

# **Horden Parish Council Employees, Volunteers and Members Social Media Policy**

**June 2019**

## **1. Policy statement**

This policy is intended to help employees, members 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. This policy not only applies to the examples listed, but also any not listed and those developed in the future.

This policy outlines the standards we require employees, members and volunteers to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which we will monitor your use of social media and the action we will take in respect of breaches of this policy.

Employees', members and volunteers 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 adherence to this policy.

## **2. The scope of the policy**

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

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

## **3. Responsibility for implementation of the policy**

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

The Clerk and Service Area Managers are responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimise risks to the Council's work.

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

Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Clerk to the Council.

## **4. Using social media sites in our name**

Only the Deputy Clerk and Administration and Finance Officer are permitted to post material on a social media website in the council's name and on our behalf.

An employee's, member's and volunteer's personal social media account must not, directly or by implication, give the impression that they are endorsed by, or speaking on behalf of the Council.

## Using social media

We recognise the importance of the internet in shaping public thinking about our council and community. We also recognise the importance of our employees, members and volunteers joining in and helping shape local government conversation and direction through interaction in social media.

Before using social media on any matter which might affect the interests of the council you must:

- a) have read and understood this policy;
- b) have sought and gained prior written approval to do so from the Clerk to the Council.

*For example, if an employee wishes to publicise the work of the Council by publishing photographs of work or making a supportive statement on issues or achievements, they should ensure that it is first published through the Council's official media activity.*

### 5. Access to social media for work purposes

Staff who use social media as part of their job must be aware that they are representing the Council when they are contributing to the Council's social media activities. Employees should use the same safeguards as they would with any other form of communication about the organisation in the public domain.

### 6. Access to social media at work for personal use

Employees are **not allowed** to access social media websites for personal use from the council's computers or other devices **during working time** and they must not be left running 'in the background', whilst at work. These provisions also apply to personal computers and mobile devices. Leaving Social Media sites 'running' constantly in work time is considered to be a breach of the policy.

### 7. Personal accountability and responsibility

All employees, members and volunteers are expected to behave appropriately and responsibly, and should be aware that they may be accountable to the Council for actions outside of their work.

Online conduct is the employee's responsibility, and it is important that employees are aware that posting information on social networking sites in a personal capacity cannot be entirely isolated from their working life.

Any information published online can be accessed around the world and will be publicly available for all to see, and this may be impossible to delete/withdraw once published.

The Council views any comment that is made on a social media site to have been made publicly, and that any inappropriate comment made, will be considered in the context of which it is made.

*For example, disparaging comments against a colleague made on Facebook could be viewed as bullying/harassment, and could be considered to bring the Council into disrepute.*

Employees, members and volunteers should be aware that all comments made through social media must meet the standards of the relevant legislation and regulations, including Data Protection legislation. It is for the employee to make themselves aware of any requirements.

Employees may be accountable for actions outside of work, including making comments on social media sites, if that impacts on or compromises the employee's ability to undertake their role, or undermines management decisions. Such behaviour could be investigated and may result in disciplinary action being taken, and ultimately could result in dismissal.

*Further employee guidance is available in Appendix A.*

## **8. Misuse of social media**

Any communications that employees make through social media must not:

**i. Bring the organisation into disrepute, for example by:**

- Criticising, disagreeing or arguing with service users, colleagues or managers;
- Making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations / groups;
- Posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content;
- Agreeing with or condoning inappropriate comments or content;

**ii. Breach confidentiality, for example by:**

- Referring to confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or service user) or the Council.

**iii. Do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual or group of individuals, and in contravention of the Council's procedures, for example by:**

- Making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age.

- Using social media to bully another individual (such as an employee of the Council).
  - Posting images that are discriminatory, bullying or offensive or links to such content.
  - Agreeing with or condoning inappropriate comments or content by others that are discriminatory, bullying or offensive.
- iv. **Any other action that impacts on the employee's ability to do their job, for example by:**
- Online activity that is incompatible with the position they hold in the Council.
  - Any breach occurring inside or outside the workplace that is likely to affect the employee doing his / her work.
- v. **Contravene the Council's policies**

The above examples are not an exhaustive list of the misuses of social media, but are examples to illustrate what misuse may look like. Employees are encouraged to talk to their manager and seek advice if they are unclear.

## **9. 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:

- Do not upload, post or forward a link to any abusive, obscene, discriminatory, harassing, derogatory or defamatory content.
- Any employee or member 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 to the Council.
- 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 to the Council.
- Do not upload, post or forward any content belonging to a third party unless you have that third party's consent.
- Before you include a link to a third party website, check that any terms and conditions of that website permit you to link to it.
- When making use of any social media platform, you must read and comply with its terms of use.

- Be mindful of the impact your contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.
- You are personally responsible for content you publish into social media tools.
- Don't escalate heated discussions, try to be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations.
- Don't discuss employees without their prior approval.
- Always consider others' privacy and avoid discussing topics that may be inflammatory e.g. politics and religion.
- 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.

## **10. Monitoring use of social media websites**

Employees, members and volunteers 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 our Disciplinary Policy.

Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us.

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):

- a) pornographic material (that is, writing, pictures, films and video clips of a sexually explicit or arousing nature);
- b) a false and defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
- c) material which is offensive, obscene;
- d) criminal, discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the council, members, or our employees;
- e) confidential information about the council or anyone else;
- f) any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or the council); or

- 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 Disciplinary Policy and for employees may result in summary dismissal.

Where evidence of misuse is found we may undertake a more detailed investigation in accordance with our Disciplinary Policy, involving the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses or managers involved in the investigation. If necessary such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

If you notice any use of social media by other employees or volunteers in breach of this policy please report it to the Clerk to the Council.

### **11. Monitoring and review of this policy**

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

Approved by Council 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019  
HPC 19/20/052

## EMPLOYEE GUIDANCE ON THE ACCEPTABLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Any online activities/comments made in a public domain, must be compatible with your position within the Council, and safeguard you in a professional capacity.
- Protect your own privacy. To ensure that your social network account does not compromise your professional position, ensure that your privacy settings are set correctly.
- Comments made outside work, within the arena of social media, do not remain private and so can have an effect on or have work-related implications. Therefore, comments made through social media, which you may intend to be “private” may still be in contravention of this policy. Once something is online, it can be copied and redistributed making it easy to lose control of. Presume everything you post online will be permanent and can be shared.
- Do not discuss work-related issues online, including conversations about service users, complaints, management or disparaging remarks about colleagues or the Council. Even when anonymised, these are likely to be inappropriate. In addition doing this in the presence of others may be deemed as bullying and/or harassment or may conflict with your employment.
- Be aware that other users may access your profile and if they find the information and/or images it contains offensive, they may make a complaint about you to the Council as your employer.
- Ensure that any comments and/or images cannot be deemed defamatory, libellous or in breach of copyright legislation.
- When setting up your profile online consider whether it is appropriate and prudent for you to include a photograph, or provide occupation, employer or work location details.
- You can take action if you find yourself the target of complaints or abuse on social networking sites. Most sites will include mechanisms to report abusive activity and provide support for users who are subject to abuse by others.
- If you do find inappropriate references and/or images of you posted by a ‘friend’ online you should contact them and the site to have the material removed.
- If you are very concerned about someone else's behaviour online, you should take steps to raise your concerns. If these are work related you should inform your manager.
- Employees must not access social media sites or leave these running in the background during working time, *for personal use*, on any devices within their control.