

Trull Parish Council Social Media Policy and Guidance

Trull Parish Council TPC encourages participation and engagement in social media, subject to members following appropriate use and common-sense guidelines when referencing TPC. TPC's ambition is to recreate the traditional village noticeboard for the 21st century — combining digital communications with traditional methods such as the Parish Magazine, newsletters, and notice boards, to ensure every resident feels informed and heard.

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to direct Trull Parish Councillors and employees of TPC's 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.

Core Mission

To transform TPC from a "background authority" into a visible, trusted, and interactive pillar of the community. A social media presence is essential for the following reasons:

- **Controlling the Narrative:** If the Council does not provide the facts, residents will rely on rumours and hearsay.
- **Increasing Accessibility:** Most residents cannot attend a 7:15 PM meeting on a Monday. Social media brings the Council chamber to their living rooms.
- **Boosting Engagement:** A strategy ensures the Council is not just broadcasting at people, but actively listening and gathering local intelligence on issues like planning and road safety.
- **Professionalism & Duty:** In a digital age, an inactive page suggests an inactive Council. A consistent approach demonstrates value for the precept (taxpayer money).

Scope

This guidance applies to TPC members and employees of the Council.

Breach of this guidance by an employee of TPC may be regarded as a disciplinary offence. For Councillors, it may be considered a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Definitions

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

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.

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.
- Maintain a tone that is engaging and nurtures the Council's relationship with the public, encourages community volunteering, and strictly maintains political impartiality.

Content Types

TPC social media content should fall into one of three categories. Posts should be planned and scheduled accordingly:

1. Daily News ("The Pulse of Trull")

Frequency: 2–3 times per week. These posts build a positive profile for the Council and demonstrate that it is active and approachable.

- **Local Spotlight:** Photos of the King George V Playing Field or community activities.

- **Weather / Traffic Alerts:** Share updates from Somerset Highways or flood warnings.
- **Community Events:** Party in the Park, group activities, market or community sales.
- **The "Human" Council:** Photos of councillors active in the community.

2. Calls for Action (Community Engagement)

Frequency: As needed (1–2 times per month). These posts require a specific response from residents.

- **Planning Consultations:** Inviting residents to share views before a specific meeting date.
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Seeking help with community events and projects.
- **Surveys / Polls:** Gathering community opinion on local issues.
- **Reporting Issues:** Directing residents to the appropriate authority (e.g. Somerset Council) to report potholes, broken streetlights, etc., for the fastest resolution.

3. Official Council News (The Formal Record)

Frequency: As required by statute. Written in plain English, with explanations where helpful.

- **Meeting Notices:** Date, time, and location of upcoming Parish Council meetings.
- **Elections and Boundary Consultations.**
- **Financial Transparency:** An annual post — ideally as a simple graphic — showing how the precept (residents' portion of Council Tax) is being spent.

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.

Administration of Social Media Accounts

While it is impractical for all councillors to review every social media post, for security and continuity of posting there will always be a minimum of two admins with access to the Council's social media accounts at any time.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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).

Review and Revision

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