



# **COLEHILL PARISH COUNCIL**

## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY – ADOPTED 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Colehill Parish Council recognises that the Internet provides a unique opportunity to participate in interactive discussions and share information using a wide variety of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. Employees and councillors are likely to use social media in a private capacity outside of work and they may/will also be required to use it in a business capacity as part of their role at the Council. All posts on behalf of the Council must go via the Clerk or the Press Officer.
- 1.2 However, employees' and councillors' use of social media in both a personal and business capacity can present risks to our confidential information and reputation, and can jeopardise our compliance with legal obligations. To minimise these risks we expect employees and councillors to adhere to this policy.
- 1.3 The purpose of this policy is to assist employees and councillors by providing clear guidance about acceptable behaviour on social media both at work and out of work.

### **2. Scope**

- 2.1 This policy applies to all employees and councillors of the Council.
- 2.2 This policy applies to the use of social media for both business and personal purposes, whether during office hours or otherwise. It also applies whether the social media is accessed using Council IT facilities, or equipment belonging to employees or councillors.

### **3. Definitions**

- 3.1 Social media is a type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other, or to share data in a public forum. This includes online social forums such as Twitter, Facebook, Linked-In, internet newsgroups and chat rooms. Social media also covers blogs and video and image sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr.
- 3.2 There are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. This policy refers to the examples listed and any new social media which is developed in the future.

#### **4. Personal Safety and Privacy**

- 4.1 Employees and councillors need to be aware that the information they post on their personal social media profile can make them identifiable to service users, as well as people they know in a private capacity.
- 4.2 Online sites such as Facebook are in the public domain, and personal profile details can be seen by anyone, even if users have their privacy settings on the highest level. Also if a user's profile is linked to other sites, any changes to their profile will be updated there too.
- 4.3 Employees and councillors who have set their privacy level to the maximum can have their privacy compromised by 'friends' who may not have set their security to the same standard.

#### **5. Key Principles**

- 5.1 Employees and councillors must not:
  - use the Cllr or Councillor title on social media;
  - present personal opinions as that of the council;
  - 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 and 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 libelous;
  - post 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, regulations or that constitutes a criminal offence.
- 5.2 The above examples are not a definitive list of the misuse of social media, but are examples to illustrate what misuse may look like.
- 5.3 Councillors must avoid posting views in advance of a decision to be debated by the Council or a Committee meeting, that may constitute predetermination or bias. The Localism Act 2011 states that councillors must not have "had or appeared to have had a closed mind (to any extent) when making the decision"., *(See Localism Act section 25)*

## 6. Addressing allegations of misuse

- 6.1 Anyone with concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should report them to the Parish Clerk or Chair of the Council, who should ensure that all complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly.
- 6.2 For councillors, complaints will be dealt with following the Council's Complaints Policy, with complaints concerning the councillor's conduct being referred to the Dorset Council Monitoring Officer.
- 6.3 For employees, complaints will be dealt with following the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

## Version History

Date	Summary of Changes
9/3/21	Policy rewritten to simplify the key principles and add clause on predetermination.

This Policy will be reviewed annually.