TREETON
PARISH COUNCIL
Social Media Policy

Adopted Date:	July 2021
Reviewed	25th Sept 2023
Next Review due:	Sept 2025

1. Introduction

Treeton Parish Council recognises that the Internet provides a unique opportunity to participate in interactive discussions and share information using a wide variety of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. Employees and councillors are likely to use social media in a private capacity outside of work and they may/will also be required to use it in a business capacity as part of their role at the Parish Council.

Employees' and councillors' use of social media in both a personal and business capacity can present risks to our confidential information and reputation, and can jeopardise our compliance with legal obligations. To minimise these risks, we expect employees and councillors to adhere to this policy.

The purpose of this policy is to assist employees and councillors by providing clear guidance about acceptable behaviour on social media both at work and out of work.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees and councillors of the Parish Council.

This policy applies to the use of social media for both business and personal purposes whether during office hours or otherwise. It also applies whether the social media is accessed using Council IT facilities, or equipment belonging to employees or councillors.

3. Definitions

Social media is a type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other, or to share data in a public forum. This includes online social forums such as X, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Linked-In, internet newsgroups and chat rooms. Social media also covers blogs and video and image sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr.

There are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. This policy refers to the examples listed and any new social media which is developed in the future.

4. Using social media sites in the name of Treeton Parish Council.

All posts on behalf of the Parish Council must go via agreed councillors seeking advice from the Clerk as necessary.

Councillors' authority to post will be withdrawn during a defined period before local council elections in order to comply with legislation (Purdah).

Councillors should also be aware that the Electoral Commission requires that candidates provide a return of expenditure on any form of advertising or campaign literature which includes web advertising on their personal social media accounts. Full guidance for candidates can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

5. Personal Safety and Privacy

Employees and councillors need to be aware that the information they post on their personal social media profile can make them identifiable to residents and service users, as well as people they know in a private capacity.

Online sites such as Facebook are in the public domain, and personal profile details can be seen by anyone, even if users have their privacy settings on the highest level, if a user's profile is linked to other sites, any changes to their profile will be updated there too.

Employees and councillors who have set their privacy level to the maximum can have their privacy compromised by 'friends' who may not have set their security to the same standard.

6. Key Principles

Employees and councillors must not:

- use the Cllr or Councillor title on personal social media
- present personal opinions as that of the Parish Council
- bring the Parish Council into disrepute or cause embarrassment, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Parish Council
- disclose commercially sensitive, personal private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Clerk

- post comments on employees or councillors without their prior approval
- upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent. This includes use of an individual's name without written permission to do so; publishing photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others including any link to a third-party website without checking that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- post, forward or link to controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks, engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications as this may constitute bullying or harassment and will bring the Parish Council into disrepute.
- conduct any online activity that is against regulation or law e.g., may be deemed libellous or that constitutes a criminal offence.

Examples of good practice:

- Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Parish Council.
- Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- Consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g., politics and religion.
- Offer routes to enable resolution of concerns and complaints e.g., how to report to Rotherham Borough Council and other statutory bodies

The above examples are not a definitive list but are examples to illustrate what misuse and good practice may look like.

Councillors must avoid posting views in advance of a decision to be debated by the Council or a Committee meeting, that may constitute predetermination or bias. The Localism Act 2011 states that councillors must not have "had or appeared to have had a closed mind (to any extent) when making the decision".

7. Addressing allegations of misuse

Any employee or councillor who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a staff member or councillor onto a social media website should inform the Clerk or Chairperson of the Parish Council who should ensure that all complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly.

For councillors, complaints will be dealt with following the Council's Complaints Policy, with complaints concerning the councillor's conduct being referred to the Rotherham Borough Council Monitoring Officer.

For employees, complaints will be dealt with following the Parish Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

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