

Heighington Parish Council

Social Media Policy

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Version: 3.0

Amended by: Clerk

Date approved: Full Council 08/06/26

Amendments: File renamed to be consistent with other policies. Review against latest model templates and also against other local councils' policies – some amendments made.

Reference to WhatsApp. Email address updated.

Minute: 055/M/26

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Amended by: Clerk

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Amendments: Major revamp based on a LALC and SLCC model template(s). Reference to the adopted Social Media Policy Supplement (Civility and Respect).

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Created by:

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Heighington Parish Council Social Media Policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to parish councillors, council staff and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media. This policy sits alongside the Council's adopted Social Media Policy Supplement¹ (produced as part of the Civility and Respect project²).

What is Social Media?

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which are currently used by Heighington Parish Council:

- Parish Council website: <https://heighington.parish.lincolnshire.gov.uk/>
- Parish Council Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/p/Heighington-Parish-Council-Lincolnshire-100069389131749/>
- Nextdoor forum, covering Heighington – <https://www.nextdoor.co.uk>
- Email
- Messaging apps

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication and the council will always try to use the most effective channel(s) for its communications.

Responsibilities

The current Code of Conduct adopted by this council, applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Individual parish councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

Council Use of Social Media

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Publicise good news stories via a linked website or press page
- Advertise vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as principal authorities, police, library, health etc – providing a link to the source organisation where possible

¹ Adopted 13/02/23

² <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/civility-and-respect-project>

- Announce new information
- Post or share information from other parish-related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Positively promote our community
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and other councillors

No formal/statutory council business will be conducted over social media. The 'official' means of publication for formal/statutory council information remains the council's website and the noticeboard outside the Spar.

Social Media Code of Practice

When using social media (including email), parish councillors and council staff must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Communications from the council will meet the following criteria:

- Be accurate, objective, balanced and informative
- Be civil, tasteful and relevant
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive
- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright
- Not contain any personal information
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising
- Confidential information which is not in the public domain (i.e. confidential reports or information not already on the council's website or in published minutes) will not be shared
- Official council social media will be administered by the clerk or other members of staff as nominated by the clerk

In order to ensure that all discussions on council social media are productive, respectful and consistent with the council's aims and objectives, we ask that these guidelines are followed by all who post:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats or abuse of language will not be tolerated
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including council members or staff, will not be permitted
- Share freely and be generous with official council posts, but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due
- Stay on topic

- Refrain from using the council's social media for commercial purposes or to advertise, market or sell products

The council's social media is not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.

Sending a message/post via social media will not be considered as contacting the council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information or services through these channels. Instead, direct contact should be made with the Parish Office in person, by telephone (01522 790846) or via the council's email (parishoffice@heighington-pc.gov.uk).

We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist comment
- Personal attacks, insults or threatening language
- Potentially libellous statements
- Plagiarised material or any material in violation of laws, including copyright
- Private or personal information published without consent
- Information or links unrelated to the council content
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Information which alleges a breach of the council's policy or the law

The council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resource available. We may not respond to every comment we receive via social media and for some posts, we may turn off comments.

Parish Council Website

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information.

Email

The parish council email (parishoffice@heighington-pc.gov.uk) is only monitored during normal office hours (Monday – Thursday, 9:00 – 13:00), and we aim to respond to any

queries as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message will be used outside working times, from Thursday afternoon to Monday morning.

Personal information will not be forwarded on to other individuals or organisations outside the council, unless specific consent is given.

Formal Council announcements, press releases and public statements

Social media should not solely be used to make announcements about significant or potentially controversial council decisions or activities. Such announcements shall be the responsibility of the clerk (or designated officer) on behalf of the council, and a formal press release will be prepared and issued.

Internal communication and access to information within the council

The council is continually looking at ways to improve its working and the use of social media and electronic communications is a major factor in delivering improvement.

WhatsApp usage is restricted to informal information sharing only amongst councillors and officers.

Councillors are expected to abide by the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and the Data Protection Act in all their work on behalf of the council.

As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors and staff are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone. This will include being careful who gets copied in on information and when forwarding on an email, considering whether it is appropriate to include the full email trail or not. Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through prescribed procedures.