



## **South Wonston Parish Council** **Social Media Policy**

**Adopted by South Wonston Parish Council 13<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

### **1. FOREWORD**

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to give guidance to councillors, staff, volunteers and those who correspond with the Parish Council using social media. This policy is meant to help the entire above make the right decisions about the use of social media and to outline South Wonston Parish Council's (SWPC) position on various aspects of its use and management of comments by local residents. Included are standards and guidelines for councillors, staff, volunteers and the public to observe when using social media, for the management of public comments and for actions to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy. This policy will cover SWPC's website, official email, parish councillor email accounts, Facebook pages and use of public sites such as South Wonston Eye and will be updated if SWPC decides to expand its channels of online communication. It should be read in conjunction with other relevant policies and procedures and the Code of Conduct, aspects of which apply to online activity in the same way as they do to other written or oral communications. Councillors should consider their role in the Parish Council and take care what they say. They have, in the main, the same legal duties as other people, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

### **2. HOW SOUTH WONSTON PARISH COUNCIL WILL USE SOCIAL MEDIA**

The Parish Council will use social media to promote its services, decisions and actions, to support local democracy, to publish notices, agendas, approved minutes and dates of meetings, to advertise events and activities organized, co-organized or supported by SWPC, to draw attention to positive local news stories, to announce new items relevant to the parish, to provide information for new and existing residents (the Directory), to canvas residents' opinions via surveys and questionnaires, to advertise council vacancies, to post and share information from other parish related community groups, clubs, associations and bodies, such as the Primary School and sports groups, and to share information from partners such as Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council, Police and other accredited agencies. Facebook will be used to support the Parish Council website. Emails will be used likewise to distribute information about council business.

### **3. CODE OF PRACTICE FOR COUNCILLORS, COUNCIL STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

#### **DO:**

- ✓ Be responsible and respectful. Keep posts positive, informative, balanced, objective and accurate.
- ✓ Respect the privacy of other councillors, staff, volunteers and residents.
- ✓ Seek permission to publish original photos or videos. Don't infringe copyright.
- ✓ Disclose your identity and affiliation to SWPC. Differentiate between your public and private capacity and follow the Code of Conduct if it applies to you. If you decide to use your personal social media account for council business rather than SWPC's Facebook page, make it absolutely clear that you are acting as a councillor, council employee or volunteer with all that signifies. Spelling and grammar: check everything if you're not sure.

#### **DON'T:**

Give out others' personal data such as addresses and telephone numbers. Use an individual's name, refer to personal circumstances or post information about an individual unless given permission (breach of Data Protection Act 2018).

Present personal opinions as those of SWPC or claim to be acting as a representative of SWPC if you aren't.

Behave in any way that might embarrass the Parish Council.

Make false or misleading statements, derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive comments on the grounds of race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief about any individual or business/agency, bully or harass, threaten or engage in personal attacks, online disputes or hostile and persistent communications or destroy professional relationships.

Publish photos of minors without parental permission, libelous information, obscene material or undertake any online activity which breaks laws or regulations or could bring the Parish Council into disrepute, including matters posted in a personal capacity.

### **4. GUIDELINES FOR THE PUBLIC**

SWPC will allow communications online from members of the public that are:

- ✓ Responsible and respectful of the privacy of councillors, staff, volunteers and other residents
- ✓ Objective, balanced, informative and accurate.
- ✓ Posts may be deleted and the correspondent banned if:
  - Personal data of others on social media such as addresses and telephone numbers are given out
  - Reference is made to an individual's name without permission

- False or misleading statements are made, including potentially inflammatory, defamatory, discriminatory or offensive comments about any person involved with SWPC in any capacity
- Posts are made which are bullying, harassing, use offensive or threatening language, make personal or libelous remarks, contain obscene material or unauthorized photos of minors or otherwise demonstrate unlawful activity. Deliberately vexatious and persistent correspondence is dealt with in a separate policy.

The relevant legislation referred to below is equally applicable to members of the public.

## **5. PARISH COUNCIL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT**

The Clerk will be responsible for posting general information on social media and the Parish Council website. This includes notices of events and activities, information for new and existing residents, forthcoming elections, council vacancies, information from Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council, Police etc, dates of council meetings, agendas, approved minutes, Pavilion facilities, classes and groups, booking arrangements and terms and conditions.

The Chair and Vice Chair will undertake the role of Moderators, and will be responsible for monitoring and ratification of content, ensuring compliance with the Social Media Policy. Content includes posts submitted by councillors, council staff and volunteers in their Parish Council role for inclusion in social media, third party posts, notifications, policies and press statements. These will be signed off by the Moderators in the same way as comments and items for local news are currently. The Moderators will also be responsible for all final published responses. It should be noted that not all communications require any or an immediate response but acknowledgements will be appreciated. Before a response can be made, a query may necessitate discussion in full council as an agenda item, and the correspondent should be notified about time and date so they can attend the meeting if they wish. The agreed response should be included in the Minutes and copied to the correspondent.

The Moderators shall remove any negative posts containing inflammatory or personal remarks, libelous or defamatory information. Such posts will be reported to the hosts of the social media site and recorded for the Parish Council. The Moderators may also block or ban access to correspondents in breach of the Social Media Policy. An explanation should be offered to the correspondent and an opportunity given to withdraw their statement if it is a case of minor rather than major infringement. The above applies to both council members, staff and volunteers and members of the public. Dubious content should be reported to the Moderators.

A Webmaster will be appointed to maintain and update the Parish Council website, especially its security settings.

Requests for links to other websites will be considered and approved or disallowed by the Parish Council at monthly meetings.

## **6. LEGAL MATTERS**

Legislation relevant to this policy includes the Data Protection Act 2018, the Communications Act 2003 (persistent use of a public electronic communications network), the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (discrimination), the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, the Malicious Communications Act 1988 (threatening behaviour), the Public Order Act 1986 (threatening, abusive, insulting words or behaviour, unlawful violence, disorderly behaviour causing harassment, alarm and distress), the Criminal Damage Act 1971 (endangering life) and the Offences against the Person Act 1861 (threats to kill).

It should be noted that the articles of the European Convention on Human Rights, which are still valid in the UK, don't confer an absolute right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom of expression (Articles 9 and 10) but discrimination on grounds of sex, race, colour etc is prohibited (Article 14).

The Parish Council's content must not contain party political material or promote a particular political view. Nor should it promote a particular councillor's private personal image, proposals, decisions, recommendations or personal issues. An individual's personal data must not be published without express written permission to avoid infringement of the Data Protection Act 2018.

If an untrue statement about a person is published which is damaging to their reputation, they might take a libel action against the perpetrator which, if it succeeds, could result in an award of damages against the council. Allowing someone to publish something libelous on council social media knowingly and not taking direct action to remove it similarly exposes the Parish Council to a libel claim.

Using images or text from a copyrighted source without permission is likely to breach copyright. Publishing anything without making sure of its status or without seeking permission could result in the award of damages against the council.

Involvement in determining planning applications, licencing applications or similar semi-judicial decisions implies that councillors should not publish material suggesting they don't have an open mind, which could invalidate the decision. Pre-disposition, predetermination or bias may require a declaration of interest at the council meeting and withdrawal from discussion and voting.

The publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

During election time, candidates must return a form of expenditure on advertising or campaign literature, including web advertising. These should not breach standards

for downloadable materials. Guidance should be sought from the Electoral Commission.