

INGOLDMELLS PARISH COUNCIL

Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

The objective of this policy is to provide Councillors and employees an overview of Social Media and outline the Council's position on various aspects of their use. In addition, it includes guidelines on Officer and Councillor responsibilities when using such channels of communication.

2. Definition of Social Media

Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content. They include social networking sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction.

Social media has the following characteristics:

- Covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs, audio
- Allows messages to flow between many different types of device; PCs, phones and tablets (e.g. iPad)
- 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
- Allows communication take place in real time or intermittently

Examples of popular social media tools include: Twitter, Facebook, Wikipedia, You Tube, Pinterest, Snap Chat, Linked-In and Google Plus. Groupings of interest are a natural feature of the development of such systems with people with similar interests being attracted to share information.

3. Pitfalls

Whilst these tools are very useful to share information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of:

- The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world. You do not even need to register in many cases to view the content. Registering is only required should 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 and gossip is as likely to be found there as useful information.
- The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is

very easy to respond instantaneously resulting in unintentionally inflaming a situation. Information can then be shared with other sites and be spread far beyond the intended audience. ***Friends of Friends may not be our Friends.***

It is also very easy to spend excess time viewing and responding to messages that outweigh any value in the first place.

4. Parish Council Use of Social Media

Principles

- To present a positive corporate image of the Parish Council as an open and transparent organisation
- To publish information about the work of Ingoldmells Parish Council to a wider audience
- To avoid entering into online debates or arguments about the Parish Council's work. Social Media must NOT be used in the recruitment process for employees or new Councillors – other than for the sole purpose of placing vacancy advertisements – as this could lead to potential discrimination and privacy actions, and also, breach of data protection issues.

5. Approved Council Social Media

Ingoldmells Parish Council website

The following guidelines will apply to online participation and set out the standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Ingoldmells Parish Council.

- 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 of others 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*** you are speaking ***for or on behalf of*** the Parish Council.
- ***Do not*** use the Parish Council ***e-mail address, logos or any other*** Parish Council identification.
- ***Make it clear*** that what you say is ***representative of your personal views*** only.
- Where possible, you should include a disclaimer: ***"Statements and opinions here are my own and don't necessarily represent Ingoldmells Parish Council's policies or opinions"***.
- Show ***respect to all***.
- Be ***respectful of the Authority*** (the Parish Council) elected Members, contractors and employees.
- Derogatory comments are ***always wrong***.
- ***If unsure, say nothing***

Elected Members (Councillors) are at liberty to set up accounts using any of the tools available but should ensure they are clearly identified as personal and do not in any way imply that they reflect Ingoldmells Parish Council's view. Councillors should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language.

6. **Guidance for Councillors - social media and meetings**

- Councillors have a responsibility to take council business seriously and it is not appropriate for members to use social media to tease or insult other members. Parish residents expect debate and to be informed about council business, not witness petty arguments.
- Remember that if you break the law using social media (for example by posting something defamatory), you will be personally responsible.

7. **Facebook Strategy**

Social networks are rapidly growing in popularity and are used by all ages in society. The most popular social networks are web-based, commercial, and include sites like Facebook, MySpace and Bebo.

For individuals, social networking sites provide tremendous opportunities for staying in touch with friends and family.

Facebook offers a rich platform allowing you to share unlimited content, including images and videos.

Example activity:

- Share articles / blog posts / expertise
- Start discussions and ask questions to encourage interaction
- Create surveys to encourage participation from visitors
- Upload images and videos
- Generic news – what's happening in the area

One of the hallmarks of online networks is the ability to "friend" others – creating a group of others that share interests and personal news. Care should be exercised when accepting invitations to friend others within personal social networking sites.

Good practice guidelines for the use of Facebook by Councillors as individuals are:

- As a Parish Council, elected Members and staff have a corporate professional image to uphold and how we individually conduct ourselves online impacts this image.
- Remember that people classified as "friends" have the ability to download and share your information with others.
- Post only what you want the world to see. On a social networking site, basically once you post something it may continue to be available, even after it is removed from the site.

- Do not disclose confidential matters or criticise Parish Council policies or personnel.
- Select and establish your profile's security and privacy settings carefully. At a minimum, all privacy settings should be set to "only friends". "Friends of friends" and "Networks and Friends" open the content to a large group of unknown people.
- Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.
- Only add statements approved by either Full Council or the Parish Clerk.
- Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libelous at any time (even in a humorous or anecdotal manner).
- Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterisations.
- Evaluate whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness at Ingoldmells Parish Council at risk.
- If you find information on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines then you must report it as required by law.
- Ensure you keep yourself informed and cautious in the use of all new networking technologies.
- information in emergency situations

Keep the content valuable!

Negative comments should only be responded to with factual information and on-line arguments must always be avoided.

8. Other Social Media

At this stage it is not intended to use any other forms of social media other than the Parish website for official use by Ingoldmells Parish Council.

Councillors are entitled to use any form of social media they wish to but must abide by this policy at all times when so doing.

I hereby confirm that I have received this policy which forms part of the terms of my code of conduct/terms of employment

Name	
Date Received	
Signature	
Counter Signature	

October 2019