

Rosliston Parish Council

Social Media Policy

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1. Introduction.

This objective of this policy is to provide Councillors and the Clerk with an overview of Social Media and outline the Councils position on various aspects of their use. In addition, it includes guidelines on Clerk and Councillor responsibilities when using such channels of communication.

2. Definition of Social Media.

Social Media is a term for websites based on user participation and user generated content. They include social networking sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction.

Social media has the following characteristics:-

- Covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs and audio.
- Allows messages to flow between different types of device; PCs, phones and tablets
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or just view information.
- Speeds and broadens the flow of information.
- Provides one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications.
- Communication takes place in real time or intermittently.

Examples of popular social media tools include: Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, You Tube, and Linked In. Groupings of interest are a natural feature of the development of such systems with people with similar interests being attracted to share information. For the purposes of this policy, Facebook is the only tool which Rosliston Parish Council wishes to utilise at this time.

3. Potential pitfalls

Whilst any of the tools above are very useful to share information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of:

- The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world. You do not need to register in many cases to view the content. Registering is only required should you wish to participate and post to the site.
- Groups on specific themes can be set up easily, and then posts edited by the owners of that group to reflect their single interest ensuring theirs is the only voice heard. There is no guarantee of truth and ill-informed comment and gossip is as likely to be found there as useful information.
- The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is all too easy to respond instantaneously which can result in unintentional inflaming a situation. Information can then be shared with other sites and be spread far beyond the intended audience. Friends of friends may not be our friends.

It is also very easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages that would outweigh the value gained in the first place.

4. Purpose of this policy.

Social media provides Rosliston Parish Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of issues relating to the activities of the Council e.g., updates, news, information and sharing relevant information from other agencies. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with the younger age group, the business community and hopefully the harder to reach groups.

The Council will make use of approved social media tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control its use to minimise the risks as stated on the previous page. In the 1st instance this will only include Facebook.

5. Aims and objectives

Social media can be used by the Council as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity.

The aim of this policy is to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of the Council's based services through the use of social media.
- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media.
- The Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media.
- Those users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.
- That the Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected.
- That communication by use of social media is effective, timely, appropriate, useful, engaging with a wider audience and utilises cross-promotion of other Council communication tools e.g., website.

Social media activity isn't something that stands alone. To be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities can be plugged into social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

Reference: Councils Communication Policy

6. Policy statement.

It is acknowledged that there is considerable potential for using social media which can provide significant advantages. The responsible, corporate use of social media is actively encouraged. The following applies equally to the Clerk and Councillors.

The policy provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise the Council's information or computer systems/networks.

Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, and ensure that its use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any other Council policies. Councillors are reminded that the Council's current Code of Conduct also applies to any on-line activity.

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Rosliston Parish Council:

- Be aware of and recognise responsibilities identified in this policy
- Remember that Councillors/Clerk are responsible for the content they publish on any form of social media.
- Members, including the Clerk's personal details will not be disclosed.
- Any personal or sensitive information must be in line with the Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018
- All communications must contain a disclaimer. Councillors/Clerk when using social media for personal purposes must not imply they are speaking for the Parish Council. Avoid use of the Council's email address, logos or other Council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only. The following is offered as a standard disclaimer " Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessary represent the Parish Council's opinions or policies"
- Be aware of obligations: compliance with other policies that the Parish Council has is essential. For example, care should be taken not to breach confidentiality and propriety information policies.
- Show respect. Be respectful of the authority and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong
- Use of the Council's Facebook account must always reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal opinion, particularly when used by a Councillor. If unsure say nothing.
- Comments posted must be accurate, objective, balanced, respectful and informative.

Individuals of the Council are at liberty to set up accounts using any of the tools available but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view. Members of the Council should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, propriety or libellous nature should not be made and care taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.

7. Responsibilities.

The Parish Clerk is the designated "Council" owner of the social media channels agreed by the Council. A Councillor elected by the Parish Council may assist the Clerk to disseminate information. However, all must follow this policy. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Clerk.

8. Guidance for Councillors

The Council encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of local issues and the use of social media can help with this, especially post official Council meetings. Below are some extra guidelines for Councillors to consider for the use of social media during meetings:

- Hand held devices and laptops are permitted for use during meetings to allow environmentally and effective communication. The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings – not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part. The volume on any such devices should be on mute.
- Councillors' tweets/blogs should not be taking place during meetings as this may lead to miscommunication and reflect negatively on the Council when members of the public or other agencies are present at meetings.

- Councillors have a responsibility to take Council business seriously and it is not appropriate for members to use social media to tease or insult other members. Rosliston residents expect debate and to be informed about Council business, not witness petty arguments.
- If the law is broken whilst using social media, for example by posting something derogatory, the Council member will be held responsible.

9. Facebook Strategy

Social networks are rapidly growing in popularity and are used by all ages in society. The most popular social networks are web based, commercial, and are **not** purposely designed for any Parish Council use. For individuals, social networking sites provide tremendous opportunities for staying in touch with friends and family. For the Council the site provides a modern alternative means to communicate with residents of the Parish.

Facebook offers a rich platform for the Council to share unlimited content, including images and videos in connection with Council business.

Examples include:

- Sharing articles/blog posts/expertise
- Start discussions and ask questions to encourage interaction
- Create surveys to encourage participation from visitors
- Upload images and videos (following agreement by the Council)
- Generic news – what’s happening in the area and when.

One of the hallmarks of online networks is the ability to “friend” others – creating a group of others that share interests and personal views. Care should be taken when accepting invitations to friend others within personal social networking sites. Friends will gain access to the Council’s network of contacts on the site.

Good practice guidelines for the use of Facebook by the Council as a body of Councillors/Clerk are:

- As a Council, we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image.
- Post only what we want the world to see.
- Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise Councils policies or personnel.
- Ensure the profile’s security and privacy settings are set carefully.
- All activity on the Council’s Facebook page must follow the Council’s agreed statement of purpose and outcomes for the use of the networking tool.
- Images of young people will not be posted without parental permission. It is the Clerks or nominated Councillor who obtains such permission.
- Only approved personnel- the Clerk and nominated Councillor will have full access to the site. The nominated Councillor is a back-up should the Clerk not be available to respond.
- Statements will only be added following approval of the full Council or the Clerk.
- The site will contain an automated response that “your enquiry will be responded to within 72 hours” thus allowing for Councillors to communicate outside of meetings to obtain an agreed response for those issues the Clerk is unable to respond to.
- No commentary that is deemed to be derogatory, obscene, proprietary or libellous will be used. The Clerk has authority to remove such comments immediately.

- Care must be taken in responding to avoid copyrighted materials and avoidance of breach of GDPR.
- The Clerk or nominated Councillor should weigh whether a particular post puts the effectiveness of the Council at risk.
- The Council does not agree to installing any external applications that work with the social networking site e.g., games or calendar.
- The Clerk will ensure anti-virus and malware protection updates are maintained
- The Council will endeavour to not fall foul to phishing scams.
- If information is found on the social networking site that falls under mandatory reporting guidelines then this must be responded to by the Clerk.