or staff, will not be permitted;
- do not disclose confidential information – do not disclose information given to you in confidence by anyone, or information acquired by you which you believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature. This includes any item discussed as a Part II item in a Parish Council meeting;
- consider keeping your personal and councillor profile on social networking sites separate;

- check you have the appropriate privacy settings for any private blog or networking site. Be aware that you will be seen as acting in your official capacity if you publish information that you could only have accessed by being a councillor;
- potential legal issues, libel – if an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation is published, they may consider it as defamatory and consider legal action;
- copyright – using images, text or photos on social media from a copyrighted source, without obtaining permission, is likely to breach copyright laws;
- data protection – personal data of individuals must not be published unless you have their express permission. Personal information in an email or personal exchange should not be presumed to imply any consent to pass it on to others;
- bias and predetermination – councillors should not say anything on social media (or indeed anywhere) that suggests they have made up their mind on an issue that is due to be formally decided;
- do not use SNHPC's social media platform for political purposes to support one party, group, individual or organization over another; for commercial purposes; or, to market products; and
- sending a message/post via social media will not be considered as contacting SNHPC for official purposes and SNHPC is not obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through this channel.

Agreed by SNHPC

Chairman: W Smith

Date: 11/5/2020