



Council Meeting – 26 September 2019

Agenda Item – CC2041/19

Social Media Policy

Introduction

Amendments have been made to the Council's Social Media policy (attached).

Discussion

Following the election in May, a number of Councillors suggested that amendments be made to the Social Media policy to best encourage use amongst Members to engage with their constituents.

I believe I have made the necessary changes to facilitate, not prohibit, social media use by Councillors whilst providing guidelines on how best to utilise social media as an elected Member of the council.

Recommendations

- That, subject to any changes, the amended Social Media policy is approved for adoption.

Ryan Bennett
September 2019



SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY (DRAFT)

1. POLICY STATEMENT

Parish Councillors and staff are encouraged to use social media platforms to communicate and engage with the residents of Croxley Green effectively, responsibly, and in accordance with approved operational standards. Councillors equally have a responsibility to ensure that their private use of internet, social media and e-mail does not impact adversely on the council and its business or breach council code of conduct.

2. POLICY AIMS

The key aims of the policy are to:

- Promote efficient and effective use of social media to best serve the residents of Croxley Green.
- Provide councillors with guidance on their responsibilities when using social media.
- Ensure that the Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to the use of social media in both Council and private use, acknowledging that there is often a 'blurring' of councillors' formal duties and their private activities.

Council Use: - Use for legitimate council business consistent with the duties and responsibilities of a councillor.

Private Use: - Private use in a councillor's own time which may have an impact on the council.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA

'Social Media' is the collective term commonly given to websites and web applications that are used to discuss, debate and share information online.

The Council has official Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts.

5. LEGAL LIABILITY

The Council may be held liable for any statements made as a result of a councillor's use of social media.

Defamation

- Communicating a defamatory statement about an individual either within, or outside, of the council. The council and the councillor personally could be sued for damages and criminal penalties could also apply.

Harassment and Discrimination

- Communication of offensive remarks, for example, the distribution of sexually explicit or offensive material relating to an individual's personal characteristics, perceived characteristics or those of someone connected to them as defined within equality legislation. These actions are capable of forming the basis of a complaint of harassment and bullying and liability can fall on both the council and the offending councillor.

6. BEST PRACTICE WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

All Councillors are encouraged to use social media to help engage with the residents of Croxley Green.

When using social media, Councillors should:

- 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.
- Comply with other Council policies when using social media.
- Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the Council, employees and councillors. Derogatory comments are always wrong.

If Councillors feel that they can offer an adequate response to questions about the Council on social media then they are encouraged to do so. Councillors can always recommend that an individual contacts the Parish Council office directly for further information.

If Councillors feel more comfortable creating a separate social media account for Council business, then they should contact the Clerk about setting one up using their council@ email address.

Parish Council Social Media Accounts

The **official** Croxley Green Parish Council social media sites are set up and operated under the guidance of the Proper Officer, and should not be operated by councillors themselves.

7. PRIVATE USE OF INTERNET, SOCIAL MEDIA & EMAIL

The council respects a councillor's right to freedom of expression when privately using the social media in their own time. Councillors should however, ensure that they do not inadvertently or otherwise engage in online conduct that could undermine their obligations as a Croxley Green parish councillor. Information posted on social media sites is in the public domain regardless of privacy settings. The author is responsible for the information posted and is legally liable for any breach or omission arising from his/her actions.

If commenting on social media, on a matter which may impact or be associated with Croxley Green Parish Council, councillors must make it clear that they are not commenting in an official capacity and that the views expressed are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council.

Should councillors become aware of negative or disparaging remarks about the council or its services, they should inform the Proper Officer.

Councillors should be aware that colleagues, residents and third parties often have access to the material they may post on social media and as such this should be kept in mind when publishing information online that can be viewed by more than friends and family.

8. REVIEW

POLICY ON USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Councillors using the Internet, social media and e-mail for Council or private purposes must not:

Communication

- Transmit confidential or sensitive information relating to individuals or any aspect of the council's business over the internet, social media sites or via e-mail (other than by council approved, secure systems for external e-mail).
- Publish material or a comment that could undermine public confidence in the council or misrepresent the council and its services.
- Post derogatory comments about the council, its staff or decisions made by the council.
- Publish inflammatory comments about council staff.
- Post expressions of anger or abuse against another councillor.
- Publish untrue statements about another councillor or staff which could damage their reputation or working relationships.
- Post comments to newsgroups on behalf of the council unless authorised to do so.

General

- Purchase goods or services, or conduct other transactions over the Internet in the council's name without proper authorisation in accordance with relevant council procedures in force at the time.
- Use the council's logo on personal web pages or social media sites.

At all times, Councillors must remember that they alone do not set Council policy. Only resolutions by full council can set policy direction for Croxley Green Parish Council.

Sanctions

In the event of potential breach of this Policy the matter will be referred to the HR and Compliance Committee to investigate and take appropriate action. In the case of staff this would take the form of the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and in the case of Councillors the Committee would determine the most appropriate response.

Date Adopted:

Date of Review: