



Social Media Policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Social media is the term for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.
- 1.2. It sets out how authorised staff must behave when using the Council's social media accounts.
- 1.3. It also explains the rules about using personal social media accounts at work and describes what staff and councillors may say about the Council on their personal accounts.

2. Why this policy exists

- 2.1. Social media can bring significant benefits to Pembury Parish Council, particularly for building relationships with local residents. However, it is important that employees and councillors who use social media within the Parish Council do so in a way that enhances the Parish council.
- 2.2. All employees, councillors and volunteers are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of Pembury Parish Council.
- 2.3. A misjudged status update can generate complaints or damage the Council's reputation. There are also security and data protection issues to consider.

3. Policy Scope

- 3.1. This policy applies to all staff, councillors, contractors and volunteers at Pembury Parish Council who use social media while working – no matter whether for business or personal reasons or if it takes place on Council premises or while working from home.
- 3.2. Social media sites and services include (but are not limited to) Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

4. Responsibilities

- 4.1. The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
- 4.2. Everyone who operates a Council social media account, or who uses their personal social media accounts at work, or when working from home, has some responsibility for implementing this policy.
- 4.3. In any biography or Social Media account where the councillor is identified as a councillor, the account should state that the views are those of the councillor in

question and may not represent the views of the Council. Use of the Council's logo on a personal account or website should not occur.

- 4.4. When commenting online on any matter relating to the Council, councillors should identify themselves as a councillor and make it clear whether or not they are representing the views of the Council. Councillors must not make anonymous posts nor use a pseudonym to hide their identity.
- 4.5. Councillors are personally responsible for the content that they publish on any form of social media. Publishing or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may amount to libel.
- 4.6. The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the Council's work.
- 4.7. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

5. Basic Advice

- 5.1. **Know the social network** – become familiar with the social network before contributing. Read any FAQs and understand what is and is not acceptable on a network before posting messages or updates.
- 5.2. **If you are unsure – don't post it** – err on the side of caution when posting on social networks.
- 5.3. **Be thoughtful and polite** – observe the same level of courtesy used when communicating via email.
- 5.4. **Look out for security threats** – be on guard for social engineering and phishing attempts.
- 5.5. **Do not commit the Council to an action without checking** – direct any enquiries to the Clerk.
- 5.6. **Handle complex queries via other channels** – further communication should be handled via the most appropriate channel, usually email.
- 5.7. **Do not escalate things** – if in doubt do not post anything.

6. Authorised Accounts and Users

- 6.1. New social media accounts in the Council's name must not be created unless authorised by the Council.
- 6.2. Only staff authorised to use the Council's social networking account may do so.

6.3. The Chair of the Parish Council and Chair of the Community Events Working Group shall be authorised to post on the Facebook page for urgent posts only when the Clerk is absent.

7. Purpose of Social Media Accounts

7.1. Employees should only post updates, messages or otherwise use these accounts when that use is clearly in line with the Council's overall policy.

7.2. Councillors must not disclose information, make comments or engage in activity on behalf of the Council unless they are authorised to do so.

7.3. Employees may use the Council's social media account to:

7.3.1. Respond to residents' enquiries and requests for help and advice

7.3.2. Share articles, press releases and other content created by the Council

7.3.3. Share articles, media and other content relevant to the Council and local area but created by others.

7.3.4. Support events and other local initiatives.

8. Inappropriate content and uses

8.1. The Council's social media sites must not be used to share or spread inappropriate content or to take part in any activities that could bring the Council into disrepute.

8.2. When sharing a post, article or piece of content, employees and councillors should always review the content thoroughly and should not post a link based solely on a headline.

8.3. Social media must not be used to publish content which may result in action for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes, but is not limited to, material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the Council into disrepute.

8.4. Social media accounts set up as a councillor must not be used to promote personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns, whether or not related to the function of the Council.

9. Use of personal social media accounts

9.1. Use of social media accounts for employees for non-work purposes is restricted to non-work times such as breaks and during lunch.

9.2. Employees and councillors should ensure it is clear that their social media account does not represent the Council's views or opinions.

9.3. Employees and councillors may wish to include a disclaimer in social media profiles "the views expressed are my own and do not reflect the views of Pembury Parish Council."

10. Safe, responsible social media use

10.1. The rules in this section apply to any employee or councillor using the Council's social media accounts

10.2. Councillors must be aware of their own safety when placing information on the internet and should not publish something that could leave them vulnerable.

10.3. Any employee or councillor receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their use of social media should report it to the Clerk and/or the Police.

10.4. Employees and councillors must handle personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's Data Protection Policy.

10.5. Employees and councillors must not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal nor release confidential reports/papers.

10.6. Users must not:

10.6.1. Create or transmit material that might be defamatory or incur liability for the Council.

10.6.2. Post message, status updates or links to material or content that is inappropriate. Inappropriate content includes pornography, racial or religious slurs. This definition also covers any text, images or other media that could reasonably offend someone on the basis of race, religious or political beliefs, age, sex, national origin, disability, sexual orientation or any other characteristic protected by law.

10.6.3. Use social media for any illegal or criminal activities.

10.6.4. Send offensive or harassing material to others.

10.6.5. Broadcast unsolicited views on social, political, religious or other non-council related matter.

10.6.6. Send or post messages or material that could damage the Council's image or reputation.

10.6.7. Discuss employees, councillors, customers or suppliers without their approval.

10.6.8. Post, upload, forward or link to spam, junk email or chain emails and messages.

11. Breach of this policy

- 11.1. Failure to comply with this Policy by councillors will be deemed as a breach of the Members Code of Conduct and will be reported to the Monitoring Officer.
- 11.2. Other violations, such as breaching the Data Protection Act 1988 could lead to criminal or civil action being taken against the individual(s) involved.
- 11.3. The Council reserves the right to request the closure of any applications or removal of any content published by employees and councillors deemed inappropriate, or which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council, or put it at risk of legal action.
- 11.4. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you or the Council.
- 11.5. Employees should be aware that where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against you under the Disciplinary Procedure.