



HIGHWOOD PARISH COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. Introduction

Social media encompasses a range of digital technologies that allow people to share information, build relationships, and express opinions. Highwood Parish Council uses social media to provide an additional means of communication with residents, clubs, societies, and businesses and to share information with anyone interested in the villages.

All conduct on social media channels must accord with the Council's existing policies:

- Code of Conduct for Councillors
- Grievance & Disciplinary Procedures
- Combined Safeguarding Policy for Children, Young People & Vulnerable Adults
- Data Protection Policy

This policy also covers traditional media (newspapers, journals, magazines, etc.) and is designed to ensure the Council's communications are open, transparent, honest, and lawful.

2. Definition

Social Media refers to all types of electronic media where people can discuss and communicate freely over an open network. Examples include, but are not limited to, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and similar platforms.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all Parish Councillors, employees, and contractors when using social media or dealing with traditional media on behalf of the Council or in a way that could affect the Council's reputation.

4. Using Social Media

4.1 General Principles

Councillors and employees should use the same safeguards as with any other form of communication concerning the Parish Council.

All communications should be accurate, respectful, and in line with the Council's values of openness, transparency, and inclusivity.

Content must be accessible, using plain language and, where possible, inclusive practices such as alt-text for images.

4.2 Official Social Media Channels

Highwood Parish Council will use the Highwood Parish Council Facebook page as its official social media channel.

The Facebook page is administered and monitored by a designated councillor (not the Clerk).

The designated councillor is responsible for ensuring that all content is appropriate, accurate, and in line with this policy.

In the first instance, if a councillor or employee has information they believe would benefit the community, they should send it to the Clerk for review and potential sharing. In emergencies or if the Clerk is unavailable, the Chairman or Vice Chairman should be consulted.

The Council reserves the right to remove any inappropriate or non-compliant content from its official channels.

4.3 Monitoring and Moderation

The designated councillor will regularly monitor the Facebook page for inappropriate content, breaches of policy, or legal issues.

Any concerns or incidents should be reported to the Clerk and Chairman immediately.

The Council will provide training and guidance to the designated councillor and all users of official channels.

5. Use of Social Media by Employees

Employees and contractors are encouraged to use social media responsibly as part of their work to engage with the community.

When representing the Council, employees must:

Ensure communications have a clear purpose and benefit for the Council.

Obtain permission from the Clerk or appropriate committee before launching public campaigns.

Have content checked by a colleague before publication.

Employees must not use social media to:

Bring the Council into disrepute (e.g., by criticising or arguing with colleagues, councillors, or the public; making defamatory comments; or posting inappropriate content).

Breach confidentiality or data protection laws (see Section 7).

Breach copyright or intellectual property rights.

Engage in discriminatory, bullying, or harassing behaviour.

6. Use of Social Media by Councillors

Councillors must distinguish between information published by the Parish Council (e.g., member pages on the Council's website) and personal blogs or posts, which are the sole responsibility of the individual councillor.

Councillors should be aware that personal social media activity may still be subject to the Code of Conduct if it affects the Council's reputation.

Councillors must not post party political material, promote a particular view or councillor, or personalise issues on official Council channels.

Councillors should avoid posts that could indicate predetermination or bias, especially regarding planning or licensing matters.

Councillors must comply with the Code of Conduct, including treating others with respect and not publishing confidential information.

7. Legal and Regulatory Compliance

7.1 Defamation and Libel

Publishing untrue statements that cause 'serious harm' to someone's reputation is defamatory and may result in legal action. This applies to original posts, shares, and retweets.

7.2 Copyright and Intellectual Property

Do not use images, text, video, or other content without permission or proper acknowledgement. Breach of copyright may result in legal action.

7.3 Data Protection

Do not publish the personal data of individuals unless you have their explicit written consent, in compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.

The Council will ensure all social media activity complies with current data protection legislation.

7.4 Obscene Material

Avoid publishing anything that could be considered obscene or offensive. Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

7.5 Bias and Predetermination

Councillors involved in decision-making must avoid social media posts that suggest a closed mind on matters under consideration.

8. Media Relations (Traditional Media)

The Clerk is the first point of contact for all officer-related media enquiries.

Where appropriate, the Clerk will respond to calls or arrange interviews with councillors.

The Council's approach to media is:

Open, transparent, honest, proactive, and helpful.

Supportive of media requests for photographs, interviews, and reasonable information.

The Clerk, staff, and councillors will:

- Promote the reputation of the Council.
- Respond quickly and effectively to media enquiries.
- Respect the confidential nature of information held by the Council.

9. Crisis and Emergency Communications

In the event of an emergency or crisis, the Council will coordinate all media and social media communications through the Clerk or designated spokesperson(s) to ensure accurate and timely information.

10. Training and Support

The Council will provide training and guidance for councillors, employees, and the designated social media administrator to ensure compliance and effective communication.

11. Breaches and Consequences

Breaches of this policy may result in disciplinary action for employees or a Code of Conduct complaint for councillors.

The Council reserves the right to remove inappropriate content from official social media channels.

12. Accessibility and Inclusion

The Council will strive to ensure all communications are accessible and inclusive, using plain language and accessible formats where possible.

13. Contact Details

Clerk to Highwood Parish Council

clerk@highwoodparishcouncil.gov.uk