

Maiden Newton Social Media policy

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Maiden Newton Parish Councillors and Clerk in the use of online communications, including social media. Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet. The policy covers Parish Council emails, websites and applications that enable users to create and store content or to participate in social networking.

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

No direct costs will be incurred by implementing it. It will require a volunteer to update and monitor the social media sites.

The use of social media is not to replace existing forms of communication. The Parish Council Newsletter will remain the main media for the purpose of communicating information about the Parish Council. The website and other forms of social media will be used to enhance communication. Therefore existing means of communication should continue with social media being an additional option.

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 their websites for electoral campaigning and extra care needs to be taken when writing on planning matters, see further notes below.

Maiden Newton Council Social Media Policy

1. The Council will appoint a nominated Councillor or Councillors as moderator(s). They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring that it complies with the social media policy. The Moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from our social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libel nature. Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the Clerk.
2. The Council will appoint a nominated "Webmaster" to maintain and update the Parish Council website.

The social media may be used to:

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Good news stories linked website or press page
- Vacancies
- Retweeting 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 and all other councillors

Facebook will be used to support the website information above.

Emails will be used to distribute information on Council business.

Individual Parish 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 are strongly advised to have separate council and personal email addresses.

Code of Practice

Guidance when using social media (including email)

3. All social media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis and ensure that the security settings are in place.
4. When participating in any online communication;
 - a. Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
 - b. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council. Never make false or misleading statements.
 - c. Parish Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment. All Parish 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.
 - d. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or "loud". Use sentence case format, not capital letters, or write in red to emphasise points.
 - e. 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 beliefs should not be published on any social media site.
 - f. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
 - g. Never use an individual's name unless you have written permission to do so.
 - h. Permission to publish photographs or videos on social media sites should be sought from the person or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.
5. Respect the privacy of other Councillors and residents.
6. Do not post and information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, see below libel and copyright.
7. Residents and councillors should note that not all communications require a response:
 - a. There will not be an immediate response to communications as they may be discussed by the Parish Council and all responses will be agreed by the Parish Council.
 - b. The Parish Clerk and the moderators will be responsible for all final published responses.
 - c. If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised at either the open forum or as a full agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors. Again the poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case.
 - d. If the moderator feels unable to answer a post for example of a contentious nature this shall be referred to the Parish Clerk. The poster will be informed by way of response to this fact and also be invited to correspond with the Parish Clerk directly.

- e. Some communication from residents and other third parties may be required to be discussed at a Parish Council meeting. When this is necessary the item will be placed on the next available agenda. Any response will then be included in the minutes of the meeting.
8. 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.
 - a. Spell and grammar check everything
 - b. Correct any errors promptly
9. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Clerk to the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken.
10. The policy will be reviewed annually.

Reviewed 04-09-20

