

Social Media Policy (2026)

1. Introduction

This policy sets out the standards and expectations for the use of social media by employees, councillors, casual workers and volunteers of Winterbourne Parish Council (“the Council”).

Social media includes (but is not limited to):

- Facebook
- X (formerly Twitter)
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- TikTok
- WhatsApp and other messaging platforms
- Blogs, forums and community groups
- Any future digital platforms

The policy aims to:

- Protect the reputation of the Council
- Protect individuals from legal and reputational risk
- Ensure lawful, professional and respectful communication
- Clarify responsibilities when using social media in both official and personal capacities

Online conduct must reflect the same standards expected offline.

2. Legal Framework

Use of social media must comply with all relevant legislation, including but not limited to:

- Data Protection Act 2018
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Equality Act 2010
- Defamation Act 2013
- Malicious Communications Act 1988
- Communications Act 2003
- Computer Misuse Act 1990
- Online Safety Act 2023
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action and, where appropriate, referral under the Member Code of Conduct or external authorities.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All employees
- All elected members (councillors)
- Volunteers
- Casual workers
- Contractors acting on behalf of the Council

It applies to:

- Official Council accounts
 - Personal accounts where the individual identifies themselves as connected to the Council
 - Any online activity that could impact the Council's reputation
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4. Official Council Social Media Use

4.1 Account Ownership

- All Council social media accounts remain the property of the Council.
- Access credentials must be held securely and retained by the Clerk.
- At least two authorised officers must have administrative access.
- Accounts must not be created without Clerk approval.

4.2 Content Approval and Monitoring

- Posts must be accurate, factual, and politically neutral.
- Content should be approved in accordance with Council procedures.
- Accounts must be regularly monitored.
- Inappropriate comments may be removed in line with a published moderation statement.

4.3 Standards of Content

Official posts must:

- Be respectful and inclusive
- Avoid party-political content
- Avoid personal opinions
- Not disclose confidential or exempt information
- Not identify individuals without lawful basis and consent



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Images of children or vulnerable adults must not be published without written consent.

5. Personal Use of Social Media

The Council recognises individuals have a right to private life. However, online conduct may impact the Council where:

- You identify yourself as a councillor, employee or volunteer
- Your role is publicly known
- Content could reasonably damage the Council's reputation

When using social media in a personal capacity:

- Make clear you are expressing personal views
- Consider using a disclaimer (e.g., "Views are my own")
- Do not use Council logos, branding or email addresses
- Do not disclose confidential information
- Do not comment on ongoing Council matters where this could prejudice decision-making

If unsure — do not post.

6. Conduct and Behaviour

The following will not be tolerated:

- Harassment, bullying or cyberbullying
- Discriminatory or offensive language
- Defamatory statements
- Breach of confidentiality
- Posting during work time where it interferes with duties
- Contacting vulnerable individuals through social media in connection with Council roles

Online behaviour is subject to the same standards as offline behaviour.

7. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All social media use must comply with data protection law.

You must not:

- Share personal data without lawful basis
- Post images of identifiable individuals without consent



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- Discuss staffing matters
- Share exempt Council business

All Council-related communications may be subject to Freedom of Information requests and legal disclosure.

8. Media Enquiries

If contacted by journalists regarding social media content:

- Do not respond
- Refer the enquiry to the Clerk

Only authorised individuals may speak on behalf of the Council.

9. Security

- Use strong, unique passwords for Council accounts
- Enable two-factor authentication
- Do not share login credentials
- Report suspected hacking immediately

The Council may update ICT protocols to protect systems.

10. Political Neutrality

The Council must remain politically neutral.

Councillors must distinguish between:

- Their role as an elected member
- Any party-political affiliation

Council platforms must never be used for party-political campaigning.

11. Whistleblowing

Nothing in this policy prevents protected disclosures under whistleblowing legislation. Please refer to the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.



12. Breaches of Policy

Breaches may result in:

- Informal resolution
 - Formal disciplinary action
 - Referral under the Member Code of Conduct
 - Removal of access to Council systems
 - Legal action where appropriate
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13. Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Code of Conduct (Members)
 - Employee Code of Conduct
 - ICT Security Policy
 - Data Protection Policy
 - Grievance & Bullying and Harassment Policy
 - Whistleblowing Policy
 - Managing Employee Performance Policy
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14. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if required due to legislative or operational changes.

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