

WESTERLEIGH PARISH COUNCIL



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Policy Statement

This policy is intended to help Councillors and Council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as emails, blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards, or comment on web-articles, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media websites.

This policy outlines the standards the Council requires Councillors and staff to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

Who is covered by this policy?

The policy covers all individuals working at all levels with the Council, including ALL elected and co-opted Councillors, the Clerk and all other employees and volunteers.

The scope of this policy

The Council has a corporate presence on the web and by use of email, which it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit the parish. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications.

All members 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.

Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure. Disciplinary action may be taken in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments by an employee.

Behaviour required by the Members Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written and verbal communication. Members shall bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity. Posting remarks on the internet means they have been published in a way that cannot be contained. Online content should be balanced, informative and accurate.

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

It must be remembered that communication, 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.

Rules for using social media

- Staff and Councillors should not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others.
- They should not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, Councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies the Council works with and serves.
- Posts must not contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic details
- Staff and Councillors should not engage in 'trolling' behaviour in any circumstances as it could bring the council in disrepute (*)
- If staff or Councillors blog or tweet personally, and not in their role as a Councillor, they must NOT act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council
- All staff and Councillors must ensure they use Council facilities appropriately.
- The Clerk shall be the nominated person to update the Council website which may be used to
 - i) Post notices and minutes of meetings
 - ii) Advertise events and activities
 - iii) Post good news stories
 - iv) Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct
 - v) Advertise vacancies
 - vi) Retweet or 'share' information from partners i.e. police, District Council etc....
 - vii) Announce new information appropriate to the Council
 - viii) Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefits
 - ix) Post other items as the Council see fit.
- Staff and individual Councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published email address, which is used for Council business.

- When participating in online communication staff and Councillors must:
 - i) Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent
 - ii) Disclose their identity and position within the Council
 - iii) Never make false or misleading statements
 - iv) Not present themselves in a way that may cause embarrassment. They must protect the good reputation of the Council.
 - v) Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council
 - vi) Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud'. Use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points and always put a subject heading on emails
 - vii) Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media sites.
 - viii) Avoid personal attacks, online fights or hostile communications
 - ix) Not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face
 - x) Never name an individual or third party unless they have written permission to do so
 - xi) Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from persons or organisations in the photograph or video before they are uploaded
 - xii) Respect the privacy of other Councillors, staff and residents
 - xiii) Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel or copyright
 - xiv) Spell and grammar check everything

- Councillors and residents should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.
- If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by Council it may be raised as an agenda item for consideration. The source of this information shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case and invited to contact the Clerk. Any response agreed by Council shall be recorded in the Minutes of the meeting.

- Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the Council as required.

(*In [Internet slang](#), a **troll** ([/ˈtrɔʊl/](#), [/ˈtrɒl/](#)) is a person who sows discord on the Internet by starting arguments or upsetting people, by posting inflammatory,^[1] [extraneous](#), or [off-topic](#) messages in an online community (such as a [newsgroup](#), forum, [chat room](#), or blog) with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an [emotional](#) response^[2] or of otherwise disrupting normal on-topic discussion,^[3] often for their own amusement.

This sense of the word "troll" and its associated verb **trolling** are associated with Internet discourse, but have been used more widely. Media attention in recent years has equated trolling with [online harassment](#). For example, mass media has used *troll* to describe "a person who defaces Internet tribute sites with the aim of causing grief to families."^{[4][5]} In addition, depictions of trolling have been included in popular fictional works such as the [HBO television program *The Newsroom*](#), in which a main character encounters harassing individuals online and tries to infiltrate their circles by posting negative sexual comments himself.

