

Trull Parish Council Social Media Guidance

Trull Parish Council (hereafter TPC) encourages participation and engagement in social media, subject to members following appropriate use and common-sense guidelines when referencing TPC.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to direct Trull Parish Councillors and employees of TPCs use of social media accounts by:

- Providing guidance on expected working practice.
- Highlighting issues and risks which may arise while using social media.
- Informing users about the acceptable use of social media sites.
- Outlining the standards which users must maintain.
- Providing standard responses to common queries and enquiries by members of the public.
- Providing guidance on interacting with followers and monitoring comments from external users.
- Warning users about the consequences of inappropriate use of Council social media accounts.

2. Scope

This guidance applies to TPC members and employees of the Council. For the purpose of this guidance the term 'member' will cover both.

Breach of this guidance by any member of TPC may be regarded as a disciplinary offence. Members should be cognisant of the Code of Conduct.

3. Definitions

Social Media are websites or applications that enable users to create and share digital content or to participate in social networking.

4. Risks

TPC recognises that there are risks associated with the use of social media.

This guidance recognises and aims to mitigate the following risks:

- Criticism regarding the use of public funds, time and resources.
- Sharing and security of passwords.
- Damage to the reputation of TPC.
- Sharing and misuse of confidential information relating to Members of the Council, employees of the Council or members of the public.
- Inappropriate use of social media including: the posting or sharing of personal views; the posting or sharing of offensive, obscene, discriminatory, defamatory or misleading information.
- Inappropriate comments by or inappropriate interactions with members of the public.
- Endorsing inappropriate or controversial views and content published by other social media users.
- Libel and misleading information; the risk of being sued.
- Illegal use of images without permission from original source; including use of images of minors without the permission of a parent or guardian.
- Inappropriate communication with minors or facilitating such inappropriate communication by other members of the public which may be deemed as 'grooming' or 'cyber-bullying'.
- Deleting public records.

- Theft of intellectual property rights.
- Failing to act upon information given by a member of the public via social media.

Non-compliance with this guidance could have a significant effect on the efficient operation of the Council and may result in financial loss and an inability to provide necessary services to our customers.

4.1 Purpose and Benefits of Social Media

Social media provides a platform for TPC to communicate effectively with members of the public. This can be achieved as a two-way process with the Council seeking to keep residents informed in addition to providing a channel through which the public can report issues and direct questions to the Council.

The general rules when drafting content or posting to social media are:

- Use common sense, follow proper professional etiquette, and be aware that in the digital age, nothing posted is entirely private.
- When you draft a message about TPC to appear on Social Media, stick to what you know.
- Do not include in a draft any confidential, undisclosed, proprietary, or internal-use-only information that you obtain as part of your duties with TPC.
- Provide accurate and relevant content that is suitable for the intended audience.

Relevant information from other sources such as other local government authorities and community groups can be included in your draft.

When drafting a post to a social media account the following should be taken into account:

- Do not include any content that is likely to bring TPC, its contractors, staff or members into disrepute.
- Do not include in the draft any inappropriate or misleading information.

4.2 Monitoring Social Media and Interacting with Followers

All members of TPC are encouraged to report any postings on any social media site that may reflect on TPC in a positive or negative or newsworthy way.

This may include posts from other Councils or organisations which will be of interest to residents of Trull, reports of damage to town property and complaints or enquiries from members of the public.

It is TPC policy to only respond on social media where this will not be controversial or lead to any breach or release of personal or sensitive information.

4.3 Inappropriate Content

TPC will not endorse posts to any Social Media which may negatively impact the Council, its staff, contractors or members. This non-exhaustive list includes any of the following:

- Content which could be considered libellous or defamatory.
- Content, which is false, misleading or intended to deceive followers.
- Obscene, sexual or violent content.
- Offensive or discriminatory content.
- Content which promotes illegal activity.
- Bullying.
- Inappropriate contact with minors.
- Engaging in controversial or political debate.

TPC should not be seen to endorse any inappropriate, offensive or controversial views posted by other social media users.

4.4 Confidentiality

All members are under a general requirement to maintain the confidentiality of information. There are also particular responsibilities under Data Protection legislation to maintain the confidentiality of personal data. If any member is unsure of whether they should pass on information, they should consult the Clerk.

Anyone drafting a post should make every effort to ensure that the confidentiality of information is maintained. Everyone must be aware that content which is published through social media cannot be permanently removed from the public domain even when deleted.

Any private, confidential or sensitive information should not be included in any content to be published using the Council's social media accounts or properties including instant messaging functions provided by social media sites, as these messages are not secure and can be easily shared.

5. Use of Personal Accounts and Properties

When using personal social media accounts, employees of the Council, as well as third parties, are advised that they should not post or share any information which reflects negatively upon TPC. This includes criticism of Council policies, decisions and procedures.

6. Members use of Social Media

Members are encouraged to use all forms of media to build relationships with the community, to promote council activities or to assist with understanding the views of the community in order that they may represent the community's views at council meetings.

Members must comply with the Council's Code of Conduct at all times.

7. Guidance Compliance

If any user is found to have breached this guidance, they may be reported to the Monitoring Officer. If a criminal offence is considered to have been committed further action may be taken to assist in the prosecution of the offender(s).

8. Review and Revision

This guidance will be reviewed as it is deemed appropriate, but no less frequently than every 2 years.