Tanworth in Arden Parish Council Social Media Policy

Date Adopted: 16/01/2025 Date for Review: January 2027

The aim of this policy is to set out a Code of Practice to provide guidance to Parish Council staff and others who engage with the Council using online communications, collectively referred to as social media. The policy sits alongside relevant existing polices which need to be taken into consideration.

1. General Provisions

Publishing untrue statements about a person which is damaging to their reputation is libel and can result in a court action and a fine for damages. This also applies if someone else publishes something libellous on your social media site. A successful libel claim against you could result in an award of damages.

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence. Breach of copyright could result in an award of damages against you.

Publishing personal data of individuals without permission is a breach of Data Protection legislation and an offence.

Publication of obscene material is a criminal offence and is subject to a custodial sentence.

Any computer, mobile or other devices used to communicate, should be secured using a strong password – this includes any online accounts such as social media account passwords. A strong password should contain a mixture of letters, number and punctuation and should not contain names or words associated with you. The password should be changed on a regular basis to ensure that the risk of compromise is low.

Councillors use of the Parish Council's systems may be monitored on the basis set out in this policy and where breaches of policy or legislation are found to have taken place, action may be taken under the Parish Council's Disciplinary Policy, the code of conduct or any such legal mechanism as is deemed appropriate.

2. The Council's Official Channels

Tanworth-in-Arden Parish Council maintains several official social media accounts.

- Facebook - facebook.com/TanworthPC
- Twitter - twitter.com/Tanworthpc
- This may not be an exhaustive list as TIA PC may join new networks as they become more popular.

Council Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise local events and activities
- Promote good news stories with a linked website or press page
- Advertise job vacancies
- Retweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Health etc.
- Announce new information relative to the Parish

- Share formal consultations or gather informal views
- Post or share information from other Parish/Town Council related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other Councillors
- Share any other information that is relevant to the community

The use of social media does not replace existing forms of communication.

Online content should be accurate, objective, balanced and informative.

We shall monitor our official social media accounts, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, excluding public holidays. Our responses to replies, comments and direct messages depend on the individual service. Even if we do not reply, we are listening and will act on or pass on your comments as appropriate. In most cases, it will be better to contact the department or member directly via our website.

Standards for conduct on social media

We request that those using our social media channels to contact us are civil, tasteful and relevant. We reserve the right to remove, without notice, any disruptive, offensive, abusive or defamatory post or comment. We also reserve the right to block a user if their interactions are offensive.

Complaints

Social media is not the appropriate avenue for raising an official complaint with TIA PC. Please see our complaints information or contact the Parish direct.

Approach to connections on social media

Any retweets, follows, or likes are not an endorsement of a service, individual or organisation. We do not take responsibility for any content on pages or profiles we have shared. There is no fixed approach on who we will have in our network.

Authority to post

Only those councillors and/or parish clerk/deputy clerk who are part of the social media sub-committee are authorised to post on the respective social media platforms on behalf of the Parish Council. The sub-committee shall not contain more than 4 (Four) members. Should any councillor wish to post on the social media platforms they much have prior approval of the content from the sub-committee.

Moderation

The Parish Council's Deputy Clerk and nominated Councillors act as the main moderators of Parish Councils social media output and are responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.

The moderators will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from the official Tanworth in Arden Parish Council social media pages which are deemed to be of a threatening, defamatory or libellous nature. Where appropriate, the moderators will have the authority to report any such posting to any other appropriate agency.

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on a TIA PC official social media page that denigrates Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Parish Clerk.

3. Officers & Staff

Parish Council staff should not:

- Present personal opinions as that of the Parish Council
- Post any paper/information which the parish council has deemed confidential.

- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Parish Council or bring the Council into disrepute.
- Undermine the parish council's democratic processes.
- Post politically controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous or that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Post offensive language relating to any protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010, including race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

Misuse of social media content that is contrary to this and other policies could result in disciplinary action being taken and is severe cases dismissal.

4. Parish Council Members

Members are reminded that anything you post online will likely be visible forever. You should generally not post any comment or opinion online, that you would not say to someone face-to-face.

Parish Councillors may publicly post from a personal account, an individual "councillor page", or a group/page representing a group of councillors. This policy applies to any post/comment made publicly where you are recognisable as a member of TIA PC.

Parish Councillors are reminded that the member's Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Councillors should not:

- Present personal opinions as that of the Parish Council, unless authorised to
- Post any paper/information which the parish council has deemed confidential.
- Present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council or bring the Council into disrepute.
- Undermine the council's democratic processes.
- Post any information that may be deemed libellous or that constitutes bullying or harassment
- Post offensive language relating to any protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010, including race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- Conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

When using social media Parish Councillors should be mindful of the information, they post in both a personal and Council capacity and keep the tone of any comments respectful and informative.

Individual Parish Councillors are responsible for what they post in a Council and personal capacity and need to be aware of the general Code of conduct which they are expected to adhere to.