



# PITSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

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## Social Media & Communications Policy

### Statement of Purpose

The widespread availability and use of social networking applications bring opportunities to understand, engage and communicate with our audiences in new ways. It is important that the Council is able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly. However, it is also important to ensure that the Council balance this with its duties to its services users and partners, its legal responsibilities and its reputation.

For example, the Council's use of social networking and online applications has implications for its duty to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults.

The policy requirements in this document aim to provide this balance to support innovation whilst providing a framework of good practice.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure:

- that the Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks;
- that the reputation of the Council is not adversely affected;
- that our users are able to clearly distinguish where information provided via social networking applications is legitimately representative of the Council.

The Parish Council will also continue to communicate and interact with residents via a number of traditional channels as well, including:

- the publication of Pitstone Parish Post village magazine, a number of times throughout the year
- by displaying posters and notices on the 6 notice-boards we own around the village
- via specific door-to-door leaflet drops where appropriate
- by welcoming contact from residents (to either councillors or clerk) via whichever method residents prefer
- by welcoming residents to our meetings and committee meetings
- via paper surveys and electronic surveys
- with general correspondence etc

This policy applies primarily to the Parish Council, although elements may be utilised by the Recreation Ground Charity and Pitstone Parish Charity where appropriate.

## **Scope**

This policy covers the use of social networking applications and other methods of communication by Council employees, Elected Members, and by partners or other third parties (including contractors and volunteers) acting on behalf of the Council. These groups are referred to collectively as 'Council representatives' for brevity.

The requirements of this policy apply to all uses of social networking applications and other communication channels which are used for any Council-related purpose and regardless of whether the applications are hosted corporately or not. They must also be considered where Council representatives are contributing in an official capacity to social networking applications provided by external organisations.

Social networking applications include, but are not limited to:

- Blogs
- Online discussion forums
- Collaborative spaces
- Media sharing services, for example YouTube
- 'Micro-blogging' applications, for example Twitter.

Many of the principles of this policy also apply to other types of online presence such as virtual worlds and RSS aggregation services and the use of these services should also be discussed with the Parish Clerk.

All Council representatives should bear in mind that information they share through social networking applications, even if they are on private spaces, are still subject to copyright, data protection and Freedom of Information legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and other legislation. They must also operate in line with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

Use of social networking applications in work time for personal use only is not addressed by this policy.

This policy is based on the Civil Service Code: Principles for Participation Online and advice produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and other sources of good practice.

## **Enforcement**

Any breach of the terms set out below could result in the application or offending content being removed in accordance with the published complaints procedure and the publishing rights of the responsible Council representative being suspended.

The Clerk reserves the right to require the closure of any applications or removal of content published by Council representatives which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council or put it at risk of legal action.

Any communications or content you publish that causes damage to the Council, any of its employees or any third party's reputation may amount to misconduct or gross misconduct to which the Council's Disciplinary Policy applies.

## **Policy**

All proposals for using social networking applications as part of a Council service (whether they are hosted by the Council or by a third party) must be approved by the Parish Council first. Use of social networking applications which are not related to any Council services (for example, contributing to a wiki provided by a professional association) does not need to be

approved by the Clerk. However, Council representatives must still operate in line with the requirements set out below.

Council representatives must adhere to the following Terms of Use. The Terms of Use below apply to all uses of social networking applications by all Council representatives. This includes, but is not limited to, public-facing applications such as open discussion forums and internally-facing uses such as project blogs regardless of whether they are hosted on corporate networks or not.

Where applications allow the posting of messages online, users must be mindful that the right to freedom of expression attaches only to lawful conduct. The Council expects that users of social networking applications will always exercise the right of freedom of expression with due consideration for the rights of others and strictly in accordance with these Terms of Use.

### **Terms of Use**

Communications including social networking applications:

1. must not be used to publish any content which may result in actions for defamation, discrimination, breaches of copyright, data protection or other claims for damages. This includes but is not limited to material of an illegal, sexual or offensive nature that may bring the Council into disrepute.
2. must not be used in an abusive or hateful manner.
3. must not be used for actions that would put Council representatives in breach of Council codes of conduct or policies relating to Elected Members or staff.
4. must not breach the Council's Equal Opportunities or Bullying and Harassment policies.
5. official Council profiles and pages must not be used for party political purposes or specific campaigning purposes as the Council is not permitted to publish material which 'in whole or part appears to affect public support for a political party' (LGA 1986).
6. official Council profiles and pages must not be used for the promotion of personal financial interests or personal campaigns.
7. official Council profiles and pages must not be used for the promotion of commercial ventures.

Where individuals, including those from partner organisations and other volunteers, are involved and are acting on behalf of the Council, they will also be expected to comply with the relevant Council policies.

It is also important to ensure that members of the public and other users of online services know when a social networking application is being used for official Council purposes. To assist with this, all council representatives must adhere to the following requirements:

1. Officers must only use the official communication addresses of [@pitstone\\_pc](https://twitter.com/pitstone_pc) or [parishclerk@pitstone.co.uk](mailto:parishclerk@pitstone.co.uk) or [www.pitstone.co.uk](http://www.pitstone.co.uk) (or that of their own reputable organisation if they are not employed by the Council) for official Council purposes;
2. Only the Parish Clerk should post to the Council's official communication channels or issue official correspondence etc;

3. Where social networking applications are being managed by Council representatives, appropriate feedback and complaints information must be provided to other council members if requested;
4. The use of the Council's logo and other branding elements should be used where appropriate to indicate the Council's support. The logo should not be used on social networking applications which are unrelated to or are not representative of the Council's official position.
5. Council representatives should identify themselves as such where appropriate on social networking applications. For example, through providing additional information in user profiles.
6. Council representatives should ensure that any contributions they make are professional and uphold the reputation of the Council.
7. Members, if using their own social media account profiles, must ensure that they are either speaking in a personal capacity or simply providing details of works undertaken or policies agreed by Pitstone Parish Council and not speaking on behalf of the Council.

All users need to be aware that applications may be closed for a defined period before local and national elections in order to comply with legislation which affects local authorities.

**General Guidelines for Conduct**

- Council should avoid getting drawn into debate or argument, especially online. State the parish council position clearly once and then withdraw from any ongoing debate.
- Council representatives should consider all electronic posts carefully before issuing – the golden rule being that if you have to think about it, or it might be misinterpreted etc, then don't post it. Posts should be factual and positive.
- Everyone is entitled to their point of view and the parish council welcomes constructive criticism as well as positive feedback. However, bullying/harassment/trolling towards individual parish councillors will not be tolerated and individual members reserve the right to take appropriate action. Where this is directed via the parish council official electronic channels, the parish council reserves the right to respond once with a clear statement of the council's position and then to refrain from entering further debate.
- Councillors and other representatives should remember that any time they are discussing council business, they must make it clear whether they are publishing as an individual or as a council representative.

**Review**

This Social Media and Communications Policy was adopted by Pitstone Parish Council on ..... minute reference ..... and will be reviewed on at least an annual basis.

Signed on behalf of Pitstone Parish Council by:

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Chairman