

SMANNELL PARISH COUNCIL – SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Introduction

- 1.1 This policy is intended to help employees and Councillors 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 the Council requires employees and Councillors to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which it will monitor the use of social media and the action that will be taken in respect of breaches of this policy;
- 1.3 This policy supplements the Council's Press and Media Policy.

The Scope of this Policy

- 1.1 All employees and Councillors are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the privacy, confidentiality and interests of the Council;
- 1.2 Breach of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.

Responsibility for implementation of the policy

- 1.3 The Council has overall responsibility of the effective operation of this policy;
- 1.4 The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the work;
- 1.5 All employees and Councillors should ensure that they take time to read and understand it. Any breach of this policy should be reported to the Clerk;
- 1.6 Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk.

Using Social media in the Council's name

- 1.7 Only the Clerk and the Chairman are permitted to post material on a social media website in the Council's name and on the Council's behalf.

Using Social Media

- 1.8 The Council recognises the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about the Council and community. It also recognises the importance of its employees and Councillors joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media;
- 1.9 Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the Council administrators must:
 - 9.a. Have read and understood this policy; and
 - 9.b. Employees and Councillors must have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from the Clerk.

Rules for use of Social Media

Whenever you are permitted to use social media in accordance with this policy, you must adhere to the following general rules:

- 1.10 Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content;
- 1.11 Any employee or Councillor who feels that they have been harassed or bullied, or are offended by material posted or uploaded by a colleague onto a social media website should inform the Clerk;
- 1.12 Never disclose commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information. If you are unsure whether the information you wish to share falls within one of these categories, you should discuss this with the Clerk;
- 1.13 Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent;
- 1.14 Before a link to a third-party website is included, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link it;
- 1.15 When making use of any social media platform, the terms of use must be read and complied with;
- 1.16 Be honest and open, but be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the Council;
- 1.17 You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools;
- 1.18 Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations;
- 1.19 Don't discuss employees without their approval;
- 1.20 Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion;
- 1.21 Avoid publishing your contact details where they can be accessed and used widely by people you did not intend to see them and never publish anyone else's contact details.

Monitoring use of Social Media websites

- 1.22 Employees 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 under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure;
- 1.23 Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you;
- 1.24 In particular a serious case of 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):
 - 24.a. Pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
 - 24.b. A false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
 - 24.c. Material which is offensive, obscene;
 - 24.d. Criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council;
 - 24.e. Confidential information about the Council or any-one else;
 - 24.f. Any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil and whether for you or the Council); or
 - 24.g. Material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Any such action will be addressed under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

- 1.25 Where evidence of misuse is found the Council may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.
- 1.26 Any incidents by employees or Councillors in breach of this policy must be reported to the Clerk.

Monitoring and review of this Policy

- 1.27 The Clerk shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

Updated and Reviewed July 2023