



# Helsby Parish Council

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## SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

**Version 1 – adopted by Council on 8 March 2021**  
**Last Committee review .....**

### 1. Introduction

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. The use of social media does not replace the council's existing forms of communication.

### 2. Definition

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 include (but are not limited to):

- Parish council website
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Email

### 3. Principles and purposes

The principles of this policy apply to parish councillors and council staff and to others communicating with the parish council. The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies and council documents which also need to be taken into consideration. The council's Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Share good news stories linked to websites or press pages
- Advertise vacancies

- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as principal authorities, police, library, health etc.
- Announce new information
- Post or share information from other local community groups such as schools, sports clubs and charities
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and other councillors

#### 4. **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. Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

Parish councillors and council staff must not:

- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the council
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes the copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

#### 5. **Risk**

In the main, councillors and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. Misuse of social media content that is contrary to the above and to other council policies could result in action being taken. Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on the council's social media site. Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence and can result in an award of damages. Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of data protection legislation and is an offence. Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence

and is subject to a custodial sentence. Councillors views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the council at a council or committee meeting may constitute Pre-disposition, Predetermination or Bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.

**6. Role of the Moderator and Parish Clerk**

The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator of parish council social media output. This person will be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with this, and other relevant policies.

The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the clerk of the council.

Signed.....  
Chairman - Helsby Parish Council

Signed.....  
Clerk / RFO of Helsby Parish Council