

Willaston 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 platforms in their work with Willaston Parish Council. Social media refers to all forms of online communication and content sharing platforms. While these platforms continue to evolve, they currently include social networking sites such as Facebook, microblogging services like X (formerly Twitter), photo and video sharing platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, as well as various discussion forums, community groups, and messaging services.

This policy outlines the standards the Council requires councillors and staff to observe when using social media, including how the Council manages and monitors its social media presence, the process for dealing with policy breaches, best practices for effective community engagement, and essential security and data protection requirements.

As a comprehensive governance document, this policy supplements and should be read in conjunction with several other key Council policies, including the Communications Policy and the Members' Code of Conduct.

The primary aims of this policy are to:

- Protect the reputation and integrity of the Council
- Ensure compliance with legal requirements and regulations
- Promote effective and responsible use of social media
- Maintain professional standards in online communication
- Safeguard council members, staff, and the public

This policy and the use of social media may be amended or withdrawn by decision of the Council at any time.

Scope and Application

This policy applies to all individuals representing or working on behalf of Willaston Parish Council. This includes all elected and co-opted councillors, the Clerk to the Council, and any other council employees. The policy applies whenever individuals are communicating in their official capacity, regardless of whether they are using Council-managed accounts or personal accounts.

The Clerk to the Council shall be the nominated moderator of parish council social media accounts. The Clerk will be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with this Social Media Policy. The Council may appoint additional moderators to assist the Clerk and ensure consistent coverage of its social media channels if required.

Implementation Responsibilities

1. The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.
2. The Clerk is responsible for:
 - Monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy
 - Making recommendations for changes to minimise risks
 - Acting as the moderator for social media accounts
 - Providing guidance on policy application
 - Managing compliance and breaches
3. All councillors and staff must:
 - Read and understand this policy
 - Comply with its requirements
 - Report any breaches to the Clerk or Chairman
 - Seek clarification when needed
4. Questions regarding policy content or application should be directed to the Clerk.

Approved Social Media Uses

The Council may use social media for the following purposes:

1. Council Information:
 - Meeting notices, agendas, and minutes
 - Council decisions and updates
 - Policy changes and consultations
 - Service updates and changes
2. Community Engagement:
 - Council-organised events and activities
 - Local initiatives and projects
 - Community feedback and surveys
 - Emergency updates and alerts
3. Partnership Communication:
 - Shared content from Cheshire East Council
 - Police and emergency service updates
 - Local community group information
 - Public service announcements
4. Administrative Matters:
 - Council vacancies and recruitment
 - Tender opportunities
 - Training and development opportunities
 - Volunteer opportunities

Standards of Conduct

All members and staff must comply with this policy to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community. The behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct applies equally to online activity as it does to other written or verbal communication.

Members should be mindful that:

- Inappropriate conduct can damage the Council's reputation
- Posts made on the internet are permanent and public
- Online statements should be considered as carefully as verbal statements
- The same standards apply to both online and offline communication

The Council will take appropriate action in cases of serious breaches of this policy, including cases involving unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening language. Additionally, the Council will take action in the event of discrimination on the grounds of:

- Age
- Gender reassignment
- Being married or in a civil partnership
- Being pregnant or on maternity leave
- Disability
- Race including colour, nationality, ethnic, or national origin
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Posting Standards and Guidelines

1. Account Management:

- All official posts must come from Council-managed accounts
- Posts must identify the moderator using initials
- Personal accounts must not be used for official communications

2. Content Standards:

- Use professional, clear, and consistent language
- Check spelling and grammar before posting
- Include relevant images or graphics where possible
- Provide accurate and factual information
- Include relevant links to official sources

3. Visual Content:

- Obtain permission before using photographs or videos
- Ensure parental consent for images of children
- Use high-quality, appropriate images
- Include alternative text for accessibility

4. Response Management:

- Acknowledge messages as promptly as practicable
- Provide factual, concise responses
- Redirect detailed queries to appropriate channels
- Maintain professional tone in all interactions

Councillor Interaction Guidelines

1. Personal Account Usage:
 - Clearly distinguish personal views from Council positions
 - Do not use personal accounts for official Council business
 - Share official Council posts rather than creating new content
 - Avoid commenting on Council posts from personal accounts
2. Content Sharing:
 - Share only official Council posts for Council matters
 - Ensure shared content remains current and accurate
 - Do not modify official Council content
 - Include appropriate context when sharing
3. Online Engagement:
 - Direct queries to official Council channels
 - Avoid online debates about Council business
 - Maintain professional conduct in all interactions
 - Report inappropriate content to moderators

Content Management and Moderation

1. Comment Management:
 - Review social media activity as part of the Clerk's regular duties
 - Remove inappropriate or offensive content when identified
 - Document removed content and reasons
 - Provide clear guidance for acceptable comments
2. Crisis Communication:
 - Follow established emergency protocols
 - Coordinate with relevant authorities
 - Provide regular, accurate updates
 - Monitor and address misinformation
3. Data Protection:
 - Comply with GDPR requirements
 - Protect personal and sensitive information
 - Obtain necessary permissions for content sharing
 - Maintain appropriate records
4. Quality Control:
 - Regular content review and updates
 - Consistent cross-platform messaging
 - Archive outdated content appropriately

- Regular policy compliance checks

Review and Updates

This policy will be reviewed if required by:

- Changes in legislation or regulations
- Changes in social media platforms or usage
- Identified improvements or issues
- Council requirements

The review will be conducted by the Clerk in consultation with Council members and approved by the full Council.

This policy was approved by the Council on 28th January 2025.

Appendix - A Non-Exclusive List of Suggested National Occasions Upon Which To Post To Social Media

- New Year's Day
- Holocaust Memorial Day
- Good Friday
- Easter Sunday
- Commonwealth Day
- VE Day
- The King's Official Birthday (Second Saturday in June)
- VJ Day
- Remembrance Sunday
- Armistice Day
- Christmas Day