West Horsley Parish Council

Social Media Policy

1. **What is social media?**
   1.1. Social Media is defined as websites and applications such as, but not exclusively, Facebook and Instagram, that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

2. **Why should we as a Parish Council engage in social media?**
   2.1. We already do via our website; however, the increased use of mobile devices means that residents, particularly younger residents, use their phones rather than their laptops to keep abreast of current events. The size of these devices means that viewing a whole website is more difficult. Information has to be passed in short bursts and can form an effective way of rapidly informing a wide audience.

3. **Why should the Parish Council have a social media policy?**
   - To define the goals for Parish Council social media activity
   - To ensure that the Clerk and Councillors are aware of the standards and processes that are in place and are using the most appropriate channels
   - To protect the Parish Council's reputation from inappropriate use of social media

   3.1. The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to West Horsley Parish Councillors, the Clerk, the Deputy Clerk and others who engage with the Parish Council using social media. In the main, Parish Councillors, the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites.

   3.2. Social media does not, and is not intended to, replace existing forms of communication e.g. Newsletters, Noticeboards etc. The current Code of Conduct applies to social media activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Individual Parish Councillors and Parish employees are responsible for what they post in a Parish Council capacity.

4. **Social media may be used to:**
   - Advertise Parish Council events and activities
   - Announce new information from the Parish Council
   - Promote links to news stories on the West Horsley Parish Council website
   - Advertise Parish Council vacancies
   - Share information from trusted partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health, Weather, Utilities etc.
   - Post or share information from other Parish community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities

   4.1. Social media will NOT be used to engage in debate.

   4.2. When using social media Parish Councillors, the Clerk and Deputy Clerk must be mindful of the information they post in a Parish Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

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

4.4. The Parish Council social media 'Webmaster' and Moderator shall be the Clerk. Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media that denigrates Parish Councillors, the Clerk, Deputy Clerk or residents should report the content to the Clerk to the Council.

4.5. Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative and must comply with the Parish Council Code of Conduct.

4.6. Parish councillors and staff must not:

- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms.
- Present personal opinions as that of the Parish Council.
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Parish Council.
- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Parish Council.
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without written parental permission on a Parish Council photography Permission template.
- Post any information that infringes the copyright of others.
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous.
- Post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment.
- Bring the Parish Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity.
- Publish personal data of individuals without permission as this is a breach of Data Protection legislation, GDPR and is an offence.
- Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

Adopted: 20th February 2024

Next Review: February 2026

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