Hockley Heath Parish Council

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Social Media Policy

For Hockley Heath Parish Council

Version: 4.0

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Document Information

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1.0	18/01/2018	Clerk	Adopted
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To be reviewed May 2028

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR HOCKLEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Parish Councillors and employees in the use of online public communications, collectively referred to as social media.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of self-publishing on the internet. The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- Youtube and other video clips and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Parish Council Emails

Who does it apply to?

The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors and all Parish Council employees.
It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing polices which need to be taken into consideration.

Use of Social Media

The use of social media will not replace existing forms of communication. The Parish Council website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore, existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

Individual Parish Councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for Council business. Councillors are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses, and adhere to **The Members' Code of Conduct.**

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Advertise vacancies
- Retweeting or 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc
- Announcing new information
- Post or Share information from other Parish related community groups /clubs /associations /bodies e.g. schools, sports clubs and community groups
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk and/or Parish Councillors

The Policy

1. The Council will appoint a nominated member of staff or Councillor as moderator. They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from Hockley Heath Parish Council's social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the Clerk.

2. The Clerk will maintain and update the Parish Council Website

3. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that appropriate security settings are in place.

4. When participating in any online communication Councillors and Parish Council employees must;
a. Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
b. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
c. Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All Parish Councillors and employees need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies.
d. Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or write in red to emphasis points.
e. Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
f. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
g. Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
h. Never publish photographs or videos on social media sites without permission from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.

5. Respect the privacy of other Parish Councillors and residents.

6. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations*, see below libel and copyright.*

7. Residents and Councillors should note that <u>not all communication requires a response</u>.
a. There will not be immediate responses to communications as they may need to be discussed by the Parish Council and a response agreed by the Parish Council.
b. The Parish Clerk and the moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.
c. If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at either the public session or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors.
d. If the moderator feels unable to answer a post (for example of a contentious nature) this shall be referred to the Parish Clerk and if appropriate the Clerk will respond directly.

e. Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Parish Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.

8. The nominated moderator or moderators shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libellous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.

9. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.

10. The Parish Council has a right to respond to inaccurate or libellous comments from residents and other third parties that have been placed on social media sites not managed by the Parish Council. The Parish Council will refrain from being drawn into debates on Social Media but may choose to respond to inaccurate comments, libellous comments or personal attacks on Parish Councillors or employees, past and present, that are brought to the Council's attention. Any responses/clarification from the Parish Council to any such comments/posts will be made in the minutes of meetings and/or on the Parish Council website.

11. The Policy will be reviewed every two years.

Original date of approval and adoption by Hockley Heath Parish Council - **18th January 2018, minute reference number 1668.1.**

Date of review and adoption by Hockley Heath Parish Council - **22nd October 2020, minute reference number 112.1.**

Date of review and adoption by Hockley Heath Parish Council – **18th May 2023, minute reference number 124/23.3 (Annual Meeting).**

Glossary

Libel If you publish an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation they may take a libel action against you. This will also apply if you allow someone else to publish something libellous on your website if you know about it and don't take prompt action to remove it. A successful libel claim against you will result in an award of damages against you.

Copyright Placing images or text on your site from a copyrighted source (for example extracts from publications or photos) without permission is likely to breach copyright. Avoid publishing anything you are unsure about, or seek permission in advance. Breach of copyright may result in an award of damages against you.

Data Protection Avoid publishing the personal data of individuals unless you have their express written permission.

Bias and pre-determination If you are involved in determining planning or licensing applications or other quasi-judicial decisions, avoid publishing anything that might suggest you don't have an open mind about a matter you may be involved in determining. If not, the decision runs the risk of being invalidated.

Obscene Material Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence.

Additional background information (IDeA) 2010