

Dunster Parish Council

Social Media Policy

Adopted on 11th May 2026

1. Policy statement

- 1.1. This policy is intended to help Councillors and Council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as emails, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other relevant social media websites.
- 1.2. This policy outlines the standards the Council expects Councillors and staff to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.
- 1.3. This policy supplements and should be read in conjunction with all other policies and procedures adopted by the Council, such as the Equal Opportunities Policy, Complaints procedure, Data Protection Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Members Code of Conduct.
- 1.4. This policy does not form part of any contract of employment, and it may be amended at any time.

2. Who is covered by this policy

- 2.1. This policy covers all individuals working at all levels with the Council, including all elected and co-opted Councillors, the Clerk to the Council and all other employees and volunteers, where posting on official Council social media or acting in the official capacity of a Councillor.

This policy does not apply to someone posting under their own name if they are not acting as a Councillor. E.g Mrs J Bloggs: 'I think the Prime Minister is an XXXXX' then is different to Councillor J Bloggs: 'I think the Prime Minister is an XXXXX'.

3. The scope of this policy

- 3.1. The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy. All members are always expected to comply with this policy to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.
- 3.2. Behaviour required by the members code of conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more

likely it is, they will be acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking. It must be remembered that communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a closed council group (e.g. committees or working groups) it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement should it be made public. Be honest and open, but mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council. A comment showing an a dedicated Council account by a know Councillor will give the appearance of being associated with the Council and may bring the Council into disrepute.

3.3. Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Employee Disciplinary Procedure. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments by an employee.

3.4. All employees, volunteers, and members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. You are personally responsible for content you publish.

4. Rules for using Council social media.

4.1 Staff and Councillors should not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, Councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses and agencies the Council works with and serves.

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council.
- Never make misleading statements.
- Not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. They must protect the good reputation of the Council.
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative. Never condescending. Use sentence case format, not capital letters, do not write in red to emphasise points.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Do not post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face.
- Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so and do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.

- Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the photograph or video before they are uploaded. You must check that there is parental permission before photos or videos of children are used.
 - Respect the privacy of other Councillors, staff and residents.
 - Never post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel or copyright.
 - Check spelling and grammar before posting.
 - If staff or Councillors blog or tweet personally, and not in their role as a Councillor, they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council. They should not include web links to official Council websites as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
- 4.2 Anyone who feels that they have been harassed or bullied or are offended by material posted or uploaded by Council members, volunteers or staff should inform the Town Clerk.
- 4.3 Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information. Never publish any one else's contact details. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Town Clerk.
- 4.4 The Town Clerk will be the nominated person to act as moderator. They will be responsible for monitoring of the content on Council pages, ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The Town Clerk will have authority to instruct Councillors to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such post may also be reported to the Hosts (e.g. Facebook) and the Council for its records.
- 4.5 The Council will appoint a nominated "Webmaster" to maintain the Town Council Website. The Clerk will update the website which may be used to:
- Post notices and minutes of meetings
 - Advertise events and activities
 - Post news stories
 - Link to appropriate websites or press page if those sites meet the Council's expectations of conduct
 - Advertise vacancies
 - Retweet or 'share' information from partners i. e. Police, Library, District Council, etc.
 - Announce new information appropriate to the Council.

- Post or Share information promoting bodies for community benefit such as schools, Scouts, sports clubs and community groups
 - Post other items as the Council see fit.
 - Facebook and/or Twitter, etc, may be used to support the website and its information as above.
- 4.6 Staff and individual Councillors are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address, which is used for Council business. Both staff and Councillors are strongly advised to have separate Council and personal email addresses.
- 4.7 Residents and Councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.
- 4.8 If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised at either Public Question time or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- 4.9 All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure the security settings are in place. Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the Council as required. Misuse of social media can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give risk to legal liability against the Council. You should be aware that any use of social media (whether accessed for Council purposes) may be monitored and where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken.
5. The Policy will be reviewed annually.

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