

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

This Social Media Policy was originally adopted by the Council in May 2019

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Erccall Magna Parish Councillors in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. The policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Facebook and other social networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- You Tube and other video clips and podcast sites

The principles of the Policy apply to Councillors and the Clerk. It is also intended for guidance for others communicating with the Parish Council. This Policy sits alongside relevant existing Policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The use of social media is not to replace existing forms of communication but to enhance it.

Aspects of the Members' Code of Conduct apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. What you write on the web is permanent.

In the main, Councillors have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failures to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. There are some additional duties around using any personal social media sites for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken if writing on planning matters.

Organisation, arrangements and responsibilities for carrying out the Social Media Policy

1. The Council will appoint a moderator. They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from the Council's social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libel nature. Such post will also be reported to the Chairman and also the Clerk.
2. Social media may be used to:
 - Post dates of meetings
 - Advertise events and activities
 - Good news stories linked website or press page
 - Vacancies
 - Re-tweeting or 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, Library and Health etc.
 - Announcing new information.
 - Post or share information from other Parish related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. Schools, sports clubs and community groups
 - Refer resident queries to the Clerk

3. Individual Councillors are responsible for what they post. Councillors are personally responsible for any online activity conducted via their published e-mail address which is used for Council business. Councillors should have separate Council and personal email addresses.

Code of Practice when using social media.

1. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the correct security settings are in place.
2. When participating in any online communication:
 - Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
 - Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
 - Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All Councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute or is contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies.
 - Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud." Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or write in red to emphasis points.
 - Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
 - Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
 - Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
 - Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
3. Respect the privacy of other Councillors and residents.
4. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations or brings the Parish Council into disrepute.
5. Residents and Councillors should note that not all communication requires a response. Councillors should consider whether a communication needs to be brought back to the Parish Council eg it covers a matter not covered by an existing Policy/Procedure.

6. There may not be immediate responses to communications as they may be discussed by the Council and those responses will be agreed by the Parish Council. The communication will be acknowledged.
7. The Clerk and the moderator will be responsible for all final published responses.
8. If the moderator feels unable to answer a post for example of a contentious nature this shall be referred to the Clerk. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Clerk directly.
9. The nominated moderator or moderators shall remove any negative posts which may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libelous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.
10. Ensure any errors are corrected promptly.
11. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other Policies and could result in action being taken.

This policy is monitored regularly and reviewed annually.
It was last reviewed in 2024.

The next review will take place in May 2027