

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Adopted May 2015 – reviewed March 2017 - next review due 2018)

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide Councillors and Officers with an overview of social media, and to outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use. It also includes guidelines on responsibilities when using these channels of communication.

Other Council Policies are also relevant to the use of social media, including the Code of Conduct, Data Protection, and the Publication Scheme.

What is Social Media?

'Social media' is a generic term for the sharing of opinions, gossip, discussions, stories, images and information electronically. The key feature of such systems is that they can be accessed in different ways – via computers, tablets and phones.

Social media is transforming the way ordinary people and organisations, including local government, communicate and learn from one another. Organisations need to use social media to foster relationships and understanding with the public, service users, stakeholders and the wider world. It is the future, and it's a vital tool to help us communicate and promote our work effectively, however the speed and scale at which a message can be amplified on social media presents a new challenge which needs careful and proactive management.

Social media can be categorised into six types - blogs, wikis, social networks, forums, podcasts and content communities. There are many popular packages for social media including Twitter, Facebook, You Tube, Pinterest, MySpace and LinkedIn. Each has a different focus – sharing, conversation, relationships, groups and reputation.

Social media has the following characteristics

- Covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs and audio.
- Allows messages to flow between many different types of device – computers, phones and tablets.
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or just view information.
- Speeds and broadens the flow of information.
- Provides 'one to one', 'one to many' and 'many to many' communications.
- Lets communication take place in real time or intermittently.

While social media tools are very useful to share information quickly with other people, there are downsides:

- The information is in most cases shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world.
- Once something is on the web it is almost impossible to remove.
- There is no need to register in many cases to view content, Registering is only required if you wish to participate and post to the site.
- Groups on specific themes can set up easily and posts then edited by the owners of that group to reflect their single interest, ensuring theirs is the only voice heard.

- There is no guarantee of truth, and ill-informed comment is as likely to be found there as useful information.
- The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is easy to respond without thinking and inflame a situation. Information can then be shared with other sides and spread far beyond the intended audience. Friends of Friends may not be your friends.
- It is easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages that would outweigh the value gained in the first place.

The Parish Council and Social Media

Social media can be used by the Council and is an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity. However, to be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix.

The aim of this policy is to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of council based services through the use of social media.
- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media.
- That Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media.
- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.
- That the Councils reputation is not damaged or adversely affected.

The Council will use social media to quickly disseminate information, but will carefully control this use in order to minimise the risks stated above.

The Council started to use Facebook in March 2015 with its use be limited to providing information on Council activities, official releases of public information from trusted sources, and community events and activities potentially of interest to / available to all residents. At March 2017 Facebook is still in use, and limited use of Whats App is made as a communication tool between Council Staff and Councillors only.

The Clerk is the designated owner of and is responsible for the management of the Facebook account, ensuring the protection of access passwords and codes and for regularly reviewing the privacy settings for the account to ensure relevance / compliance with Council IT and information security policies.

All of the Council's communications via its Facebook page will be managed by the Clerk and Assistant to the Clerk, who are responsible for monitoring, responding and posting material. At least two items will be posted to the page each week.

Monitoring

The Council reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of the social media policy, or any applicable law.

Users will be informed that their posts may not be published / may be deleted if they meet any of the criteria below:

- Comments that are not topical to the item being discussed.
- Comments that are politically motivated.
- Profane language or content.
- Material that perpetuates or promotes discrimination of protected characteristics as listed in the Equality Act 2010.
- Solicitation of commerce.
- Illegal conduct or encouragement/ support of illegal activities.

- Information that compromises or may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems.
- Content that violates the legal ownership interest of any other party.

Measuring success

Engagement with the Facebook account can be measured by the number of followers, posts and likes. Progress will be reviewed by the Council every 6 months.

Guidance on the Use of Council Social Media

These guidelines have been written for, and should be adhered to, by all Finchampstead Parish Council employees and Councillors.

- Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy.
- Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.
- Never give out personal details such as home address and telephone numbers. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act.
- Use a disclaimer. When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply that you are speaking for the Council. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only.
- Know your obligations – you must comply with other council policies when using social media. For example, you should be careful not to breach council confidentiality and information policies, or the Code of Conduct.

Do

1. Be transparent and truthful
2. Show respect to all
3. Don't return fire
4. Be a good ambassador for the Council
5. Use common sense
6. Respect confidentiality
7. Be accountable
8. Report abuse

Don't

1. Post in haste
2. Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in writing or face to face
3. Use Council Social Network accounts and facilities for personal or political social networking purposes

Finchampstead Parish Council
FBC Centre, Gorse Ride North, Finchampstead, Berkshire RG40 4ES
Tel: 0118 9088164 email: clerk@finchampstead-pc.gov.uk
www.finchampstead-pc.gov.uk