Newborough Parish Council Social Media and Online Policy

Approved September 2024 by Cllr Clarke & Clerk, Charlotte Holmes

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy covers the use of social media, including social networking websites such as, but not limited to, X (Twitter), Facebook, YouTube, content communities, websites, blogs, and Community WhatsApp Groups.

1.2 The policy aims to:

- • Ensure that the Council and its employees are protected when using social media.
- • Establish the principles of use of social media by Newborough Parish Council employees, Councillors, and volunteers.
- • Provide clear standards of conduct for staff and Councillors when using social media.

1.3 Online behavior should not differ from offline behavior, specifically when reference is made to the Council in any context. Users of social media and other websites must realize that what is published has the potential to be accessed for many years, even after the original content has been removed. The Computer Misuse Act introduced three criminal offenses: unauthorized access, unauthorized access with intent to commit a serious offence, and unauthorized modification of computer material.

1.4 This policy must be complied with; if not, disciplinary action may be taken, which could ultimately result in dismissal for staff and a Code of Conduct complaint for Councillors.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, Councillors, and volunteers of Newborough Parish Council.

3. Social media

3.1 The Council encourages interaction with its residents, partner agencies, and community groups. If using social media for this purpose, staff, volunteers, and Councillors must act responsibly and respectfully and ensure that information used is accurate. They must be aware of the image being presented when representing the Council. A time of writing, Newborough Parish Council does not have any Council-owned social media accounts but were that to change, any posts should be approved and monitored by the Clerk. Accounts would remain under the ownership of the Council at all times.

3.2 Social media should never be used in a way that breaches any other Council policies or expected standards of behavior.

3.3 It is important to use extreme caution if disclosing any personal information, as this could lead to identity theft.

3.4 Copyright and data protection legislation should be adhered to.

3.5 If you break the law online, you will be personally responsible.

3.6 If you are approached by the media regarding any content you have published, you must not respond until you have consulted the Clerk.

3.7 Social media should be used positively to project a good image. It is a powerful tool that can be hugely beneficial and can provide a valuable opportunity to do this. The use of social media should not involve unprofessional or inappropriate content and must not interfere with Council employees' duties or performance.

3.8 Employees, Councillors, or volunteers may be required to remove content that is considered to breach this policy, and any information that will bring the Council into disrepute is not to be discussed, referred to, or stated on any internet website or any other social media channel.

3.9 References must not be provided for employees (current or previous employees) on social networking sites as they may be attributed to the Council and create a liability for both the content author and the Council. Internet searches carried out for the formal assessment of candidates for recruitment are not permitted.

3.10 Council employees, Councillors, and volunteers who work with vulnerable adults or children must not use social media either to make social contact with such individuals or to accept invitations from such individuals through social media. This also applies to friends or family of those individuals.

4. Social media – personal use

4.1 It is wise to approach social networking with a degree of caution as you are joining a global community. While it can have considerable benefits, it can also provide access to individuals' personal details from undesirable people/sources. Common sense should be applied—if you are concerned or uncertain about the appropriateness of any statement, then you should not post or publish it. It is easy to publish something inadvertently that cannot be retrieved and that can have far-reaching consequences.

4.2 When using social networking websites, it is important for Officers and Councillors to:

- • Be aware that the image portrayed could adversely affect the Council's image.
- • Use a disclaimer.
- • Know their obligations (policy, rules, etc.).
- • Be respectful.

- • Use privacy controls—take the time to set these appropriately to ensure the right level of privacy protection is applied to you (the default settings vary from network to network).

The Nolan Principles should be followed at all times: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership.

4.3 Employees, Councillors, and volunteers must make it clear when publishing content online that they are speaking on their own behalf by writing in the first person and by using a personal email address. Remember that what is published has the potential to be accessed for many years, even after the original content has been removed. Councillors should be particularly careful as even though being a Councillor should never be mentioned when posting online, a member of the public may know you are a Councillor and may relate your posting to that of the Council or you as a Councillor. The Code of Conduct states that 'This Code of Conduct applies to you when you are acting in your capacity as a councillor which may include when 'Your actions would give the impression to a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of all the facts that you are acting as a councillor' and applies to all forms of communication and interaction, including: in electronic and social media communication, posts, statements, and comments.

4.4 Information or remarks that will bring the Council into disrepute are not to be discussed, referred to, or stated on any internet website or online tool. The Council recognizes that certain comments can amount to 'protected disclosures' under whistleblowing laws, which could give protective rights to employees.

4.5 Publishing personal content should not be made using any Newborough Parish Council email addresses or logos unless on a Council-authorized site and with the permission of the Clerk.

4.6 When communicating with colleagues over social media sites, you are reminded to be respectful and to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct. It is important that you ensure that you avoid the use of swearing or inappropriate language that has the potential to offend others.

4.7 The internet is merely a facility, and the approach to dealing with unacceptable behavior should not differ because it is carried out online rather than offline.

4.8 Individuals (including service users, employees, or their families) must not be named, described, nor have their photos published on any website without their express permission being given.

4.9 Cyber-Bullying means 'any use of information and communications technology to deliberately carry out hostile postings to distress another person'. As with any other form of bullying—this is not tolerated and will be dealt with under the Grievance Policy, Bullying and Harassment Policy, or Managing Employee Performance Policy.

Do:

- • Watch out for defamatory or obscene posts from others on any blog or page and remove them as soon as possible or report them to the relevant administrator(s) to avoid any perception that you condone such views.
- • Set appropriate privacy settings for any networking site used.
- • Ensure Council computers, networks, and WiFi are used in accordance with this policy.
- • When making political points, avoid being specific or personal about Councillors of the local community or other Newborough Parish Councillors. Making political comments should be avoided.

Do not:

- • Post comments that you would not be prepared to make in face-to-face contact.
- • Comment in haste.

Never:

- • Post comments that are in breach of the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy or that incite violence or hatred.

5. Guidance for Officers and Councillors on the use of social media and websites

5.1 Officers and Councillors should be familiar with the terms of use on third-party platforms (e.g., Facebook) and adhere to these at all times.

5.2 No Council-related information should be published that is not already known to be in the public domain (i.e., available on the Council's website, contained in minutes of meetings, stated in Council publicized policies and procedures, or approved by the Clerk).

5.3 Information that is published should be factual, fair, relevant, and transparent.

5.4 Officers and Councillors must be mindful that information published in this way may stay in the public domain indefinitely, without the opportunity for retrieval/deletion.

5.5 Copyright and data protection laws must be adhered to at all times.

5.6 Conversations or reports that are meant to be private or internal must not be published without permission.

5.7 When referencing external organisations, include the original source wherever possible.

5.8 Do not publish anything that would be regarded in the workplace as unacceptable.

5.9 Officers and Councillors must remember that they are ambassadors for the Council and should always act in a responsible and socially aware manner