



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

March 2024

1. Introduction

The use of digital and social media now enables better and more direct contact between Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council, parishioners, businesses it serves, and the agencies it works and liaises with. Social media is a collective term for the ways to create and publish information via the internet and for the purpose of this policy refers to any digital or social media. This policy details how the Parish Council will use social media to improve and expand the ways in which it communicates with its local residents, local businesses and various government agencies it deals with.

Social media provides an alternative channel to written correspondence, telephone and face to face conversation to enable the Parish Council to inform people who live in, work in and visit the parish. It also enables the Parish Council to deal more efficiently with the various agencies that deliver services to local people. Use of digital and social media will form an integral part of how the Parish Council delivers its services in a way that improves communication between the Parish Council and the people, businesses and agencies it serves and works with. Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council has a corporate presence on the web and an e-mail channel which it uses to communicate with residents, as well as those working in and visiting the parish.

The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur the Social Media Policy will be updated.

This policy outlines the standards we require employees, volunteers and Councillors to observe when using social media. It also details the circumstances in which the Council will monitor employees and volunteers' use of social media and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

2. Scope of the policy

- All employees, volunteers and members are required to read and comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of the council.
- Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under our disciplinary procedure as detailed in the staff member's contract of employment. In serious cases it may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.
- Violation of this policy by members may be in breach of their Code of Conduct

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

- The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy
- The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to work.
- Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk.
- Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

4. Social Media

All communications to and from the Parish Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil respectful and relevant;

- Not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- Nor contain content copied from elsewhere for which it does not own the copyright;
- Not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;
- Will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

The Clerk to the Council is responsible for approving and arranging publication of content to the website, Instagram account and Facebook page. On occasion requests for information may be forwarded to a Member(s) for their consideration and response, which will then be directed back via the Clerk to the Council.

Except as resolved in Council, no member of staff, volunteer or member is to set up a profile, or an additional profile, that represents or purports to represent the Council on any social networking site.

The Clerk will appoint a 'Named Person' to be responsible for maintaining the Council's profile on the relevant social media site's. The Named Person will be required to ensure that all details relating to the Council are kept up-to-date and that any content that they have added to the site is relevant. Members of staff may assist the Named Person at the Clerk's discretion. Only staff are permitted to post material on a social media website in the council's name or on their behalf.

On sites that allow the user to become a 'friend' or 'follower' of other users of the site, the staff shall have the discretion to follow individuals, commercial organisations, public bodies or other groups (i.e. local societies) that may be of interest to the Council, or are relevant to the Council's activities. As far as possible, they should avoid following or befriending users or organisations that hold, or appear to hold, extreme views or opinions, as this might suggest to third parties that the Council endorses the views held by those other users or organisations.

Further rules regarding social media use:

- Commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information should not be disclosed on social media;
- Before including a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit this to be done;
- Do not use the Council's profile to promote commercial activities (unless authorised to do so);
- Avoid publishing contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people not intended to see them and never publish anyone else's contact details

5. Facebook & Instagram

The Parish Council may choose to respond to a comment received, particularly if one response can be considered to address all. In the majority of cases a response isn't made and it is made clear on the site that people should contact the Parish Council through the contact details on the website.

The Parish Council retains the right to remove comments or content that it considers is inappropriate, illegal or libellous. In certain circumstances it may be necessary for a person to be blocked from the Facebook site or Instagram account..

6. Council Website

The Parish Council's website is an integral part of the Parish Council. Its purpose is to communicate with residents, local clubs, societies and organisations as well as external bodies. The Parish Council will aim to ensure that all information within the website is up to date and relevant and will ensure that documents are accessible and will regularly review their accessibility.

The following items may be included:

- Information on local clubs, societies and organisations and events;
- Links to external websites such as East Sussex County Council and Wealden District Council;
- Parish Council agendas and minutes;
- Planning applications for discussion at the Planning and Highways committee meeting;
- Parish Council Financial Information as permitted under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (as amended);
- Parish Council policies and Procedures;
- Parish Council members information; and
- Other items may be included at the Clerk's discretion.

The following will NOT be included:

- Articles affiliated to, or promoting any political organisation;
- Commercial advertisements;
- Publicity for any non-charitable fund-raising event