



# West End Parish Council

## Social Media & Electronic Communications Policy

The use of digital and social media and electronic communication enables the Parish Council to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities, providing updates, news, information, and retweeting relevant information from other sources. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with the younger age group, the business community and hopefully the harder to reach groups.

The Council currently has a website, Facebook page, Twitter account and uses email to communicate. The Council will always try to use the most effective channel for its communications. Over time the Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers.

### Policy Statement

It is acknowledged that there is considerable potential for using social media which can provide significant advantages. The following applies equally to Officers and Members.

This policy provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems/networks.

Users must ensure that they use social media sensibly and responsibly and ensure that its use will not adversely affect the Council or its business, nor be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

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

1. Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy.
2. Remember that you are personally responsible for the content you publish on social media.
3. Never give out personal details of others such as home address or telephone numbers.
4. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the GDPR.
5. Use a disclaimer. When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the Council. Avoid use of the Council email address, logos, or other Council identification. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only. Where possible, you should include a standard disclaimer, such as: "Statements and opinions here are personal and do not represent the Council's policies or opinions".
6. Know your obligations: You must comply with Council policies when using social media.
7. Show respect to all. You should be respectful of the authority and employees.
8. Use of the Council's Facebook or Twitter accounts must always reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal opinion, particularly when used by a Councillor. If unsure, say nothing.

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 the Council's views. 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.



# West End Parish Council

## Social Media & Electronic Communications Policy

### Aims and Objectives

Social media can be used by the Council as an effective and measurable way to achieve resident engagement and attract publicity.

The aim of this Policy is to ensure:

1. Engagement with individuals and communities and successful promotion of council-based services through the use of social media.
2. A consistent approach is adopted and maintained in the use of social media.
3. That Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of social media.
4. That users operate within existing policies, guidelines, and relevant legislation.
5. That the Council's reputation is upheld and improved rather than adversely affected.
6. That communication by use of social media is effective, timely, appropriate, useful, engages with a wider audience and utilises cross-promotion of other Council communication tools (e.g. website, Parish magazine, linking Facebook to Twitter account etc).

Social media activity is not something that stands alone; to be effective it needs to integrate as part of the general communications mix. Any planned campaigns, promotions and activities can be plugged into social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

### Responsibilities

The Clerk is the designated "Council" owner for all of the Council agreed Social Media channels. The Deputy Clerk and Admin Officer may assist the Clerk to disseminate information on the Council's Facebook/Twitter feed, to ensure the best use of the social media accounts. No account details may be changed without the permission of the Clerk.

As more and more information becomes available at the press of a button, it is vital that all information is treated sensitively and securely. Councillors and Officers are expected to maintain an awareness of the confidentiality of information that they have access to and not to share confidential information with anyone.

Failure to properly observe confidentiality may be seen as a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct and will be dealt with through its prescribed procedures (at the extreme it may also involve a criminal investigation). Councillors and Officers should also be careful only to 'cc' essential recipients on emails i.e. to avoid use of the 'Reply to All' option, if at all possible, but of course copying in all who need to know and ensuring that email trails have been removed.

### Council Communications

All communications from the Council will meet the following criteria:

- Be civil, tasteful, and relevant.
- Not contain content that is knowingly unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, or racially offensive.



# West End Parish Council

## Social Media & Electronic Communications Policy

- Not contain content knowingly copied from elsewhere, for which we do not own the copyright.
- Not contain any personal information.
- If it is official Council business, it will be moderated by the Clerk/Deputy Clerk to the Council.
- Social media will not be used for the dissemination of any political advertising.

In order to ensure that all discussions on the Council pages are productive, respectful, and consistent with the Council's aims and objectives, we ask you to follow these guidelines:

- Be considerate and respectful of others. Vulgarity, threats, or abuse of language will not be tolerated.
- Differing opinions and discussion of diverse ideas are encouraged, but personal attacks on anyone, including the Council members or staff, will not be permitted.
- Share freely and be generous with official Council posts but be aware of copyright laws; be accurate and give credit where credit is due.
- Stay on topic.
- Refrain from using the Council's Facebook page or Twitter site for commercial purposes or to advertise market or sell products.

The site is not monitored 24/7 and we will not always be able to reply individually to all messages or comments received. However, we will endeavour to ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people or authorities. Please do not include personal/private information in your social media posts to us.

Sending a messages/posts via Facebook or Twitter will not be considered as contacting the Council for official purposes and we will not be obliged to monitor or respond to requests for information through these channels. Instead, please make direct contact with the council's Clerk/Deputy Clerk/Admin Officer and/or members of the council by emailing [enquiries@westend-pc.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@westend-pc.gov.uk).

We retain the right to remove comments or content that includes:

- Obscene or racist content.
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language.
- Potentially libellous statements.
- Plagiarised material; any material in violation of any laws, including copyright.
- Private, personal information published without consent.
- Information or links unrelated to the content of the forum.
- Commercial promotions or spam.
- Alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law.

The Council's response to any communication received not meeting the above criteria will be to either ignore, inform the sender of our policy, or send a brief response as appropriate. This will be at the Council's discretion based on the message received, given our limited resources available. Any information posted on the Facebook page not in line with the above criteria will be removed as quickly as practically possible. Repeat offenders will be blocked from the Facebook page.



# West End Parish Council

## Social Media & Electronic Communications Policy

The Council may post a statement that 'A post breaching the Council's Social Media Policy has been removed'. If the post alleges a breach of a Council's policy or the law the person who posted it will be asked to submit a formal complaint to the Council or report the matter to the Police as soon as possible to allow due process.

### Parish Council Website

The Parish Council website is run and maintained by the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Admin Officer. Pages are updated regularly with up to date material and any current news or information is posted in the Latest News & Information feed on the home page.

### Parish Council Email

All general enquiries relating to the Parish can be sent to [enquiries@westend-pc.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@westend-pc.gov.uk). This inbox is monitored by the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, and the Admin Officer. The Clerk to the council also has their own council email address, [clerk@westend-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@westend-pc.gov.uk). Both email accounts are monitored during office hours, Monday to Friday, and we aim to reply to all questions sent as soon as we can. An 'out of office' message should be used when appropriate.

Individual Councillors also have their own individual email addresses which residents are welcome to use to contact them directly. All of these are listed on the Parish Website.

### Social Media and Meetings

The Council encourages Councillors to keep residents informed of West End issues. However, the use of social media by Councillors during official council meetings is not permitted. All updates via social media will be the responsibility of the Clerk or Deputy Clerk of the Council. Twitter is a quick and direct way of feeding concise updates about a meeting – these principles for members are aimed at the use of Twitter but are equally applicable to other forms of social media.

Below are some extra guidelines for Councillors to consider for the use of social media:

1. Handheld devices and laptops are permitted for use during meetings to allow environmentally friendly and effective communication. The use of such devices is intended to improve communication during meetings – not to interrupt or distract anyone taking part. Ensure the volume on all electronic devices is turned to "mute".
2. No Councillor is permitted to tweet/blog during Council meetings. All relevant social media reporting shall be undertaken by the Clerk/Deputy Clerk of the Council. Councillors are reminded that personal tweeting/blogging about other subjects will show the public and other attendees at the meeting that you are not engaging properly in the meeting.
3. 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. West End residents expect debate and to be informed about council business, not witness petty arguments.
4. Remember that if you break the law using social media (for example by posting something defamatory), you will be personally responsible.



# West End Parish Council

## Social Media & Electronic Communications Policy

### 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 not purposely designed for Parish Council use. For individuals, social networking sites provide tremendous opportunities for staying in touch with friends and family. For the Council the sites provide a modern alternative means to communicate with residents of the village.

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

Good practice guidelines for the use of Facebook by the Council as a body or Councillors as individuals are:

1. As a Parish Council we have a professional image to uphold and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image.
2. Remember that people classified as “friends” have the ability to download and share your information with others.
3. Post only what you want the world to see. It is not like posting something on your website or blog and then realising that a story or photo should be taken down. On a social networking site, once you post something it may continue to be available, even after it is removed from the site.
4. Do not disclose confidential matters or criticize Council policies or personnel.
5. Set 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.
6. Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.
7. Pay close attention to the site’s security settings and allow only approved personnel full access to the site.
8. Only add statements approved by either Full Council or the Clerk.
9. Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libellous. Exercise caution with regard to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions and derogatory remarks or characterisations.
10. Weigh whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness at West End Parish Council at risk or breaches the Code of Conduct
11. To reduce security risks, do not install any external applications that work with the social networking site. Examples of these sites are calendar programs and games.
12. Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your computer.
13. Be careful not to fall for phishing scams that arrive via email or on your wall, providing a link for you to click, leading to fake login page.
14. 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.

Please stay informed and cautious in the use of all new networking technologies.



# West End Parish Council

## Social Media & Electronic Communications Policy

### Twitter Strategy

Twitter is a 'microblogging' platform which allows users to post short messages and converse with other users. Unlike email or text messaging, these conversations take place in the open and engage audiences in discussions about services, products, and issues – connecting a vast amount of like-minded people in an often targeted and purposeful way.

The West End Parish Council Twitter account has been set up to inform followers of related news, events, online facilities, and other matters that may be of interest to residents of the community, local businesses, and visitors to the area.

People following West End Parish Council can expect tweets covering some or all of the following:

1. Update on Council activities.
2. Announcements about matters of importance to West End residents and those who may be visiting or moving to the area.
3. Requests for information and assistance.
4. Re-tweets from organisations that we are following.

Following: If you follow the West End Parish Council on Twitter it will not automatically follow the person back and the right is reserved to block that person from following West End Parish Council. Being followed by the Council does not imply endorsement of any kind.

West End Parish Council is unable to monitor Twitter around the clock. However, it will endeavour to answer all sensible tweeted questions. Please be aware that due to privacy it may not be possible to answer all tweet questions.

Councillors are at liberty to set up their own accounts subject to following the guidelines.

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