

Weston by Welland Parish Council

Social Media: Code of Practice for Councillors

Weston by Welland parish council (WbWPC) has a **Communications Policy** which sets out the purpose, the principles and the overall means by which the council intends to communicate with residents.

The council hopes to communicate effectively with residents by a number of means, as set out in that policy, and dealt with in more detail in the **Communications Strategy**. The council has considered how to respond to the huge growth on social media platforms, and the impact this has had in recent years on the way many people receive information and live their lives. Consequently, we have established a Facebook page to be used as a further means of conveying information and news. At this stage, however, the council will not use other social media platforms.

This does not mean that individual councillors are not free to use such platforms as they wish. Nevertheless, as elected officials, councillors need to be aware of their position in the community. This **Code of Practice** has been agreed and adopted by the council to act as a guide to councillors.

‘Social media’ is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. This code covers all forms of social media and social networking sites.

The code sits alongside other relevant existing policies for conduct (see website). The current **Code of Conduct** applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Individual parish councillors are responsible for what they post in a council and in a personal capacity. In the main, councillors have the same legal duties as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

The Code

When using social media, including email, councillors must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal or council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative. Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Councillors must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as those of the council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks

- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the parish council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations, or that constitutes a criminal offence

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim will result in an award of damages against you.

Posting copyright images or text on social media is an offence. Breach of copyright will result in an award of damages against you.

Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of data Protection legislation and is an offence.

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Pre-determination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate parish councillors, council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the council.

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

The parish council will appoint a nominated person – the Communications Officer - as moderator of council social media output and be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Code of Conduct.

(Approval date 29.11.2023)