

Yarnfield and Cold Meece Parish Council

Social Media and Communication Policy

PREFACE

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Author	Parish Clerk		
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Introduction & Purpose

The use of social media (e.g., Facebook, X/Twitter, WhatsApp) enables the Council to communicate directly with residents, businesses, and local organizations. This policy provides a code of practice to ensure all online communication is professional, legal, and respectful, protecting both the Council's reputation and individual councillors' personal liability.

The Parish Council currently has a public facing Facebook Page and uses WhatsApp to communicate with one another. This policy relates to the use of these media and any other social media platforms.

Roles & Responsibilities

- **The Clerk:** Will be responsible for maintaining the Council website and social media pages.
- **Councillors & Clerk:** Personally responsible for any content they publish. The **Councillor Code of Conduct** applies whenever an individual acts—or appears to act—in an official capacity online.

Acceptable Use (The "Dos")

- **Be Accurate:** Content must be objective, balanced, and fact-based.
- **Identify Yourself:** Always disclose your identity and affiliation with the Council.
- **Be Respectful:** Maintain a professional, informative tone. Avoid using all-caps or "loud" formatting.
- **Follow the "Golden Rule":** Do not say anything online that you would not say face-to-face in a public meeting.

Prohibited Content (The "Don'ts")

Council representatives must **not**:

- **Present Personal Opinions** as the official view of the Council.
- **Post Inflammatory remarks** or engage in personal attacks and "online fights".
- **Violate Confidentiality:** Never share sensitive or commercially private information.
- **Infringe Copyright:** Do not use third-party images or text without written permission.
- **Publish Personal Data:** Sharing individuals' names or details without consent is a breach of Data Protection laws.
- **Compromise Decisions:** Avoid posting views on matters yet to be debated, as this may constitute **predetermination or bias**.

Managing Official Council Pages

- **Monitoring:** Pages are not monitored 24/7. Official contact should still be directed to the Clerk.
- **Content Removal:** The Council reserves the right to remove any comments that are libellous, obscene, threatening, or party-political.

Personal Use & Privacy

- **Separation of Roles:** Councillors are encouraged to keep personal and professional profiles separate.
- **Clear Disclaimers:** When commenting on local matters personally, use a disclaimer such as: *"These views are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of Yarnfield and Cold Meece Parish Council"*.
- **Privacy Awareness:** Even with high privacy settings, personal posts can be made public. "Private" status is not a legal defence for breaching the Code of Conduct.

Email

The Parish Council will provide a gov.uk email address for each councillor and the clerk. Any email relating to council business should only be sent using this email address. The gov.uk email address should only be used for council business.

Agendas, minutes, reports and invitations to council meetings will be sent to councillors using their gov.uk email address.

Support the work of voluntary groups

The Parish Council will use its website, social media channels and notice boards to support the work of the village hall and other voluntary organisations operating in the parish. This support will include, but is not limited to, use of the Council website to provide information about the village hall or other voluntary groups, promote events and raise the profile of these groups.

Support the work of statutory bodies¹ and Ministry of Defence²

The Parish Council will use its website, social media channels and notice boards to support the work of statutory bodies and MoD.

Parish notice boards

The Parish Council notice boards will be used to support the initiatives and notifications set out in this policy document.

The use of the notice boards to advertise or promote commercial activities, other than those provided for in this policy document, will not be permitted.

Breach of Policy

Misuse of social media may result in:

- **Staff:** Action under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.
- **Councillors:** Referral to the Parish Council to consider whether there may have been a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Adopted on:

Next Review Date: May 2028

¹ Staffordshire County Council, Stafford Borough Council and Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care System

²² Principally MOD Swynnerton