

Tilney St. Lawrence Parish Council

Social Media Policy

The Social Media Policy was adopted by the Parish Council at its meeting held on: 04/09/2023

1. Introduction

The objective of this policy is to provide councillors and staff an overview of Social Media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use. In addition, it includes guidelines on officer and councillor responsibilities when using such channels of communication.

2. Definition of Social Media

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

Social media has the following characteristics:

- Covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs, audio
- Allows messages to flow between many different types of device; PCs, phones and tablets (e.g. iPad)
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or just view information
- Speeds and broadens the flow of information
- Provides one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications
- Allows communication to take place in real time or intermittently

Examples of popular social media tools include: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, LinkedIn and Google Plus. Groupings of interest are a natural feature of the development of such systems with people with similar interests being attracted to share information.

3. Pitfalls

Whilst these tools are very useful to share information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of:

- The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world. You do not even need to register in many cases to view the content. Registering is only required should you wish to participate and post to the site.
- Groups on specific themes can be set up easily and posts then edited by the owners of that group to reflect their single interest, ensuring theirs is the only voice heard. There is no guarantee of truth and ill-informed comment and gossip is as likely to be found as much as useful information.
- The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is all too easy to respond instantaneously which can result in unintentionally inflaming a situation. Information can then be shared with other sites and be spread far beyond the intended audience. Friends of Friends may not be our Friends.

It is also very easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages that would outweigh the value gained in the first place.

4. Purpose of the Policy

Social media provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities, providing updates, news, information, and retweeting relevant information from other sources. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with a younger age group, the business community and hopefully otherwise harder to reach groups.

The Council may make use of approved social media tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control its use in order to minimise the risks as stated above.

5. Aims and Objectives

Social media can be used by the Council as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity.

The aim of this Policy is to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of Council based services through the use of social media
- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media
- That Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media
- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation
- That the Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected
- That communication by use of social media is effective, timely, appropriate, useful, engages with a wider audience and utilises cross-promotion of other Council communication tools

Social media activity isn't something that stands alone, to be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities can be plugged in to social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

6. Policy Statement

It is acknowledged that there is considerable potential for using social media which can provide significant advantages. The responsible, corporate use of social media is actively encouraged. The following applies equally to Officers and Members.

This policy provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems/networks.

Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly, and ensure that its use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Tilney St Lawrence Parish Council:

- Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy.
- Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.

- Never give out personal details of others such as home address and telephone numbers.
- Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act.
- Use a disclaimer. When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the Council. Avoid use of the Council e-mail address, logos, or other Council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only. Where possible, you should include a standard disclaimer, such as: "Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent the Council's policies or opinions".
- Know your obligations: you must comply with other Council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach Council confidentiality and proprietary information policies.
- Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong.

Councillors are at liberty to set up accounts using any of the tools available but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect the Council's view. Councillors should always present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary, or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.

7. Responsibilities

The Parish Clerk is the designated 'Council' owner of the Council Social Media channels agreed by the Council. Councillors officially appointed by the Council may assist the Parish Clerk to disseminate information. However, all must ensure they follow this policy. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk.

Individual Councillors are at liberty to set up their own accounts but they should ensure they comply with this policy and ensure the 'personal view' disclaimer is used.

8. Guidance for Councillors

Social media and meetings The Council encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of Tilney St Lawrence Parish issues and the use of social media can help with this, especially during official Council meetings. Below are some extra guidelines for Councillors to consider for the use of social media during meetings:

- Handheld devices and laptops are permitted for use during meetings to allow environmentally friendly and effective communication. The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings - not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part. Ensure the volume on all electronic devices is turned to 'mute'.
- Councillors' tweets/blogs during Council meetings should refer to the discussions which are taking place at the meeting - tweeting/blogging about other subjects will show the public and other attendees at the meeting that you are not engaging properly in the meeting.
- Councillors have a responsibility to take Council business seriously and it is not appropriate for members to use social media to tease or insult other members. Tilney St Lawrence Parish residents expect debate and to be informed about Council business, not witness petty arguments. Remember that if you break the

law using social media (for example by posting something defamatory), you will be personally responsible.

9. Channels and responsibilities

i. Website

The Parish Council manages one web site hosted by Norfolk Parishes: <http://tilneystlawrencepc.norfolkparishes.gov.uk/>. This is normally continuously available.

The Clerk to the Parish Council is responsible for publishing content to the web site.

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Parish Councillors for consideration and response.

We may not respond to every comment we receive particularly if we are experiencing a heavy workload.

ii. Email

The Parish Council maintains two email address': clerk@tslclerk.org and jackiechristie@tslclerk.org

The account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday to Friday 10am to 12noon, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can and within 5 working days.

The Clerk to the Parish Council is responsible for dealing with e-Mail received and passing it on to the relevant Councillor or external agency to deal with.

The recognised procedure for the sending of emails from the Parish Council to residents, businesses and organisations is that they will be sent by the Clerk. Where parish councillors need to communicate with residents, businesses and organisations they should, preferably send their email to the Clerk. Where for reasons of expediency this is not practical the email concerned should be copied to the Clerk.

iii. Twitter

The Parish Council does not operate a Twitter channel.

iv. Facebook

The Parish Council operates a Facebook channel

v. Nextdoor

The Parish council operates a Nextdoor channel

vi. Youtube

The Parish Council does not operate a YouTube channel.

It is not intended to use any other forms of social media for official use by Tilney St Lawrence Parish Council. However, this is subject review.

Councillors are entitled to use any form of social media they wish to but must abide by this policy when doing so.