Social Media

Use of Social Media within Stratton St Margaret Parish Council

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Overview

Introduction

Stratton St Margaret Parish Council currently operates one Twitter account, several Facebook pages, and one Instagram account. We also operate the website and email all of which could be seen as part of an overall digital marketing strategy.

Each of these accounts have similarities, the prime one being that they offer online communication with members of the public who are active online. These members of the public are not necessarily all Stratton Parish residents and can and will include a global audience.

The objective of this document is to provide Staff and Councillors with an overview of Social Media and outline the Council's position on their use, both through official channels and through personal accounts. This document should be read in line with the Staff Handbook.

What is Social Media?

Social media is a generic term used for the sharing of information electronically in real time. Various platforms, primarily Facebook and Twitter, have brought about an expectation of instant communication. This is not an expectation that we can change, it is endemic to the platform and must be one we work within to the best of our ability.

As the information is user generated it tends to consist of opinion, gossip, discussion, debate, stories and more official information. Due to this the information passed cannot always be trustworthy and it is as common to see uninformed gossip as it is to receive useful information.

One of the key features of Social Media is that it can be accessed from multiple devices. Desktop PCs, laptops, tablets and mobile phones can all access social media, and it is common for users to log in from multiple devices depending on their preference and location.

Social media:

- **Listens** to what the public are saying.

- **Explains** to the public what is going on.

- **Engages** with the public actively, by participating in a discussion on a topic.

- **Curates** information and brings it together in a meaningful way.

- **Convenes** like-minded people into groups that may lead to engagement offline.

Why use Social Media?

- Social media has the advantages of reaching many people very quickly.

- It can be used to have not only successful one-to-one communications, but also one-to-many communications.

- Media is shared widely and quickly. It can easily spread beyond the intended audience.

- Many different devices can pick up this information.

- It can easily include text, photos, audio and video.

- It allows participants to engage as they wish. They can choose to view the content, comment on it or even create content themselves, all of which are monitored by the social media team.

- Communication can be done in real time.

Why not use Social Media?

While there are many advantages to using Social Media as a tool to communicate with our residents and the wider world, there are some disadvantages.

- Information is shared in the public domain and it should be expected that it can be viewed by anyone in the world, permanently.

- There is often no need to register to view content. Content can be viewed anonymously; registration is only needed should you wish to actively participate.

- Once published it cannot be taken back. Expect anything you publish, even if you later delete it, to be permanently online.

- Media is shared widely and quickly. It can easily spread beyond the intended audience.

- Communication is expected in real time. While some flexibility can be achieved by publicising our opening times; within those opening times Social Media should be monitored and responses, where needed, actioned as soon as possible.

- There is no guarantee of truth. Gossip and misinformation exists and is easily spread online.

- There is a lot of information out there and it can be easy to spend a high proportion of time viewing and responding to messages.

However, each of these disadvantages can be managed, or in some cases negated, through the following policy.

Stratton St Margaret Parish Council and Social Media

Social media with its ability to streamline communications is a powerful and cost effective tool to engage with the public. It is an effective and measurable way to achieve publicity for our services and achieve resident engagement. It costs far less to engage with the public this way compared to traditional face to face communications, telephone communications and even email communications. By using Social Media for certain communications it frees us to use our other methods of communications more cost effectively and appropriately.

Social Media as a tool should not stand alone. It should form part of an overall marketing and communications strategy that to be effective includes all forms of media and ways to engage. Any campaign, promotion and activity can be plugged into social media platforms to increase reach and exposure.

As the world works more and more on mobile and internet enabled devices it is now an expectation that organisations of all levels have a presence on Social Media.

Stratton St Margaret Parish Council currently operates on the following social media platforms:

- Facebook Page – Stratton St Margaret Parish Council

- Facebook Page – Stratton St Margaret Neighbourhood Plan (to be merged with the Parish Council page during a quiet period)

- Facebook Page – Grange Leisure

- Facebook Page – Grange Bar

- Twitter Account – SSMPCSwindon

- Instagram – Stratton St Margaret Parish Council (SSMPCSwindon)

Social Media Policy

1. Aims

1.1. The aim of this policy is to ensure:

- Engagement with individuals and communities.

- Successful promotion of Parish Council events and activities.

- A consistent approach is adopted and maintained through our use of Social Media.

- That Council information remains secure and is not compromised through the use of Social Media.

- That users operate within existing policies, guidelines and relevant legislation.

- That the Council's reputation is not damaged or adversely affected through the use of Social Media.

1.2. The council will make use of these tools to quickly disseminate information but carefully control their use in order to minimise any risk to the Council.

1.3. The policy provides a structured approach to using social media and will ensure that it is effective, lawful and does not compromise Council information or computer systems / networks.

1.4. That users (regardless whether they are using a personal or official account) ensure they are using social media sensibly and responsibly. Ensure that its use will not adversely affect the council or its business, not be damaging to the Council's reputation and credibility or otherwise violate any Council policies.

2. Responsibilities

2.1. The Clerk to the Council is the designated owner of all social media accounts in Stratton St Margaret Parish Council's name.

2.1.1. Where the Social media account has been set up by another Officer, full access has been provided to the Clerk to the Council. It is expected that ownership be transferred where and when deemed necessary by the Clerk to the Council.

2.2. The opening of any new Social Media channels in Stratton St Margaret Parish Council's name should be approved by the Clerk to the Council and be added to the list of currently used social media channels in this document.

2.3. The Clerk to the Council will designate a site administrator who will be responsible for daily monitoring, responding and upkeep of any content on official Stratton St Margaret Parish Council social media channels.

2.4. Councillors and Staff are at liberty to have their own social media accounts on any platform they choose. However, these should be identified as personal and do not reflect the Council's view.

2.4.1. Councillors and Officers should at all times present a professional image and not disclose anything of a confidential nature. Comments of a derogatory, proprietary or libellous nature should not be made, and care should be taken to avoid guesswork, exaggeration and colourful language. Guidelines on standards of behaviour expected can be found in section 3 and details on best practice in the appendices under the relevant social media platform.

3. Monitoring content

3.1. The Parish Council reserves the right to restrict or remove any content on Parish Council social media platforms that is deemed in violation of social media policy or any applicable law.

3.2. Users will be informed that their posts may not be published/or may be deleted if they meet any of the criteria below.

- Comments not topical to the article being discussed

- Posts that are not in direction with the Council's social media and marketing strategy

- Posts that might mislead the reader

- Personal opinions that are not of the Council

- Comments that are politically motivated

- Profane language

- Material that perpetuates or promotes discrimination of protected characteristics as listed in the Equality Act 2010, including, age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity.

- Solicitation of commerce ie: Trying to sell items or encourage the sale of non Parish Council related products or services.

- Illegal conduct or encouragement/support of illegal activities

- Information that compromises or may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems

- Content that violates the legal ownership interest of any other party.

- Images or content where we do not have the rights to promote or share.

3.3. Users may include any staff member acting as Stratton St Margaret Parish Council on social media channels but on some channels this may also include members of the public who have the opportunity to post on any of Stratton St Margaret Parish Council's pages.

3.4. Posts by Stratton St Margaret Parish Council official channels that fall under the above inadmissible behaviours may be retained or acknowledged when it would be beneficial to the transparency of the Council and Council systems. As anything put online will find a way to stay online even when deleted it is often better not to try to hide it, rather deal with it openly or recognise that the offending activity will be dealt with. If and when this may be required is at the jurisdiction of the Clerk to the Council.

4. Measuring Success

4.1. The Parish Council is interested in measuring engagement. How this is measured would be covered in more detail under an overarching Social Media or Marketing strategy or, in absence of these, an individual project's marketing strategy.

4.2. Social media platforms offer a number of ways to measure engagement. These, where known, are detailed in the appendices related to the specific platform.

5. Legal Requirements

5.1. The following legal documents have a bearing, or impinge on the rationale of this policy.

- Data Protection Act 1998

- Freedom of Information Act 2000

- Human Rights Act 1998

- Equalities Act 2010

6. Evaluation and Review Date

6.1. This Policy will be reviewed biannually by Full Council.

Guidelines on the use of Social Media

Standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Stratton St Margaret Parish Council (official and personal accounts)

- Be aware of and recognise your responsibilities identified in the Social Media policy.

- Remember you are responsible for the content you post on Social Media.

- Never give out personal details, such as home addresses and telephone numbers. Contact details should only be given out when they are in the public domain and even then it is best practice to exchange such contact details outside of public social media channels. Ensure that you handle any personal or sensitive information in line with the Data Protection Act 1998.

- Know your obligations: you must comply with other Council policies when using social media.

- Show respect to all. Be respectful of the authority, employees and other members of the council.

- Be aware that social media networks are rapidly growing in popularity and are used by all ages in society.

- Always remain aware of web security and ensure you use a secure password and keep your PC secure from viruses. You do not want your social media accounts hacked.

- All accounts owned by Stratton St Margaret Parish Council to only be accessed using Council owned devices (i.e. laptops, mobiles, tablets and desktop computers)

- Keep your PC and / or phone locked when not in use to avoid anyone else accessing social media platforms under your identity.

- Ensure that any mobile device you use to access social media is also secure to avoid others from using your device to post under your own name.

- Do not get pulled into an argument online, neither party tend to come off well. Additionally, limited space and a short time frame in which to phrase a response can inflame a situation.

  o Dealing with "Trolls": Online there are individuals who purposefully start and perpetuate an argument. If someone is refusing to act rationally or unwilling to discuss offline they may be a troll. The colloquialism being "don't feed the trolls".

Standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Stratton St Margaret Parish Council (Official Channels)

- Channels will be monitored only during business hours 8.30am – 4.30pm Monday to Thursday, 8.30am – 4.00pm Fridays.

- Keep the content relevant to the audience and persona you are speaking from.

- Correct usage includes:

    o Any Stratton St Margaret Parish Council project, or project in which we are working in partnership.

    o Sharing projects from partners related to the above.

    o Sharing information in the local public interest

- Avoid where practical any linking of professional and personal social media accounts within web enabled devices and applications. It is appreciated that some platforms such as Facebook will not work correctly without a certain amount of linkage between personal profile and business pages however care should always be taken to ensure you are responding as the correct entity at all times. This can be avoided by adhering to the guidelines of only accessing Stratton St Margaret Parish Council accounts for Parish owned devices.

Standards of behaviour expected as a representative of Stratton St Margaret Parish Council (Personal Accounts)

- Use a disclaimer. When using social media for personal purposes, you must not imply you are speaking for the Council. Make it clear that what you say is representative of your personal views only.

Appendix 1 - Twitter

Overview

Twitter is a micro blogging platform where users can post short messages of up to 140 characters and converse with other users.

Twitter additionally has an in built picture manager for uploading photographs.

Twitter is completely public with non-users able to view data and details about the user.

Users have an account that includes a "news feed", profile and other tabs that are used to navigate content.

Twitter is a good all round social media channel. Twitter's strengths lie in the engagement of and listening to the public but can also be used to explain, curate and convene in a more limited way. It is weak only at explaining due to the limited number of characters in which to convey your message.

- Stratton St Margaret Parish Council's Twitter presence can be found at https://twitter.com/SSMPCSwindon. The twitter handle is @SSMPCSwindon

Twitter Best Practice

Try to keep messages concise, but do not resort to text speak (ie: u instead of you, r instead of are). Some grammatical shortcuts can be taken, for example '&' instead of 'and' as that will reduce the character count, but it is best to avoid where possible as overuse of these can make what you say seem less professional.

Limit use of CAPS. Online use of caps is seen as shouting and can be perceived as aggressive.

It is perfectly acceptable to ask people who follow you for a retweet. Convention dictates that this looks like "Please RT" or "Please Retweet". You can just add this to a tweet you particularly want to be distributed or mention people who are best placed to distribute. Do remember this is like asking someone for a favour, treat it as such.

Promote others to help develop an online community and help to improve the reach of your own following.

Do try to respond to everyone who mentions you, even if it is just a thank you for what they said or did. It is also nice to do that for anyone who retweets you, especially if you asked them to.

For the official account it is acceptable to be a little more informal than you might expect to be. Obviously you are still representing Stratton St Margaret Parish Council however it is expected that social media is about being social and as such being engaging and showing a little more personality is no bad thing. A little whimsy on occasion can be a great tool to engage with your public and help spread the message when something more vital or important is to be said.

For personal accounts, personality is key and expected. However, remember that humour is often misunderstood online and in text formats. You are also linked to Stratton St Margaret Parish Council, however much your profile says your views are your own, so ensure you follow the policy and do nothing that might bring the council into disrepute.

Try to use images as often as you can. Visual media such as video and pictures can help grab your audience's attention.

Do ask questions and ask for feedback. A better relationship is built through engaging with your audience.

Measuring Success

Twitter is not as concise with its analytics as some other social media platforms but some aspects can be read. You can review the online analytics or choose to receive an email, once a week, with on overview of your week on Twitter with a few tweets that proved popular highlighted. Statistics include:

1. How many times posts were re-tweeted.

2. How many times posts were favourited.

3. How often a link was viewed via the tweet.

4. How many people saw the tweet, although this one should always be taken lightly as it's not always unique users.

5. Any new followers.

Appendix 2 – Facebook

Overview

Facebook is a social network where users create a personal profile and connect with friends who also have a profile. Profiles tend to have a level of privacy depending on what settings have been enabled by the user. However, it is wise to assume that all information is public, as what you post can be shared by your friends and then by their friends ad infinitum.

Unlike Twitter; Facebook offers the opportunity to get more in depth with your content and is particularly powerful at engaging with your audience. The system of creating a post and inviting people to comment on it, share it and like it give the audience many ways of interacting depending on their own preference, and many ways for it to spread further.

Facebook is a complex tool for the user with many diverse ways to collect and create content. For this guide we will stick to basic profile and page use.

Stratton St Margaret Parish Council / Grange Leisure currently operates four Facebook pages.

- Stratton St Margaret Parish Council - https://www.facebook.com/Stratton-St-Margaret-Parish-Council

- Neighbourhood Planning - https://www.facebook.com/Stratton-St-Margaret-Neighbourhood-Plan

- Grange Leisure - https://www.facebook.com/grangeleisure/

- Grange Bar - https://www.facebook.com/grangebarswindon/

The above pages are linked to a very small group of Officer's personal profiles to enable them to update the pages as 'Administrators' and upload ad hoc posts that are in addition to the scheduled campaigns. As a security measure Facebook usually requires a named person to be linked, but that person has to have 'Liked' the page.

Facebook Best Practice

Limit use of CAPS. Online use of caps is seen as shouting and can be perceived as aggressive.

Keep your message concise, you may be able to use the space for more detail but you need to capture your audience's attention quickly as they will be looking at a lot of data.

Update frequently and use images and other visual media to add interest to your posts.

Do not use any images directly from Google without the owner's written permission. It's advisable to only ever use our own images or obtain them from reputable free image sites. Using other people's images can lead to a fine.

Use it to engage with your audience, ask questions and get feedback.

Promote others, but stick to policy and guidelines when doing so.

For personal accounts, keep "friends" of your profile to actual friends i.e: people you would consider friends in Real Life. Encourage other individuals to interact with you in other ways. Councillors may want to consider creating a page for their position as councillor and leave their profile for purely personal connections.

For official accounts, any profile that may be created in the future to help Facebook functionality will not accept friend requests (without the Clerk to the Council's approval). These would be encouraged to like the official page where practical.

Do try to respond to everyone who mentions you, even if it is just a thank you for what they said or did.

For the official account it is acceptable to be a little more informal than you might expect to be, but be consistent and do not show any favouritism. Obviously you are still representing Stratton St Margaret Parish Council, however, it is expected that social media is about being social and as such being engaging and showing a little more personality is no bad thing. A little whimsy on occasion can be a great tool to

engage with your public and help spread the message when something more vital or important is to be said.

Personal accounts should have their privacy settings set to only friends. Other settings allow content on your profile to be easily open to an infinite group of unknown people.

Contentious or potentially difficult issues should only be posted if approved in writing by the Clerk to the Council, in line with the media policy on press releases. Official line should be taken at all times with these kind of issues.

Measuring Success

Facebook has a number of ways to measure engagement.

1. Insights tab – which provides analytics on engagement, comments, reach, etc. This is the best way to analyse our key times and days to post content and will be reviewed regularly

2. Notifications on each post relating to; number of people who viewed, shared and liked each post – although this is not always accurate and does not represent unique users.

3. Notification on the number of people who like your page – again, this is subjective and only our target audience are relevant.

Appendix 3 – Instagram

Overview

Instagram is an online mobile photo-sharing site that allows its users to share pictures and videos either publicly or privately on the app, as well as through a variety of other social networking platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Flickr.

Instagram keeps it simple: muted colour tones, no advertisements, minimal buttons, and most importantly, only one photo on the screen at a time. This presents users with the opportunity to truly get your following's attention and communicate your message.

The Parish Council operates one Instagram account:

- Stratton St Margaret Parish Council https://www.instagram.com/SSMPCSwindon/

Instagram has recently updated to provide insights, which we will monitor over time.