

## Social Media Guidance

### 1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance in the use of social media to Parish Councillors, Council staff and others who engage with the Council using online communications.

Social media is a collective term used to describe methods of publishing on the internet.

### 2 Scope

This policy covers all forms of social media and social networking sites which include (but are not limited to):

- Parish Council Website
- Social networking sites (eg. Facebook)
- Microblogging sites (eg. Twitter)
- Video or podcast sites (eg. YouTube)
- Professional networking sites (eg. LinkedIn)
- Blogs and discussion forums

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

The principles of this policy apply to Parish Councillors and Council staff and also to others communicating with the Parish Council. They apply to all social media activity (including but not limited to posting, sharing, tweeting, retweeting and commenting) carried out using both official and personal social media profiles.

The policy sits alongside relevant existing policies which need to be taken into consideration.

The current Code of Conduct applies to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication.

Individual parish councillors and council staff are responsible for what they post in a council and personal capacity.

In the main, councillors and council staff have the same legal duties online as anyone else, but failure to comply with the law may have more serious consequences.

Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise events and activities
- Post or share local interest and good news stories
- Advertise vacancies
- Post or share information from partner agencies (eg. Principal Authorities, police, library, health)
- Announce new information
- Post or share information from other Parish related community groups such as schools, sports clubs, community groups and charities
- Refer resident queries to the Clerk

### **3 Policy**

#### **General Use**

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

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

#### **Unacceptable Use**

Parish Councillors and Council staff must not:

- act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the Council when posting personally (it is worth noting that providing links to official Council websites may give or reinforce the impression that you are representing the Council)
- present personal opinion as that of the Council
- post or comment on behalf of the Council without a delegation to do so
- present themselves in a way that might cause embarrassment to the Council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the Council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- engage in personal attacks, online fights, or hostile communications
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish photographs or videos of minors without parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- hide their identity using false names or pseudonyms
- carry out any online activity that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the council into disrepute, including through content posted in a personal capacity
- post offensive language relating to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age, religion or belief
- conduct any online activity that violates laws or regulations, or that constitutes a criminal offence

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

Posting copyright images or text on social media sites is an offence.

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

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

Councillors' views posted in any capacity in advance of matters to be debated by the Council at a Council or Committee meeting may constitute pre-disposition, predetermination or bias and may require the individual to declare an interest at Council meetings.

#### **Moderation and Reporting**

Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites that denigrate Parish Councillors, Council staff or residents should report them to the Clerk of the Council, or the Chair of the Parish Council Standards Committee.

The Council will appoint a nominated person as moderator of Parish Council social media output and be responsible for posting and monitoring content to ensure it complies with the Social Media Policy.

The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from Council social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory or libellous nature.

#### **4 Policy Compliance**

Violating this policy may lead to appropriate disciplinary action.