

HEALEYFIELD PARISH COUNCIL



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Review Date: 29 Sep 2022

Next Review Due: Sep 2025

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Aim of the policy

The purpose of this document is to set out a code of practice and to provide guidance to Healeyfield Parish Council councillors and staff in the use of online public communications in the context of social media and the council website, particularly where this is representing the parish council and its work.

The principles of the policy apply to all councillors and the clerk to the council. It is also intended as guidance for others communicating with the parish council in terms of agreeing expectations regarding content and response. This policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to also be taken into consideration.

What is social media?

Social media is the term commonly given to website and online tools that allow users to interact with each other in some way, e.g. by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. This interaction can be through computers, mobile phones and tablet devices. Examples of popular social media tools include Facebook, Twitter, blogs, though new platforms are emerging regularly and therefore this policy is not intended to apply to any specific social media model.

Social media can provide a useful and often more far-reaching alternative to official means of communication such as written correspondence for the parish council to inform and respond to questions and queries raised by the people who live in, work in, and visit the community.

Parish council use of online and social media – code of practice

Online and social media should be used primarily for the following purposes:

- To share information relating to the official business of the parish council, e.g. posting dates of meetings, minutes and agendas;
- To advertise events and activities of potential interest to those who live in, work in, or visit the community;
- To promote newsworthy stories of potential interest;
- To alert the public to vacancies on the council;
- To support local individuals or community groups by sharing information that may be of benefit or interest;
- To announce new information that may be of relevance in relation to the work of the council;
- To function as an alternative platform for residents to express their views or queries to the clerk or councillors, although this will not be treated as being in an official capacity.

The following guidance is also provided to both residents and councillors:

1. When participating in any online communication:

- Be responsible, respectful as well as direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Never make false or misleading statements.
- Parish councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All parish councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure that personal opinions are not published as being those of the council or bring the council into disrepute, especially by contravening the council's other policies.
- Parish councillors should refrain from posting controversial or inflammatory remarks.
- Parish councillors should not present political views.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights, or hostile arguments.
- Permission to publish photographs or videos should be sought from the persons or organisations before being uploaded. It will be assumed that these permissions have already been obtained if these are shared from third party sources.

2. Respect the privacy of other councillors and residents.

3. Residents and councillors should note that not all communications require a response or will be responded to. If a matter is intended to be brought officially to the council's attention, then it may be raised directly with the clerk via email:

contact@healeyfieldparishcouncil.co.uk.

4. The nominated moderator has the authority to remove any posts which may contain personal or inflammatory remarks or which may be deemed inappropriate.

5. Councillors or residents who have concerns regarding content placed on online/social media sites should report them to the clerk of the council.

6. The policy will be reviewed whenever it is considered appropriate to do so but not less than once every three years.

Responsibilities and monitoring accounts

The Clerk is the nominated member of staff responsible for social media platforms. The clerk will be responsible for posting and monitoring content, ensuring that it complies with the social media policy. He/she will also act as moderator, overseeing comments made by the public, with the authority to remove any posts which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libellous nature or inappropriate in content. Such posts will be reported to the hosts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

It is understood that social media platforms operate 24/7, however it is not expected that they will be monitored continuously and not all messages or comments will be individually responded to. Sending a message via the website or social media will not be considered as contacting the parish council for official purposes. However, if communication is deemed relevant then it may be referred to in official meetings for the benefit of updating the council on issues of potential importance.

Views expressed by others that remain present on the website or a social media platform are not necessarily endorsed by the parish council and the parish council is not responsible for the accuracy of content posted by others, nor does it accept any responsibility or liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred as a result of reliance upon information posted online.

Conclusion

The over-riding purpose of any online or social media communication is to provide those with an interest in the work of Healeyfield Parish Council with an additional source of information. It is not designed to replace other official channels of communication, rather to enable more members of the local community to understand the work of the council and to promote greater knowledge of the council's processes, actions and decisions.