

MUNDESLEY-on-SEA PARISH COUNCIL
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. Introduction

Social media is the term for online tools, websites and interactive media that enable users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.

For the purposes of this Policy, the term “social media” covers sites and applications including but not restricted to Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, blogs, and any similar sites which develop after the creation of this policy. It also includes comments on online newspaper articles.

An overview of the main types of social media can be found at the end of this policy.

Standing Orders Section 20 (a) and (b) also applies to this policy. Furthermore, anyone publishing or causing to be published any comment on social media in regards to Council business, must first, obtain a resolution by Council to do so.

2. Benefits and Risks

The following potential benefits have been identified with the use of social media:

- (i) Ability to connect with harder-to-reach groups;
- (ii) Real-time updates on emerging situations (i.e. as they happen);
- (iii) Heightened level of interactivity;
- (iv) Low cost in comparison with traditional forms of media;
- (v) Enhanced transparency;
- (vi) Building a sense of belonging in a neighbourhood;
- (vii) Increased resident satisfaction levels;
- (viii) Help to reduce social problems like vandalism or racism.

The following risks have been identified with the use of social media:

- (i) Virus or other malware (malicious software) infection from infected sites;
- (ii) Disclosure of confidential information;
- (iii) Damage to the reputation of the Council;
- (iv) Social engineering attacks or “phishing”. This is the act of manipulating people into disclosing confidential material or carrying out certain actions. Social engineering is often conducted by individuals fraudulently claiming to be a business or client;
- (v) Bullying or witch-hunting;
- (vi) Civil or criminal action relating to breaches of legislation;
- (vii) Breach of safeguarding through the use of images or personal details leading to the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.

3. Who this Policy Covers

This policy covers all Councillors. It should be considered in conjunction with the Member’s Code of Conduct for Councillors.

It relates to all use of social media, whether inside or outside of official capacities.

4. Who can use Social Media

The Parish Clerk and the nominated Councillors will have control of any social media sites set up for the Council as a corporate body. It is recommended that in the case of Facebook and similar sites, Councillors wishing to keep their personal life and official capacities separate should create separate accounts.

5. Users' Responsibilities

Councillors using social media should make use of stringent privacy settings if they do not wish them to be accessed by the press and public.

In any biography where the Councillor is identified as a Councillor, the account should state that the views are those of the Councillor in question and may not represent the views of the whole Council. Use of the Council's logo on a personal account or website should only occur with the written permission of the Parish Clerk.

The logo should not be used on sites or applications which are unrelated to or not representative of the Council's official position. If in doubt, contact the Parish Clerk.

Where possible, a Councillor should make clear who they are in the profile of any account and whether they are an authorised representative of the Council, unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as a potential threat to personal security. In such instances, the Council's Clerk must be consulted.

Councillors are personally responsible for the content which they publish on any form of social media. Publishing – or allowing to be published (in the form of a comment) – an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may amount to libel.

Councillors must treat others with respect, avoid personal attacks and not make disrespectful, rude or offensive comments.

Councillors must comply with equality laws contained within the Equality Act 2010, associated legislation and the Council's Equality Policy. They must not publish anything that might be considered sexist, racist, ageist, homophobic or anti-faith.

6. Anonymous Posting

When commenting online on any matter relating to the Council, Councillors should identify themselves as a Councillor (for instance in their profile) and make it clear whether or not they are representing the views of the whole Council. They must not make anonymous posts nor use a pseudonym when making such comments so as to hide their identity.

Councillors who fail to identify themselves as a Councillor in breach of this obligation will be deemed to be acting in their official capacity for the purposes of the Code of Conduct and such failure will itself be a breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

7. Safety

Councillors must be aware of their own safety when placing information on the Internet and should not publish information which could give details which could leave them vulnerable.

Any Councillor receiving threats, abuse or harassment via their use of social media should report it to the Chairman, Clerk and/or the police.

They should use a secure password (generally more than eight characters long and using a mixture of letters and numbers) and never share their password with anyone.

8. Information Protection

Councillors must not disclose information, make commitments or engage in activity on behalf of the whole Council unless they are authorised to do so.

They should not cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers without their prior written consent.

They must handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Council's data protection policies.

Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important that Councillors ensure that they are confident of the nature of the information they publish. Comments posted online are permanently available and can be used by media such as newspapers.

Councillors must not publish or report on meetings which are private or internal or publish exempt committee reports or private papers.

Copyright laws still apply online. Councillors must not use images to which they do not hold the copyright. Information shared should be attributed to the source (i.e. via web link). Councillors must respect fair-use and financial disclosure laws.

9. Best Practice

Councillors must not use insulting or offensive language or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in a workplace. They must show consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered controversial, such as politics or religion.

Social media must not be used to publish content which may result in action for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes but is not limited to, material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the Council into disrepute.

Corporate social media must not be used for party political purposes nor specific campaigning purposes as the Council is not permitted to publish material which "in whole or part appears to affect public support for a political party" (Local Government Act 1986). The Council's corporate social media accounts must not be used for such purposes by a Councillor.

Councillors must not use the Council's social media accounts to promote personal financial interests, commercial ventures or personal campaigns, whether or not related to the function of the Council.

Social media must not be used in an abusive or hateful manner.

Social media must not be used for actions that would put Councillors in breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors.

Use of social media must not breach the Council's misconduct, equal opportunities or bullying and harassment policies.

10. Councils Facebook Page

This page is to be used for information only.

Only authorised admins and the Clerk may post on the page.

Should members of the public wish to raise issues then they must be asked to contact the Clerk.

The FB Page is not to be used to debate issues.

Councillors may only state decisions that have been already agreed by Council and the facts.

Mundesley Parish Councils' Facebook page are not monitored 24/7, and so the

Council will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received.

Although the Council will endeavour to respond to messages and comments received, and

to follow up on any comments, suggestions or concerns raised where appropriate, sending

a message or posting a comment through the Council's website or Facebook page will not

be considered as 'contacting the Council' for official purposes, and the Council will not be

obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information or action through these channels.

Any such requests that require a response from the Council should therefore be emailed to the Council.

TERMS OF USE

By accessing, using or commenting on Mundesleys Parish Council's Facebook page, members of the public agree to be bound by the terms of use set out in this policy and by any individual terms of use displayed on the Facebook page.

The Council reserves the right to monitor and administer its website and Facebook Page as it sees fit. Any communications received which are not in line with this policy or the stated terms of use will be removed as quickly as is practicably possible. Comments submitted to the Council's website or blog may be moderated prior to publication to ensure their suitability and compliance with this policy. Any comments received which are not in line with this policy will not be published.

Mundesley Parish Council reserves the right to monitor and administer content or comments posted on the Council's website or Facebook page by third parties and, at its sole discretion, to remove any content posted thereon. This right is unqualified and will not be subject to explanation on a case-by-case basis. As a guide, comments or content that include any of the following are likely to be removed:

- any instances of obscenity, vulgarity, or abusive language;
- personal attacks, insults, bullying, or threatening language;
- harassment, discrimination or 'hate speech' on the basis of race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, or any other factor;
- potentially false, libellous or defamatory statements;
- plagiarised material or any material that violates copyrights, trademark rights, or other intellectual property rights of third parties;
- private, personal information published without consent;
- unauthorised disclosure of proprietary or confidential information;
- information or links unrelated to the content of the discussion;
- deliberate attempts to create upset, arguments, discord or conflict (trolling);
- commercial promotions, advertisements or spam;
- information which is false or is likely to mislead readers;
- any material in violation of any laws or which alleges a breach of policy or laws.

Users of the Council's online services must not employ false identifiers to impersonate any person or entity or to misrepresent or disguise the true origin or intention of any content or comment. False or anonymous postings are neither necessary nor consistent with the open and honest level of dialogue expected by the Council. Therefore, contributors are expected to use their real names when submitting content or comments. The Council reserves the right to block any third party from commenting on its website or Facebook page, to disallow the use of any screen name or email address, and to terminate any user's posting privileges at any time, including individual and group postings.

Such actions as those outlined above may be taken on behalf of Mundesley Parish Council by the Parish Clerk, the Chairman of the Council, or a duly appointed member of the Council, at the sole discretion of the individual concerned.

11. Breaches of this Policy

Failure to comply with this policy may result in a formal complaint being made to the Monitoring Officer to be dealt with under the Council's Complaints Policy.

Other violations of this Policy, such as breaching the Data Protection Act 1988, could lead to criminal or civil action being taken against the individual(s) involved. The Council reserves the right to request the closure of any applications or removal of any content published by Councillors deemed inappropriate or which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council or put it at risk of legal action.

12. Examples of Social Media

The types and numbers of social media tools are constantly growing and this policy is intended to cover all emerging brands of social media account as well as those listed below:

Facebook: A website and accompanying mobile application on which users create a profile or timeline for themselves where they send and receive requests from "friends" which link their accounts, enabling them to share photos, information and common interests. Accounts can be set to "private". This prevents anyone but a user's approved friends seeing the content.

Blogs: Short for "weblog", this is an online diary and can take the form of a personal website created from scratch and designed by the user, or a template hosted on a site such as Blogger, WordPress or Blogs Today. It is effectively an online diary which can be themed or personal, surrounding an individual's interests or opinions.

Twitter: A microblogging site where users communicate in 140-character statements, including images and links to websites if required. Unlike Facebook (which is essentially private unless you grant access to a 'friend'), Twitter accounts are generally public unless restrictions are placed by the user to make them private. Users attract followers, who do not require permission to read a user's 'tweets' (the name of the messages) unless they are blocked. It can be compared with sending a text message to a virtual message board. Messages can be further shared by 're-tweeting' and public messages exchanged using the "@" symbol and a user's Twitter name or 'handle'.

YouTube: A video-sharing website, where users can view and upload their own videos.

Instagram: a free photo and video sharing app available on Apple iOS, Android and Windows Phone. People can upload photos or videos to our service and share them with their followers or with a select group of friends. They can also view, comment and like posts shared by their friends on Instagram.