



Stoney Middleton Parish Council Social Media Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Stoney Middleton Parish councillors and Parish staff in the use of online communications, referred to as social media. It also applies to all others who communicate with the Parish council.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook and other social networking sites (Parish Council Facebook Page and Spotted Pages)
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Bloggs and discussion forums
- Email

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication, such as newsletters and publications in The Link magazine. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration. The Code of Practice applies to online activity but is applicable in respect of other written or verbal communication.

Individual parish councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity. In the main, councillors and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Promote good news stories linked to the website
- advertise vacancies

- Share information from partner agencies such as County and District Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Announce new information
- Post or Share information from other parish related community groups
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillors

When using social media (including email) parish councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative. Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative. Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Present personal opinions as that of the council
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- Post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- Use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Post any information that infringes copyright of others
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- Post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation is an offence.

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Councillors' views, posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee meeting, may constitute pre-disposition, predetermination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate parish councillors, council staff or residents should report them to the Parish Clerk. Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken. The Parish Clerk and/or the Responsible financial Officer are responsible for posting, managing and monitoring content and a nominated parish councillor will moderate content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy. The Parish Clerk and/or Responsible financial Officer have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

This policy was adopted on 01 November, 2021;

And will be reviewed in May, 2022