Woodbury Parish Council

(serving Exton, Woodbury and Woodbury Salterton)

Social Media & Press Policy

Introduction

The use of digital and social media now has a clear and compelling impact on all areas of local government enabling better and more direct contact between the Parish Council, the people and businesses it serves and the agencies that it works with.

Social media provides an alternative channel (to written correspondence, telephone and face to face conversation) for the Parish Council to inform and respond to questions and queries raised by people who live in, work in and visit Woodbury parish. It can also enable the Parish Council to deal more efficiently with the various agencies (e.g. the surrounding parishes, district council and the county council) that deliver services to local people.

The policy is intended to provide guidance to council staff, parish councillors, volunteers and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media. The principles of the policy apply to staff, councillors, in certain circumstances volunteers and to others communicating with the Parish Council.

Press releases and our relationship with the Press is important and helps us communicate with residents and to raise the profile of the Parish Council within the Community.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members Code of Conduct.

The Councils approach to the media should be:

- Open and honest
- Proactive
- Responsive and timely
- Information

What is Social Media?

Social media is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Prominent examples are:

- Facebook is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues.

- Twitter is a free microblogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets. Twitter members can broadcast tweets and follow other users' tweets by using multiple platforms and devices.

The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include, but are not limited to:

- Parish Council website and email;
- Facebook, Myspace and other social networking sites;
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites;
- YouTube and other video clips and podcast site;
- LinkedIn, Blogs and discussion forums.

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

The Social Media and Press Policy

This Social Media & Press Policy aims to describe how the Parish Council will use social media and Press to improve and expand the ways in which it communicates with its residents, local businesses and the various government (local and central) agencies that it deals with. The Parish Council has a corporate presence on the web and an email channel which it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit Woodbury parish.

The Parish Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. We may ask those who contact us for their preferred channel of communication when we deal with them.

Over time, the Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these changes occur, the policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements as appropriate.

Channels and Responsibilities

Parish Council website is hosted by “Parish Council Websites” and is normally continuously available. The Parish Council will maintain one website www.woodburyparishcouncil.gov.uk and the Clerk/Assistant is responsible for publishing content to the website.

Where necessary, we may direct those contacting us to our website to see the required information, or we may forward their question to one of our Parish Councillors for consideration and response.

The Parish Council may, at its discretion, provide information of approved local groups and promote the group’s activities for the benefit of residents. The group would be responsible for providing correct details; however the Parish Council reserves the right to remove any or all a local group’s information from the website.

Parish Council email

Our email account is monitored mainly during office hours, Monday – Thursday, 9.30 am till 12.30pm and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can and within 10 working days. The Parish Council will maintain one email address for direct contact currently it is clerk@woodburyparishcouncil.gov.uk

The Clerk/Assistant is responsible for dealing with emails received and if necessary, sign posting it to a third party to deal with.

The recognised procedure for the sending of emails from the Parish Council to residents, businesses and organisations is that they will be sent by the Clerk. Where Parish Councillors need to communicate with residents, businesses and organisations they should, preferably, keep to the recognised procedure by sending their email to the Clerk. Where for reasons of expediency this is not practical the email concerned must be copied to the Clerk. This procedure was adopted to ensure that a complete and proper record of all correspondence is kept.

Parish Council Twitter / Facebook page

Parish Council Twitter channel @Parishwoodbury and Facebook page is for all Parish Council news and updates.

Facebook will be used as a notification method and not as a form of a two-way communication and is complementary to other existing forms of communication.

Our rules and expectation

Most online communities have their own rules and guidelines, which we will always abide by.
We promise that any communications (this includes all content on the Parish Council's website) from the Parish Council will meet the following criteria; equally, we expect any communications to the Parish Council to also meet these criteria.

- be civil, tasteful, relevant, open and honest;
- not contain content that is unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive;
- not contain any personal information, other than necessary basic contact details;
- will be moderated by the Clerk or a nominated representative;
- Social Media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

Parish Council Use of the Website and Social Media Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings;
- Publish information about the work of the Parish Council;
- Newsletters;
- Inform the public of local news, progress of works,
- Promote events and activities;
- Publish good news stories, linked website or press pages;
- Advertise council vacancies;
- Share information from partner related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities;
- Share information from other councils (parish, district and county);

Using Social Media sites in our name only the Parish Clerk/Assistant and nominated Parish Councillors (as approved by the Parish Council) are permitted to post material on social media in the council's name and on our behalf.

Internal communication and access to information within the Parish Council it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely as per our General Data Protection Regulation Policy. Parish Councillors are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of all information that they have access to and not to share that information with anyone unless they are sure that it is reasonable to do so. The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way as it does to other written or verbal communications. Individual staff, Parish Councillors and volunteers are expected to always comply with this policy to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of our council and are responsible for what they post in a council capacity.

In accordance with this policy, you must adhere to the following general rules:

No information should be published that is not already in the public domain. If uploading, posting or forwarding content or including a link, ensure you have consent to do so;

- When you do make a reference, link back to the source where possible;
- Information should be factual, fair, thorough and transparent;
- Be mindful that this information may stay in the public domain ad infinitum.
- Respect copyright laws;
- Do not publish anything that would not be acceptable in the workplace;
- Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal or confidential information. If unsure discuss with the Clerk/Chairman;
- Any employee, volunteer or member who feels that they have been harassed, bullied or offended by the material posted should inform the Clerk and/or the Chairman;

- Remember that you are an ambassador for the Council and be cordial at all times.
- Any Member of the Parish Council may wish to provide their own media accounts and comments; Members must remember that they are legally responsible for the content and that the requirements and principles associated with the adopted Code of Conduct shall remain in force. No Member should bring the Council in to disrepute.

Press Releases

Official Council Releases – An official Parish Council release is made on behalf of the Parish Council as a whole, this is written by the Clerk. It is non-party political and may include a quote from the relevant Councillor, usually the Chairman or Committee Chairman or the Clerk, but could also include a District or County Councillor quote promoting the matter. All official press releases will be on headed paper with the Parish logo.

Councillor Press Releases - These are **personal** (it must be clear that the comments are personal views of the Councillor and not the Parish Council's). The release is written and issued by the Councillor responsible and may or may not be political by it must not include the name of the Parish Council / Officer or use Parish Council contact details. A copy to the Clerk would be beneficial.

Monitoring the Use of Social Media and Review of this Policy

- Misuse of social media can in certain circumstances constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us. Breaches of this policy may result in disciplinary procedures against employees or result in action being taken against council members who are in breach of the Code of Conduct;
- If you notice any use of social media in breach of this policy, please refer it to the Clerk/Chairman;
- The Policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it reflects best practice.

This Policy was adopted on Monday 22nd May 2023