



Digital Media Policy

Aims of this Policy:

The aim of this Policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Heworth Without Parish Councillors in the use of online communications, collectively referred to as digital media.

Digital media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

The policy covers all forms of digital media and digital networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Facebook, and other digital networking sites
- Twitter and other micro blogging sites
- YouTube and other video clip and podcast sites
- LinkedIn
- Blogs and discussion forums
- Parish Council Emails

The principles of the Policy apply to Parish Councillors and 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.

Digital Media content will require a volunteer to update and monitor the publicly accessible digital media sites.

The use of digital media is to enhance rather than replace existing forms of communication. The Parish Council website, noticeboards and newsletters will remain the main media for the purpose of communicating information about the Parish Council.

The Heworth Without Parish Council Members' Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way as it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate.

Heworth Without Parish Council Digital Media Policy:

1. The Council will appoint a nominated Councillor or Councillors as administrator(s). They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring it complies with the Digital Media Policy. The administrator(s) will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from our digital media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

Such posts will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and the clerk.

2. The digital media may be used to

- Post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Display news stories linked to a website or press page
- Advertise vacancies of both staff and councillors
- Retweet or 'share' information from partners i.e. Police, Library, Health, etc.
- Announce new information
- Post or share information from other parish-related community groups/clubs/associations/bodies e.g. schools, sports clubs and community groups
- Refer residents' queries to the clerk and all other councillors
- Post or share information of relevant activities outside the parish

3. Facebook will be used to support the website information above.

4. Emails will be used to distribute information about council business.

5. 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 digital media (including email).

1. All digital media sites in use should be checked and updated on a regular basis by the relevant administrator(s). They should also ensure that best practice security settings are in place.

2. When participating in any online communication:

a. Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.

b. Use common sense and common courtesy.

c. Always disclose your identity and affiliation to the Parish Council.

d. Never make false or misleading statements.

e. Parish Councillors should ask permission to publish or report conversations that are meant to be private or internal to the Parish Council. The Parish Council's privacy, confidentiality and legal guidelines for external communication should not be violated by Parish Councillors's efforts to be transparent.

f. Parish Councillors should not present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment or bring the parish council into disrepute.

g. Parish Councillors are expected to always communicate professionally, regardless of the channel of communication.

h. All Parish Councillors need to be mindful of the information they post on sites. They must ensure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council or bring the Council into disrepute, or are contrary to the Council's Code of Conduct or any other Policies.

i. Information owned by the Parish Council is not to be discussed or referred to on social media sites, even in private messages between the Councillors who have authorised access to the information.

j. The Law of Confidence in the UK is an important right and is recognised by the courts and in the world of Intellectual Property. The absence of a written document does not necessarily mean a duty of confidentiality does not exist.

k. Keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative, never condescending or “loud.” Use sentence case format, not capital letters, and do not write in red to emphasise points.

l. Check carefully before quoting or linking to statements from other online sources – always consider whether a statement can be proved before publishing or sharing it. The Parish Council may be held responsible for something a Councillor has written or said if it is on behalf of the Parish Council, or on a Council sanctioned space including a Facebook group, blog, tweet or website.

m. Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any digital media site.

n. Retweeting, re-posting or linking to defamatory content previously shared by others does not exempt an individual or organisation (Parish Council) from the law

o. Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.

p. Permission to publish photographs or videos on digital media sites should be sought from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before being uploaded.

q. Respect the privacy of other Councillors and residents.

r. Do not post any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations such as libel and copyright.

s. The Parish Council may require its Councillors to remove social media postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of these standards and failure to comply with such a request may, in itself, result in disciplinary action.

t. Parish Councillors should never disclose their official email password to anyone and must always take care to keep login information private.

3. Residents and Councillors should note that not all communication requires a response.

a. There may not be immediate responses to communications as a response may need to be considered by the Parish Council at its next meeting (if in doubt, contact Clerk for clarification).

b. The Councillors should seek guidance before participating in social media when the topic being discussed may be considered sensitive. Social media activity around sensitive topics should be referred to the Parish Clerk.

c. The Parish Clerk and the administrator(s) will be responsible for all final published responses.

d. If a matter needs further consideration it may be raised as an agenda item for consideration by a quorum of Councillors; the Poster shall be informed via the page or direct message that this is the case and be invited to correspond with the Parish Clerk directly.

4. The nominated administrator (s) shall:

- a. Remove any negative posts they suspect may contain personal and inflammatory remarks, libellous or defamatory information without further comment or notification.
- b. Spell and grammar check everything.
- c. Correct any errors promptly.

5. Councillors or parishioners who have any concerns regarding content placed on digital media sites should report them to the Clerk of the Council. Misuse of such sites in a manner that is contrary to this and other policies could result in action being taken such as:

- a. Parish Councillors may be required to remove internet postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.

Non-compliance:

The Parish Councillors must read and comply with this policy. Acceptance of engagement with the Parish Council signifies an agreement to abide by this policy. Any failure to comply with the policy may be considered a disciplinary matter and will be dealt with in accordance with the appropriate disciplinary procedure.

Serious breaches of this policy, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the reputation of the Parish Council, may, if substantiated, constitute gross misconduct and may lead to dismissal.

Any Councillor who becomes aware of inappropriate use of social media forums as set out in this policy should immediately contact the Parish Clerk, giving screenshots of the relevant social media site where possible.

The Policy will be reviewed annually.

Adopted in May 2017

Reviewed December 2022, December 2023, December 2024

Review date December 2025