Social Media Policy

Purpose: To set out how West Wittering Parish Council uses its website and Facebook page to share information with residents in a clear, lawful and proportionate way.

Adopted: WWPC Full Council Meeting Minute Reference: 088/26 iii

Review: Autumn 2029

Introduction

West Wittering Parish Council uses its website and Facebook page to share Council news, public notices, meeting information and community updates. Social media is a useful way to reach residents quickly, but it must be used carefully and responsibly.

This policy explains what the Council will use Facebook and the website for, who may post on behalf of the Council, and how comments, personal data and inappropriate content will be managed.

The same standards apply online as offline. Council communications must be accurate, respectful, politically neutral and consistent with Council decisions.

Scope

This policy applies to the Council website, the official Council Facebook page, and any post, comment or message made by a councillor, employee or authorised representative where they are acting, or appear to be acting, on behalf of the Council.

Who may post

The Clerk is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Council website and Facebook page.

Passwords and administrator access must be kept secure. Access must be removed promptly when someone no longer needs it.

What the Council may post

The website and Facebook page may be used to publish meeting dates, agendas and minutes, public notices, consultations, service updates, emergency or disruption information, Council decisions, project updates, vacancies, grants, events and relevant information from trusted public bodies or local community partners.

Posts must be factual, clear, accessible and politically neutral. The Council will not use Facebook to make formal decisions, run Council business, replace statutory notices, handle complaints, or respond to Freedom of Information or subject access requests. Anyone raising a formal matter online will be directed to the Clerk or the relevant Council procedure.

Comments and moderation

The Council welcomes respectful comments and questions but will not enter into prolonged debate on Facebook. The Council may hide, remove, report or block comments or users where content is abusive, threatening, discriminatory, defamatory, obscene, deliberately misleading, spam, party-political, commercially promotional, breaches privacy or confidentiality, or is otherwise unlawful or inappropriate.

Councillors and personal social media
Councillors are personally responsible for what they post, share or endorse online. If a councillor is acting, claiming to act, or giving the impression that they are acting as a councillor, the Council's Code of Conduct may apply. Councillors must not disclose confidential information, publish personal data without a lawful basis, make commitments on behalf of the Council unless authorised, or present personal opinions as Council policy.

Personal data, photographs and safeguarding
The Council will handle information received through Facebook or the website in line with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018. Personal data, private contact details, complaints, confidential information and sensitive matters must not be published online unless there is a clear lawful basis and it is necessary to do so.

Photographs or videos must be used lawfully and respectfully. Particular care must be taken before publishing images of children, young people or vulnerable adults, and appropriate consent should be obtained where required. Copyright and licence restrictions must also be respected.

Relevant legislation and guidance
This policy should be read alongside the Council's Standing Orders, Code of Conduct, Data Protection Policy, Retention Policy and Complaints Procedure. Relevant legislation includes the Local Government Act 1972, Localism Act 2011, Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004, UK General Data Protection Regulation, Data Protection Act 2018, Equality Act 2010, Defamation Act 2013, Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, Human Rights Act 1998, Protection from Harassment Act 1997, Malicious Communications Act 1988, Communications Act 2003 and Online Safety Act 2023.

Records and review
Important website and Facebook content, formal requests, complaints, incidents and significant moderation decisions should be kept where necessary in line with the Council's retention policy. This policy will be reviewed at least every three years, or sooner if Council arrangements, legislation, guidance or social media use changes.