WOOLPIT PARISH COUNCIL

Adopted November 2026
To be reviewed November 2027

Social Media Policy

1. The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk, Assistant Clerk and others who engage with the council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

Introduction

2. Social Media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content, including Social Media sites and other sites centred on user interaction. This policy is intended to help Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk make appropriate decisions about the use of Social Media, and to outline Woolpit Parish Council's position on various aspects of its use, including the management of comments made by members of the public when using Woolpit Parish Council's Social Media sites. It includes standards and guidelines for Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk to observe when using Social Media as a channel for communication, the management of public comments, and the action to be taken in respect to breaches of this policy.

3. This policy covers all forms of Social Media and social networking sites. These include (but are not limited to):

    a. The Woolpit Parish Council website.
    b. Facebook, Instagram, and other social networking sites.
    c. X and other micro-blogging sites.
    d. YouTube and other video clips and podcast sites.
    e. LinkedIn.
    f. Blogs and discussion forums.

4. This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction, with all other policies and procedures adopted by Woolpit Parish Council. The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Over time, Woolpit Parish Council may add to the channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services the Council delivers. When these changes occur, this policy can be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

How Social Media will be used by the Council

5. Social Media may be used for:

    a. Engagement with individuals and communities for the promotion of Council based services, decisions, and actions supporting local democracy.
    b. Distributing in whole or part information from Council notices, agendas, approved minutes, and dates of meetings.

c. Information specifically agreed to be communicated via Social Media at Council meetings.
d. Advertising events and activities that Woolpit Parish Council has organised or co- organised, or supports as being beneficial for the community
e. Sharing good news stories relevant to the local area.
f. Announcing new information relevant to people living in or around the Woolpit area.
g. Providing and exchanging information about local services and events.
h. Gathering residents' insights.
i. Promoting cultural events or tourism in the area.
j. Advertising Woolpit Parish Council's vacancies.
k. Re-tweeting or sharing relevant information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, NHS etc.
l. Posting, retweeting or sharing relevant information from local community groups for community benefit such as information from community associations, community groups, schools, sports clubs, Scouts/Guides, and charities.
m. Linking posts to appropriate websites and other Social Media accounts of sites or organisations that meet the council's expectations of conduct.
n. Posting other items as the council see fit.
o. Referring resident queries via Social Media to the Parish Clerk for wider dissemination to Parish Councillors if required.

6. Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk should be aware that not all communication through Social Media requires a response, although an acknowledgement may be made if appropriate.

7. Woolpit Parish Council runs its Social Media pages so that it can pass information on to residents quickly. Social Media accounts will not necessarily be checked daily, and posts will not necessarily be responded to.

8. Though Woolpit Parish Council is keen to hear residents' views, it will not be able to take comments made on its Social Media accounts as official requests, comments or complaints. To manage the messages received, residents will be asked – if necessary – to forward their comments to Woolpit Parish Council. This can be done by emailing the Parish Clerk at clerk@woolpitparishcouncil.gov.uk. Auto reply messaging will be used on our Social Media pages where possible, to this effect.

9. The Parish Clerk, Assistant Clerk and Parish Councillors responsible for Social Media can seek approval or advice on posts when necessary.

Who is covered by this policy?

10. The principles of this policy apply to elected and co-opted Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk.

11. All Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners, and community.

12. Individual Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk are responsible for what they post, both in a Council and personal capacity.

13. In the main, Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of serious breaches of this policy by employees. This may include unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, or racially offensive comments by a Parish Councillor, the Parish Clerk or Assistant Clerk.

14. Volunteers in breach of the policy will result in the council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.

Code of Practice

15. When using Social Media channels in direct connection to local council matters, Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk must be mindful of the information they post in both a personal and Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

16. Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk should not post comments that they would not be prepared to make in writing or face-to-face.

17. When participating in online communication, Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk must:

    a. Be objective and accurate, concentrating on facts or explanation or both
    b. Be responsible and respectful, ensuring posts are positive, informative, and balanced.
    c. Respect the privacy of other Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk, Assistant Clerk and residents.
    d. Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative, never condescending or 'loud' i.e. use sentence case format and not write in capital letters or red to emphasise points.
    e. Seek permission to publish original photos or videos (posting copyright images or text on Social Media sites is an offence so Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk must ensure any information does not infringe copyright).
    f. Always disclose their identity and affiliation to the Council and never hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms.
    g. Remember that communications on the internet are permanent and public.
    h. Be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking.

18. Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk must not:

    a. Give out the personal data of others on Social Media, including home address and telephone numbers.
    b. Use an individual's name in Social Media communications or post information about an individual unless given written permission to do so (publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation).
    c. Present personal opinions as that of Woolpit Parish Council.
    d. If a Parish Councillor, the Parish Clerk or Asistant Clerk blogs, tweets or communicates online personally, and not in their role as a Parish Councillor, the Parish Clerk or Assistant Clerk, they must not claim to act or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Woolpit Parish Council i.e. they should not include web links to official Council websites, Council logos, Council email addresses or any other Council identification as this may give or reinforce the impression that they are representing the Council.
    e. Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to Woolpit Parish Council; they must protect the good reputation of the Council.
    f. Make false or misleading statements.
    g. Post personal or political content in relation to local parish issues, or content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Council or post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks.
    h. Make derogatory, defamatory, discriminatory, or offensive comments about any person including the Parish Clerk, Assistant Clerk, Parish Councillors, the Council or about the people, businesses, and agencies the Council works with and serves, or post online activity that constitutes bullying or

harassment. Language that may be deemed offensive relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any Social Media site.

i. Engage in personal attacks, online fights, hostile communications or in any way allow their interaction on websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. The sentiment and emotion within written text is open to interpretation by the individual reader. Negative comments should be politely acknowledged, and the author directed to our official channels to formalize any official complaint.
j. Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission.
k. Post any information that may be deemed libel (publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action).
l. Post obscene material (publication of some obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence).
m. Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.
n. Bring Woolpit Parish Council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity.

19. Parish Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a council or committee meeting may constitute pre-disposition, predetermination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at council meetings.

20. Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on Social Media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk, Assistant Clerk or residents should report them to the Parish Clerk for referral to the Chairman and/or the Council as required.

21. The behaviour required in the Parish Councillor's Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

22. Parish Councillors will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even where the code does not apply.

Managing Social Media Accounts

23. The Assistant Clerk will be responsible for monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy. The Clerk, Assistant Clerk, Chairman and any nominated Parish Councillors will be responsible for posting content on the council website and Social Media pages.

24. Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk should be mindful when sharing posts on any Social Media account that is not solely controlled by Woolpit Parish Council. Content shared and discussions/comments arising from such posts on another Social Media account may not be under Woolpit Parish Council's control or governed by its acceptable use policy.

25. This policy will govern and set clear expectations of how the public interact with our Social Media in terms of both behaviour and allowed content. The Parish Clerk, Assistant Clerk or any Parish Councillor also acting as moderator will have authority, without notice or comment, to remove any posts from Woolpit Parish Council Social Media pages which are deemed to be of an inflammatory, defamatory, or libellous nature. Such posts may also be reported to the hosts (i.e., Facebook) and to the Parish Clerk for council records.

26. The Parish Clerk, Assistant Clerk or any Parish Councillor acting as a moderator will also have the authority to block or ban access from an individual or company's account to Woolpit Parish Council's Social Media pages.

27. The Assistant Clerk will also be responsible for checking the correct security settings are in place on the Social Media sites used.

28. Parish Councillors may assist the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk to disseminate information. However, they must ensure that they follow this policy.

29. Passwords for the Council's social media accounts should be kept confidential. Parish Councillors, the Parish Clerk and Assistant Clerk must take particular care where a computer, or other device, is used by more than one person in a household. Any Parish Councillor who is unsure about security should raise the issue with the Parish Clerk or Assistant Clerk who will check the security arrangements or obtain advice from a specialist

30. No Social Media account details may be changed without the permission of the Parish Clerk, Assistant Clerk or Full Council.

31. Woolpit Parish Council reserves the right to temporarily suspend any or all of its Social Media accounts, without notice, should a localised extraordinary event occur.

32. This policy may be amended at any time and will be reviewed annually.