



GENERAL & PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

The objective of this policy is to provide Councillors and officers an overview of social media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use.

Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content. They include social networking sites and other sites and has the following characteristics: -

- Covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs, audio.
- Allows messages to flow between many different types of devices, PCs, phones and tablets.
- Involves different levels of engagement.
- Allows communication take place in real time or intermittently.
- This policy applies to the staff who operate social media on behalf of the Council such as Facebook and Twitter. Individual Councillors are not permitted to have control over the or social media pages.

Some pitfalls of social media are that information shared can travel quickly and be viewed by anyone in the world. Responses can be sent instantly which can result in unintentionally inflaming a situation.

Social media allows the Council the opportunity to communicate with a wider audience and sometimes the harder to reach groups.

The Parish Clerk is the designated Council owner of the Council Social Media channels and only the Clerk and other authorised officers can disseminate information. The Facebook pages are attached to the Staffs' personal Facebook page, so they are, therefore, authorised to access the page during working hours when necessary.

If any bad language or inappropriate personal comments are placed on the Facebook page, then these should be removed as soon as possible.

Staff are given delegated powers to operate the pages on behalf of the Parish Council and to only use them, at all times, for the benefit of the Council in: -

- communicating with the residents
- providing updates of what the Council is engaged in
- to advertise Parish Councillor vacancies
- to advertise community events taking place in the Parish and surrounding areas

- If posting information generates any contact from the press the Clerk is authorised to respond to them, providing factual information.
- Ensure that any personal or sensitive information is handled in line with the Data Protection Act.
- Start discussions and ask questions to encourage interaction.
- Upload images and videos

Staff must never: -

- use the page in a way that would bring the Council into disrepute.
- put their own personal views on issues.
- give out people's personal details such as home addresses and telephone numbers.

Councillors must not: -

- use the Facebook page for canvassing purposes
- use their own facebook page in a Councillor capacity although they can comment with a disclaimer ensuring it is clear it is their own personal opinion and not necessarily the Councils.
- Must not test or insult other members of the Council

The Council reserve the right to remove comments received on Facebook that: -

- Contain abusive, obscene, indecent, or offensive language, or link to obscene or offensive material.
- Contain swear words or other sorts of profanity.
- Are completely removed from the topic of conversation or are not relevant to the item posted on the wall.
- Constitute spam or promote or advertise products, except where it is for an event, publication or similar item that has direct relevant to the subject of discussion.
- For serious and/or persistent breaches of the moderation policy, the Clerk has the right to prevent users from posting further comments.

COUNCILLORS' PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

This section provides guidance for members of Northway Parish Council when using their personal social media accounts. It aims to help councillors use social media safely, responsibly, and in a way that maintains public confidence in the Council. This guidance supports the NALC model 'Digital Engagement' principles and should be read alongside the Northway Parish Council Social Media Policy and Council Members' Code of Conduct.

1. Separation of Personal and Council Roles

- Councillors are encouraged to keep their personal and official (council-related) social media activity clearly separate.
- Personal accounts should make clear, where appropriate, that 'opinions are my own and not those of Northway Parish Council.'
- The Council's name, logo, or branding must not be used on personal accounts without express permission from the Clerk.

- Councillors should not claim or imply that they are speaking on behalf of the Council unless authorised to do so.

2. Standards of Conduct and Reputation

Councillors are reminded that the Northway Parish Council Code of Conduct applies whenever their online activity could reasonably be linked to their role as a councillor.

Posts, comments, or shared material must not:

- Bring Northway Parish Council, or local government more generally, into disrepute.
- Bully, harass, or unlawfully discriminate against others.
- Disclose confidential information obtained through council business.
- Make unsubstantiated, misleading, or defamatory statements about individuals, organisations, or fellow councillors.

Councillors should act with the same level of respect and professionalism online as they would in meetings or in public.

3. Use of Images and Media

Councillors should exercise care when posting or sharing photographs, videos, or other media. They should not post content that:

- Is or could be perceived as offensive, discriminatory, or sexually explicit.
- shows councillors or others in situations that could undermine public confidence in the Council.
- Breaches copyright, privacy, or data protection laws.

Images taken at Council events or on Council premises should only be shared where appropriate consent has been obtained from those featured.

4. Online Safety and Security

Councillors are encouraged to:

- Use strong, unique passwords and enable two-factor authentication on all social media accounts.
- Regularly review privacy settings to control who can see their posts or personal information. It is best practice to make personal social media accounts such as Facebook 'private' rather than 'public'.
- Avoid posting personal details such as home addresses or family information.
- Be cautious about clicking on suspicious links or responding to unknown messages.
- Report and block accounts that engage in abuse or harassment, rather than responding directly.
- Inform the Parish Clerk or Monitoring Officer (Tewkesbury Borough Council) if they experience online abuse or harassment linked to their council role.

5. Respectful Communication

- Councillors should always communicate respectfully and constructively online, even when discussing contentious local issues.
- Avoid posting in anger or engaging in online disputes or 'trolling.'

- when in doubt, wait and review a post before publishing — remember that tone can be easily misinterpreted online.

6. Accountability and Good Practice

- Councillors are personally responsible for the content they publish or share.
- Even deleted posts can remain accessible through screenshots or shares.
- A good test before posting is to ask:

‘Would I be comfortable if this appeared on the front page of a local newspaper or was quoted at a Council meeting?’- If unsure whether something is appropriate, councillors should seek guidance from the Clerk before posting.

Summary

This guidance is intended to support councillors in using social media positively and safely. By maintaining high standards of conduct and personal security online, members can help protect both themselves and the reputation of Northway Parish Council.

Adopted: C/246/25