**New Holland Parish Council**

**Social Media Policy**

**Scope**

New Holland Parish Council recognises that social media can be used by a Council as an effective and measurable way to provide information, achieve resident engagement, and attract publicity; this policy covers the use of all forms social media and applies to all Parish Councillors, Parish Council pages, and the website.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

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| **Role** | **Responsibility** |
| Parish Councillors | Abide by the Social Media Policy for both personal and Parish Council activities. |
| Parish Council Social Media Lead | Perform administration activities on the Parish Council social media pages/groups, disseminate Parish Council related information to the members via the Parish Council page, monitor social media for relevant information to feed back to the Parish Council. |
| The Clerk | Perform administration activities on the Parish Council social media pages/groups, and website. |

**What is Social Media**

Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks and includes tools such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Pinterest.

It is a powerful tool for communicating quickly with a wide audience and allows interaction from other members of the platform and whilst this is very useful, there are downsides:

* The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world.
* Groups on specific themes can be set up easily and posts then edited by the owners of that group to reflect their single interest, ensuring theirs is the only voice heard. There is no guarantee of truth, therefore gossip and unreliable narrative is as likely to be found as useful information.
* The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately, and it is all too easy to respond without thinking and potentially inflaming a situation. Information can then be shared with other sites and be spread far beyond the intended audience.

**Use of Social Media During Council Meetings**

Although councillors should keep residents informed of local issues and the use of social media can help with this, they should bear in mind the purpose of council meetings and the expectations of the public in terms of their representatives attentively listening to and participating in debates and decision-making.

Councillors must be conscious of the possible public perception created by the use of social media during meetings, and it is therefore not appropriate for councillors to use social media during council meetings unless express permission is gained during the meeting for a specific reason.

Any posts which are allowed during council meetings should refer only to the discussions which are taking place at the meeting and must not include confidential information.

**Councillors’ Obligations**

New Holland Parish Councillors may set up their own social media accounts as they deem fit, however they must be mindful that even though their account is personal and may have been set up before becoming a councillor, what they post may be taken as council views and they should therefore refrain from ‘trolling’, making derogatory/rude comments at/to other people on any public or private group and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language. Disclosure of confidential information must be avoided and Councillors must not make representations of the council using their own social media account.

The following guidelines should be applied to online participation:

* Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media Policy.
* Remember that you are responsible for the content you publish on any form of social media.
* Never give out personal details such as home address and telephone numbers. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with Council policy and the Data Protection Act.
* Everyone must be conscious of their obligations and should comply with other relevant council policies when using social media. For example, they should be careful not to breach council confidentiality and proprietary information policies. For councillors this could be a Code of Conduct issue, for employees it could be a disciplinary matter.
* Respect must be shown to all. Council users should be respectful of the authority, its members, and its employees. Derogatory comments are always wrong and can have repercussions.

If a councillor breaks the law whilst using social media (for example by posting something (defamatory), he or she will be personally responsible.

**Privacy**

Profile security and privacy settings should be set carefully. As standard, all privacy settings should be set to “only friends”. “Friends of friends” and “Networks and Friends” open the content to a large group of unknown people.

To reduce security risks, care should be taken when installing any external applications that work with social media sites, for example, games.

Maintain updated anti-virus and malware protection to avoid infections of spyware and adware that social networking sites might place on your device.

Be aware of phishing scams that arrive via email or on your wall which provide a link for you to click, leading to a fake login page.

Confidential matters cannot be disclosed and individuals should not be criticised.

Do not post images that include young people without parental permission.

The following statutes have a bearing on, or impinge on the rationale of, social media as far as a council is concerned:

* Data Protection Act 2088
* Freedom of Information Act 2000
* Human Rights Act 1998

**Dissemination of information (one source of truth and platforms)**

New Holland Parish Council uses social media to quickly disseminate information, promote council activities, and to drive engagement with individuals and groups within the community but carefully controls the use to minimise the risks as stated above.

The official social media accounts for New Holland Parish Council and the use of each is described below:

* New Holland Parish Council Website
  + A repository for Parish Council agendas and meeting minutes
  + Parish Councillor names and contact details
  + Statutory financial information
  + News and events
  + Council policies and procedures
  + Links to the North Lincolnshire planning portal and neighbourhood plan
  + A method of contacting the Parish Council.
* New Holland Parish Council Facebook group
  + Any communication from the council will come via the New Holland Parish Council page (news, events etc). Anything that is posted by councillors on their accounts should not be taken as the voice of the council as a whole.
  + No memes/funnies.
  + A place for residents to ask questions – within reason, derogatory or rude comments will not be accepted – admin approval on all posts.

**Definitions**

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| **Term** | **Definition** |
| Trolling | A post or comment designed deliberately to upset or provoke others. |
| Meme/funny | an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations. |
| Phishing | A form of social engineering and scam where attackers deceive people into revealing sensitive information or installing malware such as ransomware. |
| Malware | A file or code, typically delivered over a network, that infects, explores, steals or conducts virtually any behaviour an attacker wants. |
| Ransomware | A type of malware designed to deny a user or organisation access to files on their computer. |
| Admin/Administrator | In the context of social media; a person who has the ability to remove group members, approve and delete posts, make changes to group and/or page appearances. |

**Summary**

A Council has a professional and public image to uphold and how it communicates electronically impacts this image.

The only information that should be posted is that which the Council or Councillor wants the world to see. It is not like posting something to a web site or a blog and then realising that it should be changed or removed. On a social networking site, once something is posted, it may continue to be available, even after it is removed from the site.

Only add “official” council statements after they have been issued using your council’s agreed policy; these should be communicated via the official Parish Council social media channels only.

Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libellous. Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colourful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterisations.

Weigh whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness as a Council or a Councillor at risk.

If you find information, on the social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines then you must report it, as required by law; and be informed and cautious in the use of all new networking technologies.