Old Catton Parish Council
Social Media Policy

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Parish Councillors, Council staff and others who engage with the Council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

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1. Introduction

Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content, including social media sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction.

This Policy is intended to help Councillors and Council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media, and to outline Old Catton Parish Council's position on various aspects of its use, including the management of comments made by members of the public when using OCPC's social media sites.

It includes standards and guidelines for Councillors and Council staff to observe when using social media as a channel for communication, the management of public comments, and the action to be taken in respect to breaches of this Policy.

This Policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):
- Old Catton Parish Council website
- Social networking sites, for example Facebook
- Micro-blogging sites, for example 'X' (formerly Twitter)
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

This Policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction with, all other Policies and Procedures adopted by Old Catton Parish Council. The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Over time Old Catton Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services the Council delivers. When these changes occur this Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements. This Policy may be amended at any time.

2. How social media will be used by the Council

Social media may be used for:

- Engagement with individuals and communities for the promotion of Council based services, decisions and actions
- Supporting local democracy
- Distribute in whole or part information from Council notices, agendas, approved minutes and dates of meetings
- Information specifically agreed to be communicated via social media at Council meetings
- Advertising events and activities that Old Catton Parish Council has organised or co-organised or supports as being beneficial for the community
- Sharing good news stories relevant to the local area
- Announcing new information relevant to people living in or around Old Catton
- Providing and exchanging information about local services and events
- Support community cohesion, neighbourliness and resilience
- Gathering local residents' insights
- Promoting cultural events or tourism in the area
- Advertising vacancies
- Re-sharing relevant information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health, etc
- Post or re-share relevant information from local community groups for community benefit such as information from community associations, community groups, schools, sports clubs, Scouts/Guides and charities
- Link to appropriate websites and other social media accounts of sites or organisations that meet the Council's expectations of conduct
- Post other items as the Council sees fit

Councillors and staff should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

Old Catton Parish Council runs its social media pages so that it can pass information on to residents quickly. Social media accounts will not necessarily be checked daily and posts will not necessarily be responded to. Old Catton Parish Council's social media accounts are primarily a tool to pass information on.

Though Old Catton Parish Council is keen to hear residents' views, it will not be able to take comments made on its social media accounts as official comments, particularly on planning applications. In order to manage the messages received, residents will be asked (if necessary) to forward their comments to Old Catton Parish Council. This can be done by emailing the Parish Clerk, by contacting a Parish Councillor or by attending a monthly meeting.

3. **Who is covered by this Policy?**

    The principles of this Policy apply to elected and co-opted Parish Councillors, Council staff and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy).

    All Councillors and staff are expected to comply with this Policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.

    Individual Parish Councillor and Council staff are responsible for what they post, both in a Council and personal capacity.

    In the main, Parish Councillors and Council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

    The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of serious breaches of this Policy by employees. This may include unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually orientated or racially offensive comments by an employee.

    Volunteers in breach of this Policy will result in the Council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.

    The behaviour required in the Councillor's Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Councillors will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the Code does not apply.

    Councillors must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking.

    Councillors and staff must remember that communications on the internet are permanent and public.

    When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement should it be made public.

    A Councillor or Council staff member's behaviour on any social media site must be consistent with the behaviour required generally.

4. **Code of Practice**

    When using social media, Councillors and staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

    Councillors and staff should not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face.

When participating in online communication, Councillors and staff must:

- Be responsible and respectful, ensuring posts are positive, informative and balanced
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors, staff and residents
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud' (ie use sentence case format and not write in capital letters or red to emphasise points)
- Seek permission to publish original photos or videos (posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence so Councillors and staff must ensure any information does not infringe copyright).
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council and never hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Be objective, balanced, informative and accurate
- Spell and grammar check everything

Parish Councillors and Council staff must not:

- Give out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers.
- Use an individual's name in social media communications or post information about an individual unless given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection Legislation)
- Present personal opinions as that of Old Catton Parish Council. If a Councillor or member of staff communicates online personally they must not claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council, ie they should not include weblinks to official Council websites, Council logos, Council email addresses or any other Council identification as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
- Councillors may not individually communicate online in an official capacity. All communication from Old Catton Parish Council must be issued from the Clerk.
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council; they must protect the good reputation of the Council
- Make false or misleading statements
- Post personal or political content, content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Made derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive comments about any person including Council staff, Councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies the Council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment. Language that may be deemed offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Engage in personal attacks, online fights, hostile communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others
- Publish photographs or videos or minors without parental permission
- Post any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in court action)

- Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence)
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence
- Bring the Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity

Councillors views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or committee meeting may constitute Predisposition, Predetermination 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 Parish Clerk for referral to the moderator(s) and/or the Council as required.

5. Managing social media accounts

The Parish Clerk will be responsible for posting content on Council website and social media pages. The Parish Clerk will delegate this to the Administration Assistant as required.

The Parish Clerk will be the Council social media moderator to ensure all Parish Council social media output and content complies with the Social Media Policy.

The Parish Clerk, acting as moderator, will have authority, without notice or comment, to remove any posts from Council social media pages which are deemed to be of an inflammatory, defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts may also be reported to the hosts (ie Facebook) and will be formally recorded.

The Parish Clerk, acting as moderator, will also have the authority to block or ban access from an individual or company's account to Old Catton Parish Council's social media pages.

When participating in online communication, Old Catton Parish Council will generally allow posts on its social media pages from members of the public that:
- Are responsible and respectful
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors, staff and residents
- Are objective, balanced, informative and accurate

Posts may be deleted and the holder of the account banned if a comment or post:
- Gives out the personal data of others on social media, including home address and telephone numbers
- Mentions an individual's name in social media communications or post information about an individual unless deemed reasonable (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation)
- Makes intentionally false or misleading statements
- Includes potentially inflammatory, defamatory, libellous or offensive remarks

- Makes derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive comments about any person including Council staff, Councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses or agencies the Council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Uses language that may be deemed offensive, in particular relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief
- Engages in personal attacks, online fights, and/or hostile communications
- Includes the publication of photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Includes any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action)
- Includes obscene material (publication or some obscene material is a riminal offence and is subject to custodial sentence)
- Conducts any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

It is ultimately up to the moderator, on behalf of Old Catton Parish Council, as to whether a post will be deleted and/or an account blocked.

The Parish Clerk will also be responsible for checking the correct security settings are in place on the social media sites used.

Councillors may assist the Parish Clerk to disseminate information however all must ensure they follow this policy.

No social media account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk or full Council.

This Policy will be reviewed annually, unless required earlier by Legislation or additional material.

Adopted: 10th January 2022
Reviewed: 15th January 2024