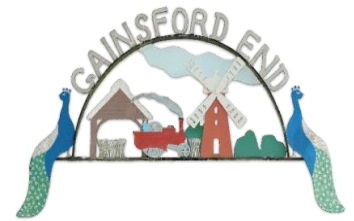




TOPPESFIELD PARISH COUNCIL



Social Media Policy

Aim of the policy:

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice, and to provide guidance to Toppesfield Parish Councillors in the use of online communications, this is collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a term used to describe methods of publishing on the Internet.

The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- *Parish Council website*
- *Facebook, MySpace and other social networking sites*
- *Twitter and other micro blogging sites*
- *YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites*
- *LinkedIn*
- *Bloggs and discussion forums*
- *Parish Council Emails*

This policy applies to Parish Councillors and The Clerk to the Council. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council. This policy sits alongside other relevant policies which need to be taken into consideration.

There will be no direct cost incurred by implementing policy. It will require a volunteer to update and monitor the social media sites.

The use of social media is not to replace existing forms of communication The Parish Council newsletter will remain as part of communicating information about the Parish Council.

Other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore, existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

Councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, and aspects of the Members Code of Conduct apply to the online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What you write on the web is permanent.

Social media policy:

1. A Councillor or Councillors will be appointed by the council to act as monitor(s). They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the social media content, ensuring it complies with the Social Media policy. The moderator will have the authority to remove any posts made by third

parties, which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libel nature. Such post will be reported to the Hosts (I.e. Facebook) and the Clerk.

2. The council will also nominate a “webmaster” to maintain and update the Parish Council Website.

Social media maybe used to

- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked websites or press page
- Vacancies
- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Retweeting or ‘share’ information from partners I.e. Police, Library and Health etc.
- Announcing new information
- Post or Share information from other Parish related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and all other Councillors

Facebook will be used to support the information on the website.

Emails will be used to distribute information of council business.

Councillors are advised to have a separate council and personal email addresses, individual Parish Councillors are responsible for what they post on social media, and are responsible for any online activity conducted via their published email address which is used for council business.

Code of Practice

Guidance when using social media (including email).

3. All social media sites in use should be updated and checked on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.
4. When participating in any online communication;
 - a. Be respectful and responsible; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
 - b. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make misleading or false statements.
 - c. Parish Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All Parish Councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council’s Code.
 - d. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or “loud.” Use sentence case format, not write in red to emphasis points,
 - e. Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
 - f. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
 - g. Never use an individual’s name unless you have written permission to do so.
 - h. Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
5. Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.
6. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.

7. Residents and Councillors should note that not all communication requires a response.
 - a. There will not be immediate responses to communications as they may be discussed by the Parish Council and all responses will be agreed by the Parish Council.
 - b. The Parish Clerk and the moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.
 - c. If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at either the open meeting or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Again the poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.
 - d. If the moderator feels unable to answer a post for example of a contentious nature this shall be referred to the Parish clerk. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Parish Clerk directly.
 - e. Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Parish Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.
8. The moderator or moderators shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libelous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.
 - a. Spell and grammar check everything.
 - b. Correct any errors promptly.
9. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.
10. The Policy will be reviewed annually.

Additional background information (IDeA) 2010

Libel

If you publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation they may take a libel action against you. This will also apply if you allow someone else to publish something libellous on your website if you know about it and don't take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel claim against you will result in an award of damages against you.

Copyright

Placing images or text on your site from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about, or seek permission in advance. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you.

Data Protection

Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission.

Bias and pre-determination -If you are involved in determining planning or licensing applications or other quasi-judicial decisions, avoid publishing anything that might suggest you don't have an opinion.
Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

The council's legal position

Material published by a local authority as an organisation is, for obvious reasons, restricted in terms of content. It must not contain party political material and, in relation to other material, should not persuade the public to a particular view, promote the personal image of a particular councillor, promote an individual councillor's proposals, decisions or recommendations, or personalise issues. Nor should the council assist in the publication of any material that does any of the above.

The Members' Code of Conduct

Councillors can have 'blurred identities, you may have a social media account where you comment both as a councillor and as an individual. Ensure it is clear when you are posting in a private capacity or as a councillor.

Such blurred identities might for example have implications where your views are taken as those of your organisation or political party, rather than your personal opinion.

There is the need to get social media accounts/ profiles clear, to be confident as to what you can't and can say while you are representing the Parish Council.

How you use your online identity will also determine how online content will be treated in respect of the Members' Code of Conduct. Members should comply with the general principles of the Code in what they publish and what they allow others to publish.

Some of the terminology in social media, like 'following' or 'friending' can imply an intimacy that's not really there. Both terms just mean you have linked your account to someone else so you can share information.

Savvy internet users are used to this, but some people can feel a frisson of unease when their council, local police service or councillor begins following them on Twitter before establishing some sort of online relationship. Some councillors wait to be followed themselves first. Do make use of other communication functions that social media allows you. Twitter's 'list' function, for example, can help you to follow local people in a less direct way.

Social media is transparent. The best bloggers admit mistakes rather than try to cover them up (which isn't possible online). Amending your text and acknowledging your mistake; perhaps by putting a line through the offending words and inserting a correction or providing an update section at the bottom of a blog post – shows you are not pretending it never happened, and is much better than just deleting it when dealing with online misfires.

- Avoid the trolls

References

CivicSurf is a blogging programme for local leaders www.civicsurf.org.uk.

Socitm Insight has produced Social Media – Why ICT management should encourage leadership to embrace it (January 2010) and Twitter Gritters: Council use of digital channels in emergencies. (February 2010)

The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) 2010. Connected councillors a guide to using social media to support local leadership. IDeA March 2010

'Connected Councillors – A guide to using social media to support local leadership' LGA