



HERNHILL PARISH COUNCIL

Social Media Policy

Adopted: 28th September 2022

Next review: June 2025

Hernhill Parish Council

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

This policy was adopted and approved by Hernhill Parish Council at a meeting held 28 September 2022

1. Policy Statement

1.1. This policy is intended to help employees including the Clerk/ RFO and casual employees (collectively referred to as employees in this policy), Councillors and volunteers make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, social networking websites, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

1.2. This policy outlines the standards required by employees, Councillors and volunteers to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

2. The scope of the policy

2.1. All employees, Councillors and volunteers are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council.

2.2. Breach of this policy by employees and Councillors may be dealt with under the adopted Code of Conduct or Disciplinary Procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal in the case of employees.

3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy

3.1. The Council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy.

3.2. The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to our work.

3.3. All employees, Councillors and volunteers should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Any breach of it should be reported to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Council.

3.4. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk. Social Media Policy

4. Using social media sites in the name of the Parish Council

4.1. The Council will appoint a nominated member of staff/ Councillor or Councillors as moderator(s). They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy.

4.2. The moderator will have authority to remove any posts made by third parties from our social media pages which are deemed to be of a defamatory, libel nature. Such post will also be reported to the Hosts (i.e. Facebook) and also the clerk.

4.3. Use of the Parish Council's Facebook account must always reflect the Council's position/decisions on a matter and in no circumstances must it be used to express personal opinion, particularly when used by a Councillor. If unsure, say nothing.

5. Using social media

5.1. The importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about the Council and community is recognised, as is the importance of employees, Councillors and volunteers joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.

5.2. Social media may be used to:

- Distribute agendas, post minutes and dates of meetings
- Advertise Parish Council events and activities
- Share good news stories linked website or press page
- Advertise vacancies
- Re-tweet or share information from partner agencies such as Principal Authorities, Police, Library, Health etc.
- Refer resident queries to the clerk and all other councillors

5.3. Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the Council, ensure that:

- All employees and Councillors have read and understood this policy
- All employees and volunteers must have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from the Full Council.

6. Rules for use of social media

6.1. When using the Parish Council's official social media channels, posts must not:

- hide the poster's identity using false names or pseudonyms
- present personal opinions as that of the council
- post content that is contrary to the democratic decisions of the council
- post controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks
- use an individual's name unless given written permission to do so
- publish photographs or videos of minors without written parental permission
- post any information that infringes copyright of others
- post any information that may be deemed libel
- post online in a way that constitutes bullying or harassment
- bring the Council into disrepute
- post offensive language relating to race, sex, sexual orientation, disability, gender, age, marriage of civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief.
- conduct any online activity that violates laws, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence

7. Monitoring use of social media websites

7.1. Employees and Councillors should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken against employees and Councillors under the Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure.

7.2. Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against the Council and its employees.

7.3. In particular, a serious case of emailing, uploading, posting forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will probably amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):

- material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.
- pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
- a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
- material which is offensive, obscene
- criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, members, or employees;
- confidential information about the Council or anyone else
- any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for employees or the Council);

7.4. Any such action will be addressed under the Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedure and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

7.5. Where evidence of misuse is found, a more detailed investigation may be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Disciplinary Procedure involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

7.6. Any breach of the policy should be reported to the Clerk and Chair of the Council.

8. Parish Council social media followers

8.1. Followers should adhere to certain good practices and conventions of polite and constructive discourse if responding to posts on its social media feeds. Therefore, the Council will not publish and will remove comments that:

- contain abusive, obscene, indecent or offensive language
- contain swear words or other sorts of profanity
- contain symbols or images to create a swear word
- contain abusive language towards an individual involved in the thread, other organisations or the page administrator
- are completely removed from the topic of conversation or non-relevant to the item posted on the wall

- constitute spam or promote or advertise products except where it is for an event, publication or similar item that has direct relevance to the subject of discussion. Information about locating and sharing knowledge and expertise is welcomed, but within the specific discussion provided
- are designed to cause nuisance to the page administrator or other users

9. Exceptional Circumstances

9.1. Under exceptional circumstances where a social media post could be deemed to be either:

- Illegal
- Seriously damage the reputation of either a Parish Councillor or the Council itself The Parish Clerk will seek immediate advice from Swale Borough Council if they are unable to contact the Chair or Vice Chair on the removal of a post. Upon receipt a written report will be provided to the Chair or Vice Chair to determine whether a formal investigation should be commenced.

10. Monitoring and review of this policy

10.1 The Parish Council shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.