

# Newstead Parish Council - Social Media Policy

## Introduction

Social Media has become an established form of communication, enabling immediate and direct contact between the Parish Council, residents, and partner agencies.

This policy describes how Newstead Parish Council ('The Council') will use social media to improve how it communicates with its parishioners, local businesses, Central and Local Government Agencies, and other relevant parties.

It also sets out what is and is not an acceptable use of social media, ensuring it aligns with the Code of Conduct for Councillors

It is intended that the council will use its social media accounts to disseminate up to date information including, but not limited to:

- Parish Council Meetings
- Other meetings open to the public
- Events arranged by The Council

In addition to this, the council's social media accounts, and in particular its Facebook page, will provide a place for parishioners, local businesses and other organisations to submit comments and suggestions

## Scope

Social Media is defined as *"websites and applications that enable users to create and share content, or to participate in social networking"* and includes, but is not limited to:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- WhatsApp
- Snapchat

Used correctly, social media allows the sharing of information, voicing of opinions, the creation of interest groups, the building of online communities and ultimately enables participation and engagement.

This policy covers any social media communication published via the council's social media accounts, or by any individual in their capacity as a Councillor or employee of the Council.

## Key Principles

Information and comments published on social media are immediate and typically conversational.

However, there are standards that should be followed.

- Due to the absence of face-to-face communication, anything we publish can be misinterpreted, often to a higher magnitude than if it were a conversation in person. Therefore, any comments must be accurate, considered, and informative as they will be permanent and recorded.
- Councillors and employees should also be mindful of any posts they make via personal accounts that could negatively impact the reputation of the council.

## Responsibility and Accountability

Any councillor or employee with access to The Councils social media accounts will be responsible for the administration and moderation of the said accounts to ensure that posts and responses are acceptable and meet the criteria set out in the Criteria section below.

## Criteria

Social media communication from The Council should meet the following criteria:

- All official social media communication must be through the council's social media accounts.
- The tone should always be civil, and the content both tasteful and relevant.
- Content that is deemed illegal, construed as libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful to a person's or organisations reputation, obscene, profane or sexually or racially offensive must not be posted.
- It should not contain material that is copied or shared unless the council owns the copyright or it is licenced in such a way that redistribution is permissible. Examples of the latter may include the sharing of local news items, items from other government agencies or updates from local and national Police.
- Personal information, other than required basic contact details, should not be published.
- It should not include information that infringes any Data Protection Regulations including but not limited to GDPR.

Where councillors or employees have personal social media accounts they should ensure that they comply with the relevant Code of Conduct whenever they act or appear to act in an official capacity on social media in the same way they would for any other form of communication.

Independent communication with parishioners and local businesses is important in raising awareness of the council and helping them engage with us.

The overarching rules are that councillors and employees should not:

- Make commitments on behalf of the council without approval.
- Bring the council into disrepute
- Fail to respect confidentiality.

## Social Media Guidelines

### Respect

Do not use social media to make personal attacks or indulge in rude, disrespectful or offensive comment.

Treat others with respect.

### Equality

Do not publish anything that might be interpreted as racist, sexist, homophobic or anti-faith. Ensure that all posts comply with all equality legislation

### Bullying and Harassment

Do not post anything that may be construed as bullying, harassing or intimidatory.

### Confidentiality

Do not disclose any information that is given to you in confidence by anyone, or information acquired by you which you believe, or ought to be reasonably aware, is of a confidential nature.

### Separation

Check the privacy settings of your personal social media accounts.

Be aware that you may be seen as acting in your official capacity if you publish any information that you could only have accessed by being a councillor or employee of the council.

## Potential Issues

Failing to comply with any legislation may lead to legal challenges being brought against you personally or against the council.

The following is a list of potential legal issues but should not be considered as exhaustive.

### Libel

If you publish an untrue statement about a person or organisation which is construed as damaging to their reputation, they may consider it as defamation and take legal action.

### Copyright

Copyright Law is a complex subject beyond the scope of this policy. However, the posting of any content for which the copyright holder has not given permission would most likely be a breach of copyright law. If in doubt, do not post

### Data Protection

Data Protection legislation is quite clear and should be adhered to. Unless there is express permission, no personal data of individuals should be published on social media or any other form of communication. You cannot presume consent to pass data on to others.

### Bias and Predetermination

Councillors must not publish on social media or any other form of communication that suggests they have made up their minds about an issue that has not been formally decided. Councillors should be prepared to attend meetings with an open mind, weigh all the information and evidence and make an informed decision.

You could be challenged if you have already published your views and/or decision beforehand.