

SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1. The popularity of social media over recent years opens up new opportunities for contact and communication. Lyndhurst Parish Council will use social media sites as an additional communication channel to communicate with residents and businesses in the Parish.
- 1.2. The Council will use Facebook and Twitter as its main social media channels of communication but other social media sites may also be used as they become available and popular.

2. Maintaining and Monitoring the Council's Social Media Presence

- 2.1. The Clerk is the Council's appointed officer to manage and moderate its social media accounts. However, any councillor is authorised to make posts on behalf of the Parish Council, except where an exception has been agreed by the Council.
- 2.2. The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator as well as the Clerk who will be responsible for monitoring the content on Council pages and ensure compliance with the Social Media Protocol. The moderator will have authority to immediately without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the Clerk for Council records.
- 2.3. Any Councillor may also make their own posts in their capacity as Councillor using their own social media accounts. These should be in keeping with the Member's Code of Conduct.
- 2.4. The Clerk and Councillors will monitor the Council's social media sites from time to time and may respond to posts as appropriate. Not all posts on social media will require a response and the Clerk will use judgement to determine where this is necessary.
- 2.5. However, sending a message/post via Facebook or Twitter will not generally be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes. Freedom of Information requests and other requests for information will be processed in accordance with relevant legislation. We recommend that official contact with the Council is through normal channels e.g. telephone email or in writing. Details can be obtained by visiting www.lyndhurstparishcouncil.org.uk. People should be advised not to include personal/private information in messages on Facebook / Twitter.
- 2.6. No one will enter into discussions online with posters of contentious or sensitive subject matter. Instead, they will reply that the poster should contact the Clerk by email at clerk@lyndhurstparishcouncil.org.uk.
- 2.7. No one will enter into discussions online with posters who are aggressive or abusive. The Clerk has the authority to remove any inappropriate posts. The Clerk will notify the Facebook / Twitter and block the sender as appropriate.
- 2.8. The Clerk and Councillors are authorised to make posts to social media that are concerned with the following:
 - Advertising meetings and minutes of meetings
 - Providing and exchanging information about services
 - Advertising Parish Council and other community events and activities
 - Sharing Parish Council newsletters

- Posting good news stories
- Advertising staff or Councillor vacancies
- Retweeting or 'sharing' information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc.
- Linking to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct
- Announcing new information agreed by the Parish Council.
- Posting or Sharing information from other Parish related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups
- Responding to resident's queries
- Gathering residents' insights
- Promoting cultural events or tourism for the area
- Supporting community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
- Posting other items as the Council see fit

2.9. The Clerk and Councillors will abide with the following protocol when administering the social media sites:

- All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.
- Be professional; remember that you are an ambassador for the council.
- Be responsible, be honest at all times and when you gain insight; share it with others where appropriate.
- Be credible, be accurate, fair and thorough and make sure you are doing the right thing.
- Be safe, never give out personal details like home address and phone numbers, or any financial details or bank account numbers.
- Try to add value and provide worthwhile information and perspective.
- Do not open a channel of communication you cannot maintain.
- Understand when a conversation should be taken offline.
- Do not engage with users who are aggressive/abusive
- Abbreviations are acceptable but not 'text speak', the response may be useful to all followers so it needs to be comprehensible to all. Capital letters should be used for proper nouns. Check spelling and grammar before any posting. All rules of accessibility and plain English should apply.
- Avoid speculation, keep to facts
- Check with that any information you want to post/tweet is accurate. Social media should be a reliable source of information.
- Remain impartial and politically neutral.
- Community groups, non-profit organisations and partners may have events and information that can be promoted, be mindful of pushing out too much information.
- Do not allow interaction on any websites or blogs to damage your working relationships with others. Do not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies that the Council works with and serves.

- Seek permission to publish original photographs or video from the persons or organisations in the video or photographs before they are uploaded.
- Check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used
- Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff and residents
- Be aware not to publish anything which violates laws or regulations.

APPENDIX 1: GUIDANCE ON USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

A few legal matters first...

Defamation

This term covers libel (written) and slander (spoken) and relates to the publication of any untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation. This also applies if someone is allowed to publish something libellous on the Parish Council's website. If the Parish Council is aware of it and doesn't take prompt action to remove it, a successful libel claim against the Parish Council will result in an award of damages against the Council.

Data Protection

Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless their written permission has been obtained.

Bias and Pre-determination

The Localism Act 2011 sought to remove the concept of pre-determination but it still exists. Although the Parish Council is only a consultee on planning applications, rather than the determining body, it is wise to avoid publishing anything which might suggest that Members do not have an open mind on these matters. The much-quoted example of pre-determination is "over my dead body!"

Copyright

Placing images or text on the website, from a copy-righted source without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything unless permission has been granted. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against the Parish Council.

Obscene Material

Obvious! This is a criminal offence.

The Council's legal position

The Parish Council is apolitical but it is worth noting that party-political material is a misuse of the Parish Council's website. There should be no material included which attempts to persuade the public to a particular view, promote the personal image of a particular councillor, promote an individual councillor's proposals or recommendations, or personalise issues. Nor should the Council assist in the publication of any material which does any of the above.

"Do's and Don'ts" in your capacity as a councillor

- Comments should be respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud". "Loud" is when capital letters are used. Use sentence-case format.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language which could be deemed as offensive, especially in respect of race, sexuality disability etc. should not be published on any social media website.
- Avoid personal attack, on-line fights and hostile communications.
- Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission.

In the main, Councillors have the same legal duties on-line as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. It is useful to remind Members that extra care needs to be taken for electoral campaigning and when writing on planning matters.

It is also worth remembering the Nolan Principles (as enshrined in the Code of Conduct) when working with social media. If a councillor owns a Twitter or Facebook account there are a few key points to note:

- Even if it is a personal account, you are still a councillor, any opinions shared could and would be associated with the Council.
- It is immediate time communication.

- Consider what else is on your account as well as pictures, comments from friends and family Rules for using social media
- If staff or councillors blog or tweet personally and not in their role as a councillor, they must not act, claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.