

Social Media Policy

Purpose of policy

To establish a clear set of guidelines for the use of social media as a communication tool for Eynsham Parish Council. The policy will ensure all councillors and employees understand the purpose, the boundaries, and the potential risks – to personal reputations as well as that of the Council more broadly – associated with using social media.

What is social media?

Social media refers to websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or connect online via a social network. This includes, but is not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, TikTok, LinkedIn, blogging, vlogging and Instagram.

Why should Eynsham Parish Council (EPC) use social media?

Social media is increasingly being recognised as a key additional communication channel for local governance organisations, helping them to enhance their engagement with their communities via a medium that many residents already use on a regular basis.

In Eynsham, many individuals, groups and businesses already make use of social media channels to stay connected with one another. By not having a presence in this landscape, the Council is missing an opportunity to foster closer ties with the community, raises awareness of issues and developments, and improve the levels of engagement with the Council and its projects.

With a newly hired Communications Officer, we now have the resources to manage an additional communications channel and with careful planning and approach, we can minimise any risks associated with social media use while unlocking the benefits. It is also a medium that can be analytically monitored and reported on to track progress and allow for pivots in approach as required.

Risks associated with social media use

As with many online activities, using social media channels brings certain risks that must be considered and mitigated. These risks include:

- Damage to Council reputation due to harmful posts
- Damage to personal reputation of councillors or employees due to harmful posts
- Cyber-attacks, such as phishing
- Social engineering attacks from data misuse
- Cyber bullying/stalking

- Data leakage
- Potential litigation
- Loss of productivity
- Defamation
- Breach of code of conduct

Social media channels will only be used to:

- Distribute EPC agendas, minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise EPC events and activities
- Announce new information relating to EPC and/or the village
- Share links to EPC content hosted on Eynsham Online
- Promote links with village/community organisations
- Advertise EPC vacancies
- Share information and links from local, district, county or national agencies
- Post or share relevant and/or important information from neighbouring parishes
- Provide contact details for responding to EPC consultations or to share thoughts on related issues
- Share images of Eynsham and the surrounding area
- Run polls or short surveys on any issues related to EPC

Social media channels will not be used to:

- Start debates or enter into discussions about any issues related to the village or EPC
- Invite free-form opinion on any issues related to EPC or the village
- Share subjective opinions on any matters beyond the remit of EPC
- Promote personal projects or interests of the Councillors or employees unless directly relevant to EPC strategy and projects

Management of channels

Any social media accounts established will be clearly branded as Eynsham Parish Council and will be managed by the Communications Officer, with oversight from the Clerk. All posts or tweets will adhere to a consistent editorial voice and be posted or scheduled by either the Communications Officer or the Clerk. Passwords and account details will be held by the Communications Officer and accessible to the Clerk.

If a councillor/employee wishes to post on a particular issue or share a particular link, application should be made to the Communications Officer and will be considered based on whether the post/re-share adheres to the social media policy and objectives of the channel. If possible, councillors/employees should try to avoid using their personal social media accounts to post on EPC channels or make explicit links to it, or their role as councillors, to safeguard personal reputations and avoid trolling.

The social media channels will be used for information purposes only, as well as to establish links to other groups, but not for opening discussions, inviting opinion or starting debates. Where possible, external posts or comments will be moderated to allow for review in advance of them appearing on the channel. This will ensure unpleasant or abusive posts remain private. It will be made clear on the social media channel that any messages that seek a response or thoughts on any council issues should be emailed directly to the Clerk.

The Communications Officer or Clerk will remove posts that are considered to include:-

- Obscenities
- Insults
- Trolling
- Misinformation
- Fake news
- Political posts

The Council reserves the right to block any individuals who post such content.

All channels will be monitored daily (Monday to Friday) by the Communications Officer and reported on monthly to the Council. The use of social media channels will be reviewed after three months initially, then on a six-monthly basis.

Role for councillors and employees

If using social media in a personal capacity, both EPC councillors and employees must be mindful of the information they post. It must be clear that any individual's comments are their own and not those of EPC, although be aware that such disclosure will not prevent any posts being conflated with the reputation of EPC. Caution is always advised while associated with EPC.

The views of individual councillors posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by EPC at a council meeting, could constitute pre-disposition, pre-determination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at the meeting.

Employees must refrain from posting about their employers, including forthcoming parish council business, contractors, business or other sensitive information. No confidential information about the council, its councillors or employees should be shared on social media. Any content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative, complying with the EPC Code of Conduct and Media Policy.

When using social media generally, councillors and employees must not:

- Hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to EPC
- Post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of EPC
- Publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- Publish personal information without permission that breaches Data Protection legislation

- Post any information that infringes copyright
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous
- Engage in any communication that may be construed as bullying or harassment

Legislation

Everyone should be aware of and consider the following in terms of the involvement with any Eynsham Parish Council social media channel:

- Data Protection Act 1998/General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
- Human Rights Act 1998 – Article 8
- Defamation Act 2013
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
- Transparency Code 2015

Any questions, concerns, suggestions or ideas on the use of social media channels for Eynsham Parish Council can be directed to the Communications Officer in the first instance.

This policy will be reviewed after six months initially, and then annually.