Item 12

Use of Social Media

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to outline a proposed use of Social Media by the Parish Council to improve how it engages and communicates with the community.

Background

From time to time, it has been suggested that the Parish Council should have a social media account to improve how it communicates and engages with the local community.

However, because of concerns about the time and resources required to administer and monitor usage this has not been supported previously.

At present, the main ways in which the council communicates with the community is via quarterly updates in Villages News, posting information on the website, contact with Parish Clerk and in person by attendance at the Annual Parish Meeting and Parish Council meetings.

To improve the reach of communication, we also work closely with the Village Partnership (VP) who kindly agree to post articles for us on the VP Facebook Page. Whilst this support is very much appreciated, it would be quicker and perhaps more appropriate if the Council was able to post such articles on its own social media page.

Definition of Social Media

Social media is a term for websites based on user participation and user-generated content. They include social networking sites and other sites that are centred on user interaction.

Social media has the following characteristics:

• Covers a wide variety of formats, including text, video, photographs, audio;

• Allows messages to flow between many different types of devices; PCs, phones and tablets;

• Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment or just view information;

• Speeds and broadens the flow of information;

• Allows communication to take place in real time or intermittently.

Examples of popular social media tools include: Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram.

Benefits

Social media provides the Council with the opportunity to communicate to a wide audience instantaneously on a range of subjects relating to its activities, providing updates, news, information including relevant information from other sources. It also provides an opportunity to communicate with the younger age group, the business community and hopefully the harder to reach groups.

Social networks are rapidly growing in popularity and are used by all ages in society. The most popular social networks are web-based, commercial and not purposely designed for Parish Council use. They include sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, QQ and Messenger. For individuals, social networking sites provide tremendous opportunities for staying in touch with friends and family. For the Council the sites provide a modern alternative means to communicate with residents of the village.

Facebook, for example, offers a rich platform allowing you to share unlimited content, including images and videos.

Example activity:

- Share articles

- Create surveys to encourage participation from visitors;

- Upload images and videos;

- Generic news – what's happening in the area.

Pitfalls

Whilst these tools are very useful to share information quickly with other people, there are some pitfalls to be aware of:

- The information in most cases is shared in the public domain and can be viewed by anyone in the world;

- Groups on specific themes can be set up easily and posts then edited by the owners of the group to reflect their single interest, ensuring theirs is the only voice heard.

- The nature of these tools is that information is shared immediately and it is all too easy to respond instantaneously which can result in unintentionally inflaming a situation. Information can then be shared with other sites and be spread far beyond the intended audience. Friends of friends may not be our friends.

- There is no guarantee of truth and ill-informed comment and gossip is as likely to be found there as useful information;

- It is also very easy to spend a lot of time viewing and responding to messages that would outweigh the value gained in the first place.

Proposed Council Policy on the Use of Social Media

In order that the council can make use of the benefits to quickly disseminate information, this needs to be done in a carefully control way in order to minimise the risks as stated above.

It is therefore proposed, as an initial step in using social media that:

The Parish Council opens a Facebook Account to be used solely with the intention that all posts will be for information only and will not have the option to be commented on

The use of the Facebook account will be governed by the adoption of a Facebook Policy. A draft proposed policy is attached at Appendix A.

Parish is Council is asked to:

A) Approve the opining of a Facebook Account
B) Approve the proposed Facebook Policy to govern it use

M Ramshaw

Parish Clerk

29th July 2021